

United States – Mexico
“Western Gap” Boundary

Robert W. Smith
Geographic Consultant

The United States and Mexico have been successful in avoiding maritime boundary disputes by concluding four boundary agreements, beginning in 1970. The last agreement, signed in 2000, delimited their respective continental shelves in an area beyond 200 n. miles from their coasts, an area known as the “western gap”. This agreement reflects several aspects of cooperation between these neighbors.

First, during the negotiations a need to verify and update the coastal positions of several critical locations along each coastline resulted in three joint survey excursions. Secondly, the agreement itself includes provisions that recognize the possibility that oil and gas reservoirs may straddle the boundary.

However, future deep water cooperation between these two States near the “western gap” boundary, and the 1978 boundary for that matter, may be hindered by Mexico’s Constitution which prohibits international companies from entering into joint exploration and exploitation agreements with Mexican government entities. And, at some time in the future, the “eastern gap” will require boundary agreements among the United States, Mexico, and Cuba.