

# Protecting marine resources

## *2 countries share ecosystems, waterways and research*

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Human travel between the Florida Keys and Cuba may be extremely limited because of U.S. restrictions, but the aging governmental policies are not enough to block the migration of fish and birds.

Tarpon, sharks, marlin, sailfish, tuna and a multitude of other species and birds regularly migrate between the two countries.

Rosette spoonbills, flamingos and other migrating birds have been documented making the roughly 100-mile crossing, proving the ecosystems of Cuba and the Florida Keys are inextricably linked. The health of one is related to the other, scientists and marine biologists say.

“Cuba and the Florida Keys are connected in many ways, but what excites me as a resource manager is to recognize that the ocean currents the flow through the Caribbean Sea and merge into the Florida Current between the Keys and Cuba serve as a dispersal highway for marine life larvae that may be produced in Cuba, but make their way to the coral reefs of the Florida Keys,” said Billy Causey, regional administrator with NOAA’s National Marine Sanctuary Program. “Cuba and the Florida Keys are linked oceanographically by ocean currents, and ecologically and biologically by the marine life that is dispersed to our waters.”

Despite the frigid relations between the two countries, scientists on both sides of the Straits of Florida have partnered for decades to protect the fisheries and ecosystems both share.

### **Ernest Hemingway’s Key West and Cuba**

There is arguably no historical and literary figure that represents the fishing traditions of and between the two countries more than Ernest Hemingway. Iconic black and white photos of the one-time Key West resident and revered writer still hang in bars in both countries.

But few are aware of the part Hemingway played in the summer of 1934 in cataloging marlin and other fish in the straits for the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

Charles Cadwalader, managing director and president of the academy, sought out Hemingway’s fishing talents to help with a study of Atlantic Ocean fish. The study was conducted by the academy’s longtime ichthyologist, Henry Weed Fowler, according to the book “Glorious Enterprise: The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and the Making of American Science” by Robert McCracken Peck and Patricia Tyson Stroud.

The goal, Cadwalader explained to Hemingway in a letter, was to address “the lack of knowledge concerning the classification, life histories, food (and) migrations...of the sailfish, marlin, tuna and other large game fishes.”

“We have here (at the academy) a very large and comprehensive collection of fishes for all over the world, but specimens of the larger game fish are lacking. According to Mr. Fowler, no museum in the world has a comprehensive collection of these big game fish such as we are anxious to secure,” Cadwalader wrote.

In a four-page, handwritten response, penned from the S.S. Paris en route to New York, Hemingway eagerly accepted Cadwalader's invitation. He asked for more details about what specimens the museum had, and discussed ways in which new fish would need to be collected and preserved, according able to appreciate the range of colors associated with the age, sex and species of the fish he was studying.

Hemingway suggested a Havana hotel where the two Philadelphians could arrange "a cool, pleasant, comfortable room with a bath...in a very pleasant situation, close to the old waterfront and overlooking the harbor and the Morro Castle for \$2 a day. It is much cooler in Havana now than in Philadelphia or N.Y." he assured the pair.

Hemingway closed his letter with an enthusiastic description of his new fishing boat, the Pilar, and the latest fish he caught.

"It is very comfortable, seaworthy and has speed when it is needed," Hemingway wrote. However, he appeared more excited about his catch, a 9-foot, 119.5-pound sailfish. "I fought him for 41 minutes and landed him."

The story convinced Cadwalader and Fowler that Hemingway's hospitality offer was genuine. They were soon enjoying trips into the Gulf Stream with Hemingway.

Some of the information about the six-week fishing and research trip is documented in an article Hemingway wrote for Esquire magazine, and from the dozens of enthusiastic letters exchanged between Hemingway, Fowler and Cadwalader in the year following the trip.

Although the expedition was only successful in landing one marlin, which weighed in at 420 pounds, Fowler learned a great deal from Hemingway about large pelagic fish.

### **A Nobel anniversary**

In celebration of the research trip 80 years ago, and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hemingway's Nobel Prize in literature, a group led by Hemingway's grandsons, John and Patrick Hemingway, departed for Cuba today, according to Jeffrey Boutwell, one of the organizers of the event.

The U.S.-Cuba Hemingway Commemorative Project: Protecting the Natural Resources of the Florida Straits was organized by the Latin America Working Group Education Fund and the U.S. Pugwash/Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs.

