

Costa Ricans,

We cannot let Leatherback National Park be destroyed!

Leatherback Marine National Park was created by decree in 1991 and by law in 1995 to protect the ecological integrity of Ventanas, Grande, and Langosta Beach, in addition to the nesting populations of leatherback sea turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*), a species classified as Critically Endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Unfortunately for the leatherback, things have changed since then. **According to experts, during the last 20 years the population of leatherback sea turtles has diminished an estimated 90%.** The leading factors for this are the unregulated poaching of nests and adult mortality from open ocean industrial fishing practices.

Guanacaste's coastal zone has also changed. Sky rocketing beachfront property values have generated an accelerated and unregulated type of urban tourism development that has compromised the ecological integrity of the area. **Coastal development has now become the most recent and serious threat to leatherback sea turtles.**

The creation of the Leatherback National Park has without a doubt had a very positive impact. By controlling nest poaching and coastal development efforts within 125 meters of the beaches over the last 20 years, the decision to create the park has guaranteed the nesting habitat's quality. In fact, **50% of the remaining Eastern Pacific leatherback population still nests in Leatherback National Park.** Up to this point, the strategy has worked; however, a lot more needs to be done.

Experts agree that future efforts to save leatherback sea turtles must focus of the following strategy:

- Reduction of adult open ocean mortality rates
- Strict protection of their nesting beaches

While the first point requires the development of new fishing technologies and the elaboration of complicated international conventions, the second only depends on the decisions that this country makes.

Regrettably, it has not been easy to consolidate Leatherback National Park. **There are powerful political and economic interests that seek to allow tourism development inside the National Park.** These interests have insatiably tried to misinterpret the boundaries inherent to the law that created Leatherback National Park, until the State Attorney had to rule in 2005 that Costa Rica was under the obligation to consolidate the park and proceed with the immediate expropriation of all land within the 125 meter protected coastal belt in order to strictly guarantee their conservation. **The Constitutional Court has also ruled that the State's interests lie with the consolidation and the expropriation of corresponding properties in the park.**

Not only have they disobeyed this mandate throughout the present administration, but they have also presented multiple bills, each promoted by congressman Jorge Eduardo Sánchez, that propose changes to the park's limits in order to sidestep the court's ruling and authorize developments that satisfy the private interests of "developers". Fortunately, these bills have all been rejected by the Legislative Assembly's Environmental Commission.

Now, desperate, the "developers" have presented a new bill that proposes to downgrade the park's status – and level of protection – from a National Park to a Mixed National Wildlife Refuge. The difference with this project is that it does not come from a congressman in the Legislative Assembly, but from **President Oscar Arias Sánchez himself.**

This new bill is no more than another attempt to evade the Constitutional Court's binding resolutions, and is a reflection of yet another perversity of the politics surrounding this government's, "Peace with Nature" program.

Time is running out on the leatherback sea turtle. The bill has already been officially presented to the Environmental Commission for its ruling. The intention is to push its approval through before then end of the year, thus guaranteeing that the incoming administration cannot derail its progress.

The principal claim used to justify the bill is that there is not enough government money to pay the millions of dollars needed to expropriate. In reality, what there is too little of is **political will** to consolidate the National Park. As an example, the State has chosen to accept astronomic and fictitious property values to justify its behavior, when in fact the National Groundwater System (Senara), to which the President's decisions are bound, has determined that the land in question should only be dedicated to conservation efforts because of its fragile ecological makeup. **How can properties not apt for development be worth so much?**

WHAT CAN WE DO TO DEFEND LEATHERBACK NATIONAL PARK?

- Don't accept the excuses and official claims from the President that circumvent the Constitutional Court's rulings.
- Insist that the park be consolidated and that lawful expropriations be carried out.
- Voice your repugnance towards this bill by asking the Legislative Assembly's Environmental Commission to table the proposal.
- **Tell President Oscar Arias to:**

"LEAVE THE LEATHERBACKS IN PEACE!"

Cut out the following note and send it to the Legislative Assembly's Permanent Special Environmental Commission. Don't forget to fax a copy to Pretoma at 2236 6017 or email it to info@pretoma.org, and we will make sure it reaches President Oscar Arias as well.

Mrs. Hania Durán
Permanent Special Environmental Commission, Legislative Assembly
FAX 2243 3436 / email: hduran@asamblea.go.cr

The following letter expresses my repugnance towards the bill titled "Rectification of the Leatherback Marine National Park's Borders and Creation of the Leatherback Mixed Wildlife Refuge" (Case No. 17.383), recently submitted by the President's office to the Environmental Commission.

The Environmental Commission must table this bill in order for the Executive branch to immediately move forward with expropriations of properties located within the National Park's limits, in accordance with the Constitutional Court's order. Sincerely,

Name; _____ age _____

Profession _____ identification # _____



BOSQUES NUESTROS

RED TORTUGAS MARINAS



COSTA RICA



Asociación Pro Conservación y Defensa de los Recursos Naturales y Culturales de Guanacaste



WCS-Costa

