Outlook of 2020 Sargassum blooms in the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico*
December 31st, 2019, by University of South Florida Optical Oceanography Lab (huc@usf.edu)

The maps below show Sargassum abundance, with warm colors representing high abundance. December 2019 continued the situation of November 2019. Very little Sargassum was found in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM), Florida Straits, Caribbean Sea (CS), and Central West Atlantic (CWA). In all regions combined, the Sargassum amount is reduced to ~0.4 million metric tons. This amount is similar to that in December 2016 (0.6M tons) but much lower than in December 2015 (1.1M tons), December 2017 (3.2M tons), or December 2018 (4.7M tons). Most of the Sargassum mats are currently aggregated near the east tropical Atlantic (not shown in the maps below).

Looking ahead, because the Sargassum amounts in all regions above (except the east tropical Atlantic) have continued to decrease and because there is currently minimal Sargassum amount in the CWA, we predict that all regions will likely experience minimal or no beaching events in January to February 2020. However, because there is still some Sargassum in the east tropical Atlantic, if these Sargassum are transported to the west following the equatorial current, the Sargassum amount in the CWA may increase in spring 2020. We will keep a close eye on how Sargassum in the east tropical Atlantic may evolve in the next two months.

More updates will be provided by the end of January 2020, and more information and near real-time imagery can be found under the Sargassum Watch System (SaWS, https://optics.marine.usf.edu/projects/saws.html).

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Disclaimer: The information bulletin is meant to provide a general outlook of current bloom condition and future bloom probability for the Caribbean Sea. By no means should it be used for commercial purpose, or used for predicting bloom conditions for a specific location or beach. The authors of this bulletin, as well as USF and NASA, take no responsibility for improper use or interpretation of the bulletin.