

COIBA NATIONAL PARK, PANAMÁ
NODE SYNTHESIS EXECUTIVE SUMAMRY
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PANAMÁ, JULY 2010

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Executive Summary

The Republic of Panama has a wealth of coastal and marine resources with a 5.634 km coastline and countless islands on both coasts. These resources represent an added value to the economy and society by generating foreign exchange, jobs and food for domestic consumption and export. The area of interest of this study includes the Coiba National Park (PN Coiba by its Spanish Acronym) and its Montuosa Island and Hannibal Bank Special Zone of Marine Protection (ZEPM by its Spanish Acronym). These two areas form the largest marine protected area of the Republic of Panama and are themselves a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site. Unlike many other such areas in Panama, there are no communities living within its boundaries, which might seem to facilitate its management.

Management of coastal marine resources in Panama is an extremely complex situation due to the multiple sectors that participate in the process. Aspects related to fisheries, protected areas, ports, the Panama Canal, mining, aquaculture, coastal development, tourism and management of wastewater have different jurisdictions and in many cases there are overlapping jurisdictions. In the case of PN Coiba for example, jurisdiction lies with the National System of Protected Areas (SINAP by its Spanish Acronym) of the National Environmental Authority (ANAM by its Spanish Acronym). While the jurisdiction of the ZEPM falls within The Aquatic Resources Authority of Panama (ARAP by its Spanish Acronym). Coastal marine resources are defined as "Those who are between the coast and the outer limits of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Panama, consisting of the territorial waters, contiguous zone, continental shelf, estuaries, coasts, gulfs, bays, estuaries, mangroves, reefs, submerged aquatic vegetation, scenic beauty, the biotic and abiotic resources within those waters, as well as a stretch of coastline of 200 meters width from the line of high tide, parallel to the coastline of the Caribbean Sea coast and the Pacific Ocean, with the exception of mineral and hydrocarbon resources."

The implementation of Marine Managed Area Science Project (MMAS) in Panama starts hand-by-hand with the process to update the Coiba National Park Management Plan. This process establishes a work plan where user participation is identified as the backbone of the process. Therefore, working closely with the MMAS team from Conservation International, five priority areas are identified for implementing their respective topics and complement the Coiba National Park Management Plan: a. Governance analysis; b. Socioeconomic analysis of the influence area of PN Coiba; c. Analysis of the cultural values of the area of influence of PN Coiba; d. Economic valuation of tourism and fishing resources of the PN Coiba, e. Monitoring of biological indicators.

The governance analysis focused on examining the trends observed since the park was created in 2004 to establish guidelines that allow an efficient strategic management. For this, we evaluated the performance of the new management structure for the protected area, led by the Executive Board Council, as the top authority in the PN Coiba. Also, the study makes recommendations to improve the effectiveness of governance in the PN Coiba and establishes governance indicators to be monitored during the five years of implementation of the Management Plan.

The socio-economic analysis of the area of influence of PN Coiba focused on the area of influence of communities on the protected area. The study includes not only those communities

with direct influence on aspects of fishing and tourism but also those communities with alternative activities such as agriculture and livestock, and as well as those with potential to influence the PN Coiba in the short term (five years). To better understand certain demographic, social, economic and cultural rights of the resident population in the influence area of PN Coiba and their relationship to existing coastal and marine resources, we conducted structured surveyed in ten communities and used 11 criteria and 39 socioeconomic indicators. We sought to identify the significant elements in the day-to-day operation of those communities to provide input for the establishment of lines of action by the management authorities of the Coiba National Park. Similarly, several socioeconomic indicators were included in the Coiba National Park Management Plan to assess the impact that the establishment or not of the area and the conservation of the PN Coiba may have in the communities of the area of influence of Coiba.

The analysis of the cultural values of the area of influence for the PN Coiba is one of the issues with larger gaps in knowledge that have been identified in the MMAS project. It is generally focused in the same areas of the socio-economic analysis. It seeks to establish the roles and values of Cultural Heritage in the area to determine how much of the traditional culture survives among the inhabitants and users and how they have changed over time. These will allow determining the evolution of the factors that have influenced this cultural heritage. It also established those indicators to be monitored in the Management Plan.

