Outlook of 2023 *Sargassum* blooms in the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico*
September 1, 2023, by University of South Florida Optical Oceanography Lab
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The maps below show *Sargassum* abundance, with warm colors representing higher values. As expected, the *Sargassum* quantity in the Great Atlantic *Sargassum* Belt (extending from west Africa to the Gulf of Mexico) continued to decline from July to August 2023, with current total wet weight of roughly 5 million metric tons. This abundance is essentially middle-of-the-pack for the GASB during August (compared to all years since 2014). Biomass remains concentrated in the Central West Atlantic region (CWA; roughly 2.5 million tons) and Caribbean Sea (CS; 2 million tons). While the CS quantity is slightly increased from last month, this is not uncommon for this timeframe, and does not indicate an increasing trend for future months. Instead, this likely represents an undercount during the month of July in the CS. Only minimal *Sargassum* quantity was observed in the Gulf of Mexico (GoM), which is also common during this time of year.

Following prevailing currents and winds, the *Sargassum* aggregations in the CWA and CS have continued to move northwestward. Patchy *Sargassum* was found throughout the northern and eastern margins of CS, as well as just north of the Greater Antilles Islands. Minimal *Sargassum* quantity was found in the western CS.

Looking ahead, the overall *Sargassum* abundance within the GoM, CS, and the CWA will all continue to decline, and the threat to coastal communities in the region will continue to abate. Nevertheless, we will closely monitor and track *Sargassum* in each region, with an eye toward the start of the 2024 season. Of note, the *Sargassum* abundance in the Central East Atlantic (offshore Africa; not shown in the images below) doubled over the last month. This is uncommon for the time period, and will have unclear impacts moving forward. As such, we will provide more summary updates by the end of September 2023. Meanwhile, daily updates through near real-time imagery can be found under the *Sargassum* Watch System (SaWS, https://optics.marine.usf.edu/projects/saws.html).