



Espíritu Santo National Park Recovery Project

SEPTEMBER 8TH, 2022

Unsustainable, unregulated and [illegal fishing](#) practices during the last 40 years have severely impacted the diversity and richness of the Gulf of California, once considered the “Aquarium of the World”. This national sea, dotted with more than 800 islands, is an ecologically unique marine ecosystem, and these island coastlines are environments used by marine species to complete all or part of their life cycle, particularly the reproductive stage. Fish larvae, protected within the complex topography and rocky reefs of the coastline, find food and protection to grow into adult size. The success story at nearby Cabo Pulmo National Park has demonstrated that protected “recovery zones” result in fish population and marine ecosystem recoveries within 5-10 years.

This project will be the first recovery project in the Gulf of California since Cabo Pulmo, 27 years ago. It will restore the marine biodiversity of Archipelago Espíritu Santo National Park to a high level of abundance and reef recovery through modification to the park’s management plan and the deployment of policy and conservation finance strategies. This is a collective impact partnership between three civil society organizations: **SeaWatch**, **Red de Observadores Ciudadanos A.C. (ROC)** and **Niparajá A.C.**

The effort began as the Espíritu Santo es Parte de ti Campaign in 2016, where we successfully engaged the citizens of La Paz to support restoration of the natural values in the park by boosting community pride, reducing the sale and consumption of parrotfish (95 local restaurants agreed to stop selling parrotfish), and promoting terrestrial and marine surveillance and citizen’s participatory vigilance through ROC.

By the end of 2017, and continuing into 2018, small parrotfish, cabrillas, and pargos [began to recover](#) in the waters of the park, but in late 2018 federal fishing authorities allowed the use of fish traps within the park boundaries. Fish traps are an incredibly efficient, destructive and nonselective fishing method that removes all carnivorous fish species indiscriminately from all age classes and are banned in many other parts of the world. With the introduction of fish traps, fishermen were legally allowed to reverse our emerging success. At that point it was clear that where there were fish, fishing interests would find a way to take them. While it is critically important to ban traps and nets the only permanent way to protect the reefs and reef fish is to

create adequate “No Take Zones” around all nearshore rocky reefs and mangrove areas. This is what was done in [Cabo Pulmo National Park](#), just 58 miles away. Established in 1995 when underwater it was a desert, 27 years later it is now known as one of the greatest reef fish recoveries worldwide and is one of the top dive 10 spots on the planet.

In response to these threats, in 2021 we began working with other organizations to provide better protection through more effective environmental policy management tools and surveillance. We submitted a [formal request](#) to the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas ([CONANP](#)) to eliminate traps and nets, and to create viable “No Take Zones” that protect all nearshore rocky reefs and mangroves along the entire coastline of the park.

In 2022 we launched the Espiritu Santo National Park Recovery Project, to update the park’s management plan through CONANP’s public consultation process with the goal of restoring the rocky reef ecology and productivity of the park’s marine area. The core issues are a lack of protection of parrotfish, the use of fish traps and nets, and the absence of significant recovery areas in the current management plan (which protects only 1.4% of the park’s marine area).

Our goal is to leverage our success at Espiritu Santo to provide a model framework for similar conservation initiatives in other marine protected areas in the Gulf of California and lay the groundwork for a permanent source of funding for marine conservation.

We have a unique window of opportunity to address these issues through our close collaboration with the leadership of CONANP’s Park Director, Irma González, and the update of the park’s management plan, a process that only happens once every 5 years. It is also fortunate that the park is currently listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as one of its “Green” National Protected Areas, a status which will be reviewed in the coming years.

Our core conservation objectives for revising the park management plan are to:



Protect 100% of the inshore rocky reefs and mangroves, by creating a “recovery zone” ½ to 1km into the sea from the shorelines of the park.



Ban all fish traps and nets in the entire marine area of park and allow artisanal line fishing only in designated areas outside the “recovery zone”.



Ban sports fishing and spearfishing in the entire marine area of the park.



Engage fishers and tourism service providers in participatory surveillance.