The group includes several prominent marine biologists and sport-fishing experts. They'll meet with Cuban marine scientists to discuss cooperative programs to protect the natural resources of the Florida Straits that were such an essential component of the Hemingway legacy in Cuba, Boutwell said.

The trip will include a trip to Cojimar. Hemingway often moored Pilar there and came to know the fishermen who provided the inspiration for "The Old Man and the Sea," which led to Hemingway's 1954 Nobel Prize.

Hemingway donated the medal to the people of Cuba, "because my works were created and conceived in Cuba, in my village of Cojimar, of which I am a citizen."

For one of the few times since the 1950's, the Nobel medal will be brought to the Finca Vigía for the Hemingway commemoration.

Americans and Cubans will discuss efforts to preserve marlin, tuna and other gamefish, continuing Hemingway's legacy of cataloging marlin with the Philadelphia academy, Boutwell said.

Among those in the discussion will be Robert McCracken Peck of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, and Martin Arostegui of the International Game Fish Association.

“Having members of the Hemingway family join the effort to help preserve shared U.S.-Cuba ocean resources is the best testament I can think of to the memory of their grandfather,” said Mavis Anderson, senior associate of the working group. “The United States and Cuba need to move beyond decades of frozen relations and cooperate on those issues of mutual benefit.”

### **A scientific exchange**

For nearly 14 years, the U.S.-based Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) has been working with and learning from Cuban scientists and national parks officials about the best way to protect coral reefs, sea-grass beds and mangrove habitats, according to EDF Cuba Program Director Dan Whittle.

Cuba has set aside nearly 25 percent of its waters as marine protected areas, which closes out or puts severe restrictions on fishing. By comparison, 6 percent of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary has been set aside as marine reserve areas, where fishing is heavily restricted and in some cases prohibited.

Among the designated Cuban protected areas is the famous Jardines de la Reina, or Gardens of the Queen, named by Christopher Columbus for Queen Isabella. The archipelago is a string of hundreds of mangrove-fringed islets and keys stretching more than 90 miles along Cuba’s southern coast. In 2010, Cuba made it a national park.

“It’s a spectacular place and it’s become a popular destination for ecotourism and a generator of millions of dollars,” Whittle said.

Cuba has retained so much of its natural resources because of political isolation and farsighted government policy, according to the EDF. The result has been that for 50 years, Cuba has avoided the overdevelopment so common in the Caribbean.

However, development pressure is rising as Cuba opens itself to the world, and Cuba is wrestling with how to grow its economy while protecting the natural heritage.

“Cuba has a wealth of information to share when it comes to marine protected areas,” said Causey, who traveled to Cuba in 2011. “They are far ahead of many Caribbean nations and that is of keen interest to me and many of my colleagues. It is exciting for me to see our relationships with our counterparts in Cuba grow.”

Causey, the highest ranking NOAA official to visit Cuba, traveled with Whittle and South Atlantic Fishery Management Council member Ben Hartig, other fishery managers and fisherman from the United States and Mexico.

The group exchanged ideas on fisheries science and management, and spent time on a research vessel and a tuna boat. These “floating workshops” provided a firsthand view of Cuban fisheries and fishery management.

The trip gave Causey a greater understanding of one of the most controversial and illegal forms of fishing gear – lobster casitas. Casitas are denlike devices placed on the sea floor to attract large congregations of lobster. They are strictly prohibited in the United States, but illegally used in the Keys. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is reviewing the gear to see if it could be legalized.

Cuba and Mexico allow casitas. In Cuba, casitas must be removed before the start of spawning season.

“I still have many concerns over the use of casitas in the United States,” Causey said. “The trip gave me the opportunity to see the use of casitas for fishery purposes. It opened my eyes, but it has not changed my opinion about them being randomly deployed in an irresponsible way.”

Also, the EDF is working with Mote Marine Laboratory, which has offices and coral reef programs in the Keys, to link the United States, Cuba and Mexico in a shark conservation program – the first of its kind in the world, Whittle said.

In Cuba, the EDF and Mote are working with University of Havana researchers, who are compiling a census of Cuba's shark populations along the island's northwestern coast.

With the help of Whittle and the EDF, Cuban fisherman and scientists also have come to the Florida Keys and to Texas in recent years.

“The waters between Cuba and the Keys are truly a ‘Moveable Feast’ of marlin, tuna, swordfish and other species that travel freely across political borders,” Whittle said, referring to Hemingway’s memoir. “Therefore, we must work with Cuba to sustain those resources for future generations, regardless of the politics of today.”

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