

SANDWATCH STARTS IN PUERTO RICO

One of the first steps for Sandwatch in Puerto Rico was to translate and publish the Sandwatch manual in Spanish. With the support of the University of Puerto Rico Sea Grant College Program and the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, this was completed at the beginning of 2008.

With this document in hand, the time was opportune to launch the Sandwatch program. On 8th August 2008, twenty five teachers from schools all around Puerto Rico and fifteen members of the Puerto Rico Parques Nacionales met at Boqueron, Puerto Rico to learn about Sandwatch methods and to discuss how to start a Sandwatch programme in Puerto Rico. The workshop was sponsored by the following organizations:

- University of Puerto Rico Sea Grant College Program
- Puerto Rico Tourism Company
- Organizacion Pro Ambiente Sostenable
- Parques Nacionales de Puerto Rico
- Sandwatch Foundation



Parques Nacionales staff at the workshop



Some of the teachers present at the workshop

During the two-day workshop, participants learnt about Sandwatch methods and tried out the various Sandwatch protocols for themselves; they listened to presentations about the Sandwatch programme and heard how other countries are implementing Sandwatch; and they discussed how to start Sandwatch in Puerto Rico. The workshop was facilitated by:

- Dr. Alida Ortiz of the Puerto Rico Tourism Company,
- Ms. Lesbia Montero of the University of Puerto Rico Sea Grant College Program (Humacao), and
- Dr. Gillian Cambers of the Sandwatch Foundation.

The beach at Boqueron was an ideal location for the workshop. Participants stayed at the Parques Nacionales complex and were able to walk directly to the beach and try out the Sandwatch methods. The beach is also an interesting one, much favoured by Puerto Ricans for vacations and recreation, and under stress from nearby tourism developments including a marina.



Measuring beach width



Analyzing the data



Measuring sand characteristics



Presenting a sketch map of the beach



No waves to measure on a calm day!



Measuring longshore currents



Puerto Ricans enjoying Boqueron



Seeing if the beach is suitable for turtle nesting



Collecting a water sample for testing



Investigating the flora and fauna



Analyzing water quality



Table showing water quality results

After spending Saturday, 9th August 2008, learning about Sandwatch monitoring methods, participants turned their attention on Sunday to how to make Sandwatch happen in Puerto Rico. Among the ideas discussed were: establishing a Sandwatch Facebook group; involving municipalities and scout groups; bringing the private sector on board; and establishing a Sandwatch database.



Lesbia Montero (left) and Alida Ortiz, two of the workshop facilitators

Lesbia Montero, Marine Educator at the University of Puerto Rico Sea Grant College Program agreed to be the Sandwatch Coordinator for Puerto Rico, and participants committed themselves to sending their individual Sandwatch action plans to her by 27th September 2008. The organizers hope to be able to hold a Sandwatch Exhibition in May 2009 when Sandwatch groups from around Puerto Rico can display and share their Sandwatch activities.

All in all, an excellent beginning for the Puerto Rico Sandwatch programme!