

Outlook of 2021 *Sargassum* blooms in the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico* Jan 31st, 2021, by the University of South Florida Optical Oceanography Lab (huc@usf.edu)



The maps below show *Sargassum* abundance, with warm colors representing high abundance. In January 2021, the *Sargassum* amount continued to increase across the central Atlantic. Large amounts of *Sargassum* were observed in both the Central West Atlantic (CWA, i.e., the region east of the Lesser Antilles in the maps below) and the Central East Atlantic (CEA). As predicted back in December 2020, some of the Lesser Antilles Islands (e.g., Guadeloupe, Dominican Republic) in the eastern Caribbean Sea (CS) appear to have experienced small amounts of *Sargassum* in January 2021. Yet the following regions are still largely free of *Sargassum* mats: the Gulf of Mexico (GoM), Florida Straits, and western CS. In all regions combined, the total *Sargassum* amount increased from ~3.2M tons in December 2020 to ~5.1 million metric tons in January 2021, similar to that in January 2019 but much higher than all previous January months except January 2018.

Looking ahead, the eastern CS will experience moderate to large amounts of *Sargassum* starting February 2021, while the GoM should still be free of large mats of *Sargassum*. Some of the Lesser Antilles Islands may experience beaching events on both their windward and leeward beaches. This situation may continue into summer, and the overall bloom intensity might be similar to that of 2019. We will keep a close eye on how *Sargassum* in the CS and the tropical Atlantic may evolve in the next two months. More updates will be provided by the end of February 2021, 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).



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.