On a parallel track with the previous objectives, we will:

- Execute a capital campaign to secure a USD \$5 million endowment fund in coordination with ROC's board chairperson, Lorenzo J. de Rosenzweig P., marine conservation expert, retired CEO of FMCN, and senior consultant in conservation finance, to provide long-term financing to ensure CONANP's ability to fully implement the new park management program.
- Launch and operate a media campaign to engage the citizens of La Paz, focused on the importance of conserving and managing the park as a natural asset for the benefit of La Paz society.
- Design a financial mechanism to support artisanal fishermen in the process of recovery of the rocky reef ecosystem of the park.
- Increase income and wellbeing to existing accredited hand line fishers through better prices and fish handling processes assisted by "Smart Fish" or similar sustainable commercial framework.
- Establish a project baseline and conduct project impact monitoring methodologies in collaboration with regional research entities and federal agencies.
- Contribute, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to the development of a blue economy in La Paz Bay.



Espíritu Santo National Park Proposed “NO TAKE ZONES”

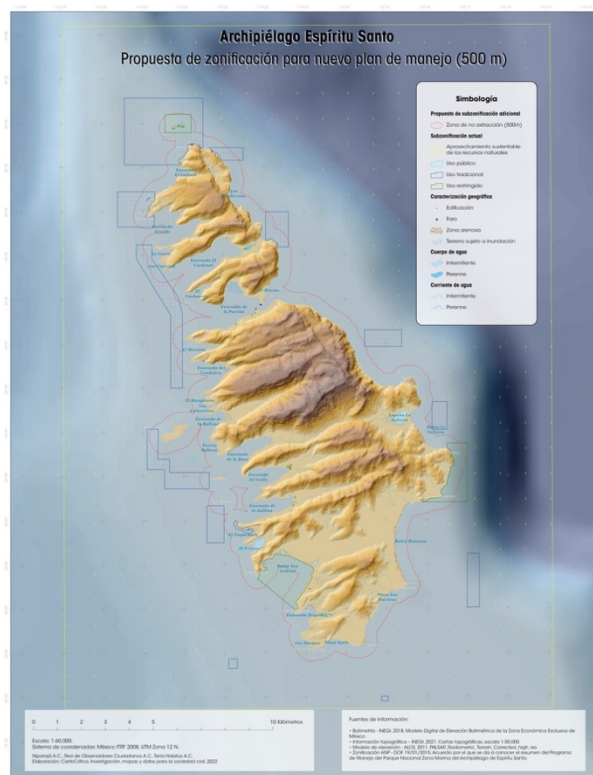


[Click to enlarge](#)

The original proposal is for a 1 km “No Take Zone,” the RED line on the map starting at the shoreline and going out 1km (1000 yards). It would ban all extraction and protect 100% of the reefs and mangrove areas in the park.

This would be ideal and allow patrol boats to quickly identify any boats inside that 1 km RED line but harder to get agreement on since it removes the majority of areas in the BLUE boxes which are for local “hook and line” fishing only and have been there since the park was formed.

All nets, traps, sportfishing, and spearfishing would also be banned inside the outer perimeter of the park marked by the YELLOW line.



[Click to enlarge](#)

The secondary (backup) proposal is for a ½ km “No Take Zone,” the RED line on the map starting at the shoreline and going out 0.5 km (500 yards). It would ban all extraction and protect 100% of the reefs and mangrove areas in the park.

This would be harder to patrol around the island but easier to get agreement on since it leaves mostly intact the areas in the BLUE boxes which are for local “hook and line” fishing, which were designated when the park was created.

All nets, traps, sportfishing, and spearfishing would also be banned inside the outer perimeter of the park marked by the YELLOW line.

Espíritu Santo National Park Recovery Project

(Three Year Budget USD)

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Total
Collaboration, Mediation, Consultation and Community Engagement	100,000	65,000	30,000	195,000
Communication and Media	42,500	42,500	42,500	127,500
Endowment and Financial Sustainability of the Project	50,000	25,000	15,000	90,000
Baseline and Monitoring	30,400	30,400	30,400	91,200
Indirect cost (12%)	7,980	7,980	7,980	23,940
TOTAL	230,880	170,880	125,880	527,640

Milestones towards measuring success

	Status	Completion
Secure agreement with CONANP Park Director to the changes needed to protect 100% of the inshore reefs and mangroves in the marine areas of the park.	In progress	September, 2022
Submit formal comments to CONANP on recommended changes to the park management plan.	To be completed	September, 2022
Get buy-in from the 29 stakeholders on CONANP's advisory board.	To be completed	January, 2023
Get buy-in from CONAPESCA.	To be completed	June, 2023
Publish and enforce the new Espíritu Santo Park Management Plan.	To be completed	August, 2023

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