The economic valuation study of tourism and fishing resources of the Coiba National Park seeks to achieve a balance between resource use and conservation, balancing the operational budget required for implementing the protected area management plan.

The monitoring of biological indicators summarizes the biological component of the MMAS project including the ecological monitoring in protected areas and marine reserves as a tool to support decision making, management and conservation and the importance of monitoring the marine ecosystems and fishing gear in the PN Coiba. The biological monitoring seeks to determine the variations with respect to the most important habitats and resources in the PN Coiba. These include the health of the reefs, the evaluation of the presence of indicator species such as predators (sharks, snappers, groupers) that have an important influence on populations of other organisms. It also studied the species that are extracted for food or economic resource (conch, lobster, snapper, grouper and sea cucumbers).

The highlights of the study of governance study include specific recommendations generated to address the challenges identified in the PN Coiba and to improve the effectiveness of its governance. Main points addressed include: a. Consolidation of the technical and administrative support for the three PN Coiba management entities (Coiba Executive Board Council, Scientific Committee, and Commission of the Special Zone of Marine Protection). This will be achieved by: a1. Establish of a physical space for the operation of the technical and administrative support staff for the three entities. A recommended location for the office space is in the ANAM headquarters (Central or Regional Office in Veraguas); a2. There must be permanent administrative staff dedicated to the management responsibilities of the PN Coiba. This role could be filled by a "Council Administrative Coordinator," which would coordinate the activities of the three groups and could provide logistical support to their activities, keep communication, agreements / contracts between and among the groups, and off course ANAM,

the other government institutions and NGO's; a3. There should be a budget to support the technical and administrative management bodies; a4. The activities of the committees and the Board should be scheduled and an Annual Operating Plan (POA) must be established; a5. There must be incentives and capacity building for the members of the management bodies of the protected area so they can meet with their responsibilities or take the initiative in this regard; a6. There must be a follow-up and a strict monitoring of the compliance of the Coiba National Park Management Plan. The plan was adopted in February 2009 and was ratified by the ANAM in July 2009; and finally, a7. The three entities must be aware of emerging issues within and outside the park and make their voice heard as an active unit in situations such as unsustainable development in the area of influence to the park.

The highlights of the socioeconomic study indicate that the creation of PN Coiba has allowed the families in the area of influence of the park to improve their quality of life. Benefits are being seen at the level of basic services, access roads and increased tourism. However, the cost of living has increased too. A decline in revenue for fisheries resources due to new regulations in the Park is perceived in the area. This has led to the migration of users to another type of activity, such as agriculture, tourism or work in the city. Although the inhabitants of the region recognized ANAM as the management authority of the PN Coiba, many argue that they do not know the regulation that created the park. A positive aspect of the creation of the park is that the users within the protected areas have better perception of their management than those users outside the protected area. Similarly, the users of the marine resources in the park are probably receiving more information and capacity building provided by the management bodies of the protected area, mostly due to the large amount of information being disseminated in the area.

Among the highlights of the cultural study we can indicate that the identity of the inhabitants of the area of influence of PN Coiba NP is given by a mixture of native ancestors, Spanish and African descendents. However, the Catholic roots have strongly influenced the religious and pagan festivities, food, lifestyle, music and dance, and housing among others. The festive and cultural activities are characterized by agricultural and livestock exhibitions, folkloric dance groups, selling food and local drinks, sale of handicrafts (although there is little production in the area), gambling and popular dances. The most important cultural activities include the carnivals, tamborito (typical dance), Easter and the Virgen del Carmen (the Virgin). The traditional buildings include ranches whose walls and ceilings are built with palm fronds and have persisted for 500 years in this remote region of Panama. In the home, the traditional artifacts are made from plants. Stand out the trays, gourds, sink, grinding stones, shakers and the casserole. The main socio-economic activity is the large rural state with their livestock and agricultural interests that monopolize the land. In the agricultural aspects, the techniques remain the same as in the colonial era, slash and burn and planting with the coa (wooden rode used to till the soil). The enterprises are scarce in the area due to the lack of academic training. The gender differences are evident. While the man is mainly responsible for the use of money, looking for firewood, hunting, planting, education of the children in the process of selling the products, care of livestock and fisheries, women's main tasks include the housework, care for pets, preparing meals and transmit knowledge of the housework to their daughters.

