

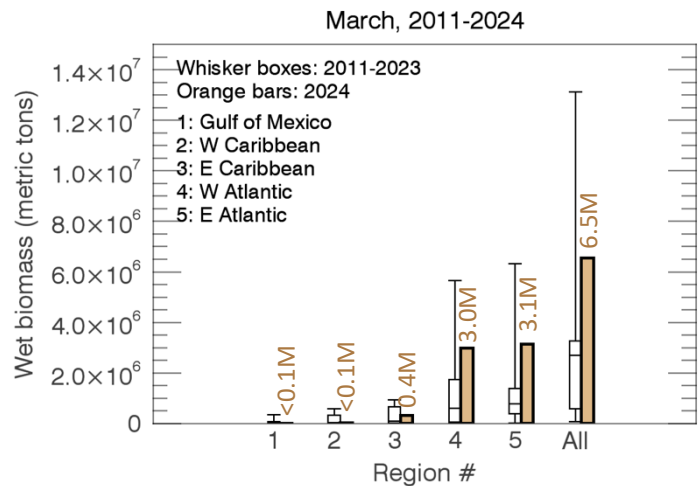
Outlook of 2024 *Sargassum* blooms

A perspective for the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico*
April 1, 2024, by University of South Florida Optical Oceanography Lab
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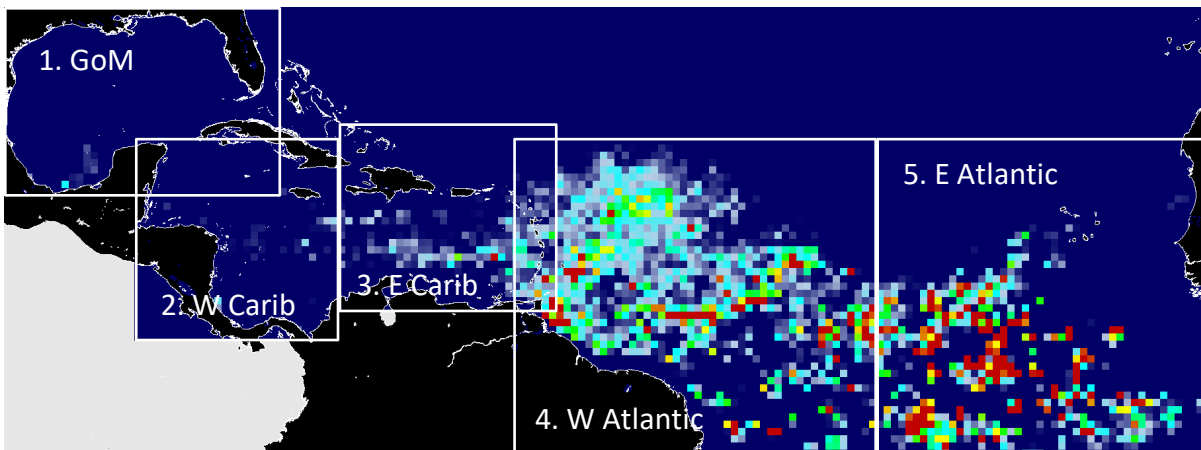
The map below shows average *Sargassum* abundance for the month of March 2024, with warm colors representing higher abundance. The *Sargassum* abundance for each region is compared with historical values in the same month of 2011 – 2023 in the whisker box plot below, where horizontal bars in each vertical box indicate minimum, 25%, 50%, 75%, and maximal historical values, respectively.

Unlike most previous years, total *Sargassum* amount decreased from about 9 million metric tons in February to about 6.5 million metric tons in March. Most of the decline occurred in the eastern Atlantic where persistent cloud cover could cause some underestimation. In the western Atlantic, slight decline could be due to weaker-than-usual winds. Nevertheless, similar February-March declines also occurred occasionally in previous years (e.g., 2018), and the total amount in March 2024 was still above the 75% of all previous March months, indicating that 2024 could still be a major *Sargassum* year.

As predicted earlier, the amount of *Sargassum* entering the eastern Caribbean Sea (CS) continued to increase from late February, and this trend will continue in the coming months. In contrast, negligible amount was found in the Gulf of Mexico (GoM) and the western CS.



Looking ahead: We interpret the February-March decline as an unusual anomaly, and expect increased *Sargassum* amounts in the central Atlantic and particularly in the eastern CS over the next few months. By late April or early May, the coastal regions in the western CS may receive small to moderate amounts of *Sargassum*. The southeast coast of Florida (including the Florida Keys), however, will be largely free of *Sargassum* until late May. We will closely monitor and track *Sargassum* throughout the central Atlantic, and will provide more summary updates at the end of each month. Meanwhile, all previous monthly bulletins as well as daily updates through 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 and Gulf of Mexico. 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 the Federal funding agencies, take no responsibility for improper use or interpretation of the bulletin.