

Outlook of 2022 Sargassum blooms in the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico* March 31st, 2022, by University of South Florida Optical Oceanography Lab (huc@usf.edu, szhang26@usf.edu)



The maps below show *Sargassum* abundance, with warm colors representing high abundance. In March 2022, the overall *Sargassum* amount continued to increase, especially across the Caribbean Sea (CS). Compared with the last month, the *Sargassum* amount in the CS increased by 79%, with more *Sargassum* reaching the western CS where beaching events have likely occurred along the coast of Honduras, Belize, and Mexico. Meanwhile, moderate amount of *Sargassum* were still observed in the Central West Atlantic (CWA, i.e., the region east of the Lesser Antilles in the maps below). Gulf of Mexico (GoM) and Florida Straits were still largely free of *Sargassum* mats. In all regions combined, the total *Sargassum* amount increased from ~4.3 million tons in February 2022 to ~6.2 million tons in March 2022, comparable to that in March 2019 (5.5 million), but lower than in March 2018 (10.3 million) and 2021 (10.1 million). Based on these observations, we maintain our earlier prediction that 2022 is likely going to be another moderate or major *Sargassum* year.

Looking ahead, the westward transport of *Sargassum* will continue, resulting in increased amounts in CWA and CS. More *Sargassum* will reach the western CS, and some of the *Sargassum* will enter the GoM in April. 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 April 2022, 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.