The main highlight of the economic valuation of fisheries and tourism resources is that the visitor has a willingness to pay more than they currently pay. This possibility should be explored and could help finance the careful development of the Park. In this sense, it is recommended that the wealth generated should revert to the conservation of the Park. Failure to achieve this could result in nature tourism developing in a chaotic way and thus contributing as a serious threat to the conservation of the park, when it has potential to be a highly sustainable activity.

The biological monitoring in the PN Coiba and areas outside the park found that the establishment of the Marine Reserve Area (ZRM) in the period 2006-2009 has allowed a noticeable increase in the abundance of species with high economic value in the PN Coiba when compared with areas outside the protected area. This represents a net benefit for the communities of influence of the protected area.

The Coiba National Park Management Plan (ANAM 2009) is undoubtedly the most important product generated with the contributions and individual reports of the MMAS project. The Plan reflects the efforts of more than three years of work and specifically includes all of the studies conducted as part of the MMAS Project "Initiative for supporting and strengthening the participatory process associated with the Coiba National Park Management Plan." MMAS components are reflected in the different chapters of the Management Plan. The plan approved in 2009 is running until 2013 during which it must be fully implemented.

Despite all the positive aspects observed during the development of the MMAS project, there are economic changes that have already been manifested in the region and could have adverse impacts on resources and the PN Coiba. The governance analyses identified both internal and external threats: a. A rapid development of tourism activities on the coast of Veraguas (external threat), which has increased due to the pressure on the area of influence of the PN Coiba. The area is considered by the Tourism Authority of Panama (ATP by its Spanish acronym) as a Special Development Zone of Tourism or better known as the Zona 10 de Veraguas. It is subjected to a great land speculation, development of hotels, houses, marinas. All of this due to disorganized touristic development. Similarly, these activities have a direct influence on the cultural characteristics of the area: a. Tourism development is influencing social change, which is also increasing; b. Regional history of landlords and landlordism persist; c. Coastal populations are defenseless against mercantilism; d. There is an extensive coastline sparsely populated; e. Difficulties in communication between communities and the development process in the area. Some of the identified problems could begin to be overcome if: a. A proper scientific program of cultural data collection is established (this recommendation applies to each of the components of MMAS) b. Management of the area using tools of the knowledge of culture and nature resources; c. The role of culture and traditional values of the people has not been taken into account to help manage the area; d. Government's support in safeguarding the cultural heritage of the region has not been achieved.

Perhaps the most important and worrying some aspect that emerges from the biological monitoring is one where the information generated is being used by poachers and violators to access the areas identified with a greater recovery of fish and other marine resources stocks and higher densities of them. This is done to extract the resources illegally. This situation has been

generated probably because the generation and dissemination of information has not gone hand in hand with the protection and surveillance efforts.

The Science to Action Program (S2A) transfers the knowledge generated to key users in order to implement best management measures and use of resources. This approach occurs at all levels, including administrators and resource managers, as well as users in general. The S2A Project has generated a series of products aimed at different sectors of society to make people aware of the importance of the Coiba National Park. About 15 leaflets, posters, banners, calendars, T-shirts have been produced. Different activities have been scheduled in the last couple months. These activities include a series of workshops, meetings, training, and training, media campaigns to disseminate the material that has been prepared. The material is directed at all sectors of management and users of the protected area, including the governing body of PN Coiba, the Executive Board Council. The process is still running and the active program of will continue during the following months. It is expected that at the end of this process, the information generated by the MMAS Project will have taken roots among different segments of users of the Coiba National Park. This is done in order to achieve an effective and productive management of the protected area through the implementation of the Management Plan.