



The Gulf of Mexico States Accord

The Gulf of Mexico States Accord (GOMSA) is an international cooperative agreement, initiated in 1995 by the Governors of the eleven Mexican and US border states along the Gulf of Mexico basin. Those states are: *Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas* on the US side; *Campeche, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, and Yucatan* on the Mexican side. The Gulf of Mexico States Accord brings state-level leadership in a well-defined sub-region of North America to define mutual interests, shape consensus and build political will for new regional initiatives in the areas of international commerce, homeland security, economic development, transportation, tourism and education. Policy officials, business executives, economic developers and academic researchers all actively participate in the Accord.

The Accord's initiatives impact homeland security in the Gulf of Mexico basin, as well as create new environmental, economic development, educational, agricultural and commercial programs and new transportation initiatives in the border states of the Gulf of Mexico basin.

The Accord's objectives are summarized as follows:

- ❑ To work jointly to develop our common border – the Gulf of Mexico.
- ❑ To maximize the advantages of the Gulf's enormous potential for increased trade and tourism, stronger educational and cultural bonds
- ❑ To strengthen regional cooperation
- ❑ To ensure that each of our states is a better place in which to live and work.
- ❑ To promote a healthy and vibrant Gulf region for the benefit of all our collective 62 million citizens.

Institutional Framework

- **The Accord Executive Committee** is comprised of senior state government officials designated by their Governors to manage the Accord, guide its work programs, and ensure continuity of leadership. In order to provide focus and a systematic approach to management of the Accord activities, the Executive Committee has guided the creation of new institutions and Work Programs over the past three years



- **The General Secretariat**, located in Tampa, Florida, manages the day-to-day activities of the Accord, the Executive Committee, its work programs and special initiatives of the Executive Committee. The Secretariat also manages the official Accord website, www.gomsa.org.
- **Seven Working Groups:** The Accord currently maintains seven Working Groups, with binational co-Chairs of each group:
 - ❑ Transportation, Infrastructure & Communications (Veracruz & Florida)
 - ❑ Trade, Finance & Investment (Yucatan, Louisiana & Campeche)
 - ❑ Tourism (Quintana Roo & Florida)
 - ❑ Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry & Fisheries (Quintana Roo & Florida)
 - ❑ Health, Ecology & Environment (Veracruz & Florida)
 - ❑ Education & Culture (Quintana Roo & Louisiana)
 - ❑ Comparative Legal Framework (Veracruz & Florida)

Presently, the Accord Working Groups count upon the participation of state and Federal government officials, business executives, and research institutions, including the University of South Florida, Texas A&M University, Louisiana State University, the University of Florida, Loyola University of New Orleans, and Daytona Beach Community College; and in Mexico, the University of Quintana Roo, the University of Veracruz, and the University of Tamaulipas.

CURRENT MAJOR PROJECTS OF THE ACCORD

- **Bilateral Gulf of Mexico Research Program on “Red Tide” Phenomenon (2003 – ongoing):** On June 10-11, 2003, the GOMSA helped to convene this meeting with the US EPA, NOAA and NASA their counterparts in Mexico (SEMARNAT and the National Water Commission), and state environmental officials. This is the first Mexico-US scientific and research seminar on "hazardous algal blooms", the scientific description of "red tide" and other similar phenomena that create significant effects on public health, tourism, economic and fisheries in the Gulf. Federal and state officials committed substantial planning, scientific and fiscal resources (estimated at \$1 million over time) as a consequence of this meeting. Within 15 months, observation equipment will be placed on the Mexican side of the Gulf for the first time. Scientists will for the first time be able to create a more systematic study of this phenomenon across the



entire Gulf. Placement of this observation equipment will also facilitate new navigation equipment and other technologies to be placed in the Gulf.

In October 2003, the Red Tide Initiative was nominated to receive the first binational "Good Partner" Award under the federal US-Mexico Partnership for Prosperity Initiative by Lic. Joaquin Hendricks Diaz, Governor of the State of Quintana Roo and President of the Accord.

