



Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

San Jose Declaration ATBC 2013

Urgent need to maintain the integrity of Costa Rica's designated protected areas

Over the last 30 years Costa Rica has become a global symbol of sustainable development. It is one of the few countries wholeheartedly endorsing the integration of advancing human welfare and environmental protection. Costa Rica's visionary decisions have led the country to protect 25% of its lands and to develop an exemplary program for the payment for environmental services. As a direct consequence, tourist income is one of the largest revenue generators for the country. Protected areas and national parks have helped transform Costa Rica into a modern service-based economy, thus playing a large role in improving the living standards of Costa Ricans.

Whilst the environmental and economic achievements of Costa Rica's efforts are applauded, they are currently threatened by potentially damaging projects that could reverse these gains. If these projects go ahead they may dethrone Costa Rica from its global leadership role in combining social, economic and environmental progress.

The Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC), the world's largest organization dedicated to the study and conservation of tropical ecosystems, is particularly concerned about threats to Costa Rica's world class network of protected areas. An example is the current proposal to de-gazette 1000 ha of the Rincon de la Vieja National Park, an area that contains a nationally unique natural forest type. The proposal, Bill number 17680, put forward by the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Mines and the Costa Rica Electricity Institute, is presently under consideration in Costa Rica's National Congress.

The realization of this proposal would remove 10% of the total area of this National Park from protection and forever threaten the existence of the only example of this unique forest type in Costa Rica. Moreover, such a de-gazetting of a National Park implies that none of Costa Rica's

National Parks, which offer the greatest levels of protection, are safe from conversion to other land-uses.

At this 2013 annual meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation, in San Jose, Costa Rica, we, the meeting delegates, consisting of 127 Costa Rican and 841 international scientists representing a total of 53 nations RESOLVE to:

CALL UPON THE COSTA RICAN CONGRESS AND MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY AND MINES to withdraw the current proposal presented to Congress to de-gazette 1000 ha of natural forest of Rincon de la Vieja National Park.

We urge the Costa Rica Congress and the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Mines to remove the current proposal presented to Congress.

CALL FOR THE COSTA RICA CONGRESS AND MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY AND MINES to continue to uphold current laws and exclude protected areas from being subjected to potentially damaging projects.

We urge careful consideration of the ultimate impacts on human wellbeing, biodiversity conservation and the provision of environmental services of any proposed legislative changes relating to protected areas.

Given the pressures on Costa Rica's natural systems in the face of new threats such as climate change, an increase in the support for the existing system of protected areas is critical. Additionally, extensions of some protected areas may be required to connect different National Parks to allow plants and animals to move as the climate shifts. A key example of this is the plan to link the lowland forest of the Piedras Blancas and Corcovado National Parks to Fila Cal near the Talamanca Mountains. Such biodiversity corridors are critical to maintaining Costa Rica's biological heritage through the 21st century and beyond.

CALL FOR THE COSTA RICAN GOVERNMENT TO assist in strengthening connections between existing protected landscapes and to endorse responsible and sustainable development of Costa Rica outside protected areas, to assist the existence and movement of biodiversity beyond the borders of protected areas.

We urge that the expertise and knowledge existing in the country be better utilized, particularly the input and participation of natural and social scientists when making nationally important decisions that may potentially threaten ecosystems in Costa Rica.

The government of Costa Rica should honor the commitments contained within national laws and international treaties that it has signed, including the Law 3763, signed and ratified on 19 October 1966, if it is to ensure that Costa Rica maintains its position as a world leader in

environmental and sustainable development. Honoring these commitments will ensure Costa Rica's National Parks will continue to provide a strong foundation for the national economy, maintain critical ecosystem services, and serve as source of enjoyment for future generations.

27 June 2013, San José, Costa Rica.