

American Bird Conservancy * Caribbean Agroecology Institute*
Center for Democracy in the Americas* Clearwater Marine Aquarium* Columbus Zoo and
Aquarium* Environmental Defense Fund * Foundation for a Civil Society* Harte Research
Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies* The New York Botanical Garden* Ocean Doctor* The
Ocean Foundation* Social Science Research Council * Washington Organization on Latin
America* WildAid* Wildlife Conservation Society

December 11, 2020

President-Elect Joseph R. Biden
c/o Office of the Presidential Transition
Washington, DC 20270

Dear President-Elect Biden:

Congratulations.

As leaders of US non-profit organizations and academic institutions at the intersection of science and society, we look forward to working with you and your administration. Our purpose is to ask that in the first 100 days of your administration you resume diplomatic dialogue on environmental matters with the government of Cuba and reverse current administration policies and regulations that have restricted scientific and professional exchange between Americans and Cubans.

A renewed policy of scientific engagement on environmental matters will advance the interests of the United States and those of the Cuban people in a way that ensures a clean and healthy environment and sustains the natural resources upon which our societies and economies depend. Engagement will also be fundamental to carrying out your agenda on promoting clean energy and addressing climate change in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Environmental protection was a central pillar of US-Cuba bilateral cooperation during the last two years of the Obama-Biden Administration. A *new* policy of environmental dialogue and cooperation could resurrect and expand the successful and impactful policies, programs and collaborations put in place between 2015 and 2017. To that end, we pledge our strong support to you in this endeavor and respectfully request that you take the following actions—

1. Initiate a climate-focused dialogue with the Cuban government to identify priority areas for continued cooperation and collaboration on environmental protection, resource

- management, and biodiversity conservation among government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, and the private sector;
2. include Cuba in a regional climate-focused dialogue to develop and advance a coordinated Caribbean and Latin American strategy for addressing climate change and ocean health;
 3. implement the existing bilateral agreements on environmental protection, biodiversity, and wildlife conservation; and
 4. include Cuba in your planned *Clean Energy Export and Climate Investment Initiative* to promote Cuba's development of clean energy and to support Cuba's climate change mitigation plans.

We understand that any steps to resume environmental dialogue and cooperation will need to be embedded within a broader set of actions to advance US-Cuba engagement. Particularly important is the need to promptly restore the Cuban Assets Control Regulations (CACR) and the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) regarding Cuba to their status on January 20, 2017. This will allow NGOs and others to carry out projects under general license provisions and remove the confusion created by a series of restrictions imposed by the current administration since the summer of 2017. Robust environmental and scientific cooperation also depends upon the ability of Cuban scientists and experts to travel to the United States. Therefore, it is imperative that the US Embassy resume full operations as soon as possible and begin issuing multiple-entry non-immigrant visas to Cuban scientists, conservationists, and others.

We request that you take the actions described above because the well-being of Cuba's environment matters tremendously to the United States and its people. Neither country can effectively manage shared resources alone. Cuba sits at the convergence point of the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico. Because of the prevailing currents and Cuba's proximity to the United States, sustainably managing resources and protecting the environment in Cuba is critically important to fisheries, ecosystems and economies in the southern United States.

Furthermore, the islands of the Caribbean, including Cuba and the US territories, are on the front line experiencing the impacts of climate change. With support from the United States, Cuba can help galvanize and coordinate climate change action across the region. Cuba has been proactive in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change and has made some progress toward transitioning away from dirty fossil fuels to clean, distributed energy. That said, like so many countries in the region, Cuba lacks sufficient resources of their own to invest in clean energy or large-scale mitigation projects.

Essentially, we request that you resume and build upon the approach taken during the last two years of the Obama-Biden administration and continue the long and rich history of scientific

collaboration between the United States and Cuba. The signatories to this letter represent a diversity of NGOs and other institutions that for decades have worked with Cuban counterparts to deepen our understanding of natural systems shared by both countries and the region and to produce scientific research that informs effective policies. For example, a team of US and Cuban scientists worked together to design a science-based network of marine reserves around the island aimed at protecting corals reefs and the diverse populations of fish that depend upon them. That network now extends to over 25% of insular coastal waters in Cuba. Building upon this success, in November 2015, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) signed a bi-lateral agreement with the Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment to collaborate on the conservation and management of marine protected areas in the Gulf of Mexico. Joint scientific expeditions under that agreement explored deep water coral reefs in Cuba and produced findings that will help protect marine ecosystems in both countries. This agreement also resulted in the creation of a US-Cuba sister sanctuary program that included two of the largest protected areas in the US Gulf of Mexico and two in Cuba. In 2017, US and Cuban partners to the coalition invited the Mexican government to join, adding seven marine protected areas to what is now called the Gulf of Mexico MPA Network, or *RedGolfo*.

There are scores of other examples where Americans and Cubans working together have produced tangible benefits for the people in both countries. Such collaborations have increased our collective capacity and readiness to prevent and respond to oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico. Fishermen, scientists and officials from both countries have come up with new approaches for rebuilding commercial and recreational fisheries. Dozens of learning exchanges between small farmers have led to the implementation of innovative ecological, social and economic models for resilient agricultural and food systems. Joint scientific surveys have led to new discoveries and have helped identify priority areas for biodiversity conservation. The behavior and routes of birds that migrate between North America, the Caribbean and South America are better understood thanks to field research in both countries. Through the work of cultural institutions, this scientific work made possible ground-breaking exhibitions and educational products around Cuban and Caribbean nature and culture, and unprecedented collaboration in the cultural arena. These collaborative projects are often guided by distinct Memoranda of Understanding signed between US and Cuban NGOs, research and university counterparts, and remain valid to date, notwithstanding the constraints placed upon such partnerships by the current administration.

We now have an opportunity to renew US-Cuba relations with a policy of constructive engagement. Our groups and others have continued scientific and environmental projects in Cuba during this period, but the current administration policies have constrained our ability to fully carry out projects on the ground. Because of the reduction in staff at the US Embassy in Havana, it has been practically impossible for Cuban scientists and other experts to secure visas to travel to the United States, dealing a special blow to scientific collaboration and joint research.

We respectfully urge you to set a new course, one firmly based on constructive engagement and the centuries old tradition of science diplomacy. The specific steps outlined above will set a strong foundation for bilateral relations that will benefit the people of the United States and Cuba for years to come.

President-elect Biden, you can count on our support. We wish you well and look forward to working with your Administration.

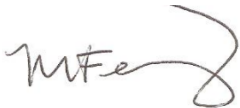
Sincerely,



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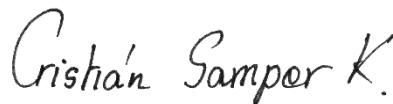
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