- **Gulf of Mexico States Tourism Corridor (2003 – ongoing):** Under the leadership of the Working Groups on Tourism and on Transportation, Communications & Infrastructure, the creation of a "Gulf of Mexico Tourism Corridor" is underway. The Working Group has developed a "master plan" for the Tourism Corridor, and will request the input of Fonatur and Sectur (Mexico), prior to involving the Secretariat of Communications and Transportation and the Secretariat of Environmental Protection at the appropriate time. The Corridor has two components:
 - 1) Designation of a "Gulf of Mexico Scenic Highway", which would traverse the entire Gulf from Key West to Chetumal. The Accord is currently engaged in designation of signage, preparing a Web-based tourist "guide" to the Corridor, and working with state officials for designation of the Scenic Highway; and,
 - 2) Design and construction of a "nautical staircase" in the Gulf of Mexico, linking the US inter-coastal waterway system to a series of public and private marina construction projects, with corresponding tourism, marine service and economic development initiatives, along the Mexican Gulf Coast.

- **Memorandum of Understanding on "Short-Sea Shipping" Cooperation between the USDOT, Mexico's Secretaria de Comunicacion y Transporte, the Accord and the Gulf of Mexico States Partnership, Inc. (2003 – ongoing):** The US Secretary of Transportation has made the more efficient utilization of maritime "highways" and ports a cornerstone of his administration. The MOU on Short Sea Shipping is a cooperative tool for maritime technical assistance and training, the first maritime agreement between the US and Mexico in the Gulf of Mexico. Establishment of short-sea shipping routes (sea barges and small container vessels) in the Gulf will increase shipping, will help to alleviate road congestion and pollution in the US and Mexico, and will impact port operations



and NAFTA distribution networks throughout the Gulf states. The first step in the process was the signing of a “Memorandum of Cooperation” between MARAD, the Accord and the Partnership on November 5, 2003 at the MARAD Short Sea Shipping Conference in Sarasota, Florida.

On December 8, 2003, Congresswoman Katherine Harris spoke from the floor of the US House of Representatives about the Gulf of Mexico States Accord and the Gulf of Mexico States Partnership, Inc. MOC initiative on short-sea shipping. This MOC refers to the Accord members as the "Gulf of Mexico border states". This is the first time that an official government document in the US has referred to the Gulf as a "border" region. This conceptual framework was first discussed by the Accord in February 2001 at its meeting in Tallahassee. The MOC also calls for support of the Partnership's "Gulf of Mexico Transportation Trade Corridors" Study during the coming year.

Congresswoman Harris inserted the MOC into the Congressional Record on along with a speech entitled "Integrating the Gulf of Mexico Border". In so doing, the Accord/ Partnership "border states" initiative has achieved more policy legitimacy, particularly in the US.

➤ **Change in Travel Visa Status to Mexico for Permanent US Residents (2003):**

The Working Group on Tourism proposed at its July meeting in New Orleans a formal change in Mexican immigration regulations. The Executive Committee endorsed this new initiative designed to ease travel by the permanent legal residents of the US to Mexico for tourism purposes. The President of the Executive Committee agreed to prepare and send a letter to the Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico and the Secretary of the Interior (Gobernacion) requesting a review of such tourism immigration regulations.

On June 19, 2003, in his capacity as President of the Gulf of Mexico States Accord, Lic. Joaquin Hendricks Diaz, Governor of the State of Quintana Roo, presented a formal request to Mexican Secretary of Interior Lic. Santiago Creel that Mexican residents in the US be relieved of the visa requirement to enter Mexico.

With the valuable assistance of the Secretaries of Interior, of Foreign Relations and of Tourism, the efforts of the Gulf of Mexico States Accord have achieved a simplified tourism migratory regime. All permanent legal foreign residents in the



US and Canada will henceforth be required to obtain only a “consular seal” stamped on their migratory form in order to enter Mexico as tourists.

This change was officially agreed to by Dr. Javier Moctezuma Barragan, Under Secretary of the Interior for Population, Migration and Religious Affairs in November 2003.

This administrative change in Mexican immigration law will ease travel to Mexico not only for Mexican permanent residents of the US, but all residents who hold this status. This is a significant accomplishment of the Accord, with an enormous potential affect on tourism in the Gulf of Mexico states.