



Presidio de los Reyes, Nayarit. The Náyeris reject the Las Cruces Dam project (Photo: *Machángel Carvajal*).

## Vol. 5, No. 1 Spring 2014

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*Journalism to Raise Environmental Awareness**Grassroots Bulletin on Sustainable Development in Northwest Mexico*

Editorial

**2**

## New world order: Tide of trade accords to sweep up Mexico

The meeting in Toluca this past February 19 of Mexico's Enrique Peña Nieto, Canada's Stephen Harper, and the United States' Barack Obama to celebrate 20 years of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was purely about protocol, backing Peña Nieto's energy reform policies, lauding the treaty itself as an example for future commercial agreements under consideration, and an excellent time for a photo op.

In the so-called North American Leaders Summit, left out were Mexico's most pressing current issues, including immigration, employment, and US protectionism for certain products and services provided to Mexico, as well as national security and the border.

In regards to the latter subject, a rewrite will be in order once the details are better known of the recent capture in Mazatlán of Joaquín "Chapo" Guzmán Loera, the world's most wanted man.

It was only at the last minute, under international pressure, that they slipped in an environmental issue: the increasing and alarming death of the monarch butterfly, symbol of the trinational agreement. Nothing else.

It was a show of support for NAFTA and Peña Nieto, a way to say to the other nations that this is what the new world order is going to look like with the formation of economic and commercial blocs headed by the United States, and with petroleum as the principal commodity. In this vein, we point at the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) with its objective being to integrate the Asian-Pacific region. México became a signatory member of this commercial agreement on October 8, 2013.

The countries participating in the talks are the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, Chile, Mexico, and Peru. They have formed a new bloc in order to face commercial competition from China and other groups, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur).

NAFTA will be the basis for these new trade agreements but they will also include more currently relevant issues, such as the opening up of natural resource markets, and greater benefits and security for foreign investments. The electricity, mining, and scientific research and technology sectors would be included in the free-for-all, completely under the guise of progress.

The bad news in the petroleum market, especially for Mexico, is the gigantic Keystone XL oil pipeline. It would take crude oil from Athabasca, in Alberta, Canada to Texas refineries on the Gulf of Mexico. It is supposed to lower oil prices on the world market, but everyday consumers in the United States and Mexico won't benefit in the least from the pipeline.

Then there is the Transatlantic Economic and Trade Pact (ETP), currently under negotiation which aims to eliminate trade barriers between the European Union and the United States. Among these are tariffs, unnecessary regulations, and restrictions on investment affecting a variety of economic sectors.

Unlike the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the ETP includes an ample chapter on environmental and health issues, such as the prohibition on genetically modified organisms in crops or other imported products that put citizens' health at risk.

Mexico, dependent and subordinate to United States corporations, has no voice in these new trade deals, although it will be swept along by whichever blocs are finally formalized.

Editorial

## Trade talks: When is 'free' fair?

Discussions between the heads of state of Mexico, the United States and Canada, about the latest free-trade agreement proposal – for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP – set the unsettling backdrop for the most recent issue of our newsletter on sustainable development.

Unlovingly described as "NAFTA on steroids", the secretive proposal for talks to boost big business in 12 Pacific Rim countries, reminds those of us who prefer fair trade to be wary of the environmental and employment impacts of such a treaty.

Since we can be pretty sure, based on past experience, that nobody will ask us about it and what we want for our communities' economies, let's just say we're focusing our energies on some issues pertinent to the Northwest Mexico Region, for the time being.

Chief among our concerns is the proposed assault on the culture and economy surrounding the region's last wild river. Grassroots organizers and scientists are pointing out the folly of federal infrastructure projects to dam the San Pedro Mezquital and siphon its water from sensitive protected wetlands through a massive irrigation channel. Meloncoyote brings you full coverage, direct from Nayarit.

Meanwhile, our publication continues to inform you on how the Yaqui Tribe's twisted path to water justice meets with new obstructions over the contested Independence Aqueduct in Sonora state. We examine the latest turn of events in the saga of competition over the use of the binational Colorado River, and we recognize fishing families' involvement in natural resource conservation.

In Baja California coverage, proposals to alleviate the urban woes of Tijuana and Ensenada are a focus of attention, as we bring you true stories of activists and scientists taking pains to protect their local environments.

Coastal real estate development in Baja California Sur and Sinaloa, a major concern of this publication, comes under scrutiny as we report on a complaint filed at the trinacional level charging that Mexico is breaking its own laws in permitting megaprojects in protected and sensitive environmental settings on the Gulf of California. In addition, we provide the details of the latest megaproject threat – in Todos Santos.

We also uncover striking facts to share with you about the industrial polluters in Baja California Sur that have been honest enough to admit what, how much, and just where they release toxics into the environment, as rules for public disclosure of factory waste are strengthened. The islands and shores of the gulf are the scene of a concerted effort to establish mitigation and adaption projects due to the region's vulnerability to climate change impacts, as you will learn in our first-hand account from a participant in the unprecedented endeavor.

Finally, we revisit the ongoing controversy over the proposed Los Cardones mine in the protected area of Baja California Sur's Sierra de la Laguna.

We hope you'll learn things you want to know, share them with friends or family, and tell us what you think. Thanks for reading.

Mission

## Why Melóncoyote?

Our project dates back to 1994, when "Journalism to Raise Environmental Awareness" (abbreviated PECE in Spanish) was formed. In 2004, PECE played a role in the founding of the national professional organization The Mexican Environmental Journalist's Network. In 2005, when we started the first grassroots journalism project in the Gulf of California, our team chose the name Melóncoyote because it is a species emblematic of the region at the heart of our mission.

The Coyote Melon, known in Spanish as melón coyote or calabacilla (which includes the species *Cucurbita palmata*, *C. cordata*, *C. digitata* and *C. foetidissima*) is a wild perennial gourd that is resistant, versatile, beautiful, useful and native to the sandy soils that characterize the Gulf of California zone. The coyote melon is found in the region's seven states: Baja California Sur, Baja California, California, Arizona, Sonora, Sinaloa, and Nayarit. A vine, Coyote Melon has an immense root that guarantees its survival against hard times while its long stems serve to anchor the soil in fragile areas.

The indigenous peoples of the area, bearers of the region's traditional wisdom, describe the plant and how it is used. As medicine, it is bitter, but effective. As a musical instrument, it makes a beautiful rattle. Its seeds provide oil and a flour which contains a high level of protein. Its shell is ideal as a container for all matter of things. Because of all of these traits, and because it is an integral part of the food chain and one of the principal foods of the coyote, they named it "Coyote Melon".

Our team of collaborators chose this name because it is a plant found throughout the region, and in doing so, we wanted to stress our intention to create a large-scale communications medium, capable of spreading (on a regional level) the news about efforts being made towards sustainability. With this symbolic name to represent our work, we are sending a clear message about our respect for the land and the sea, as well as for the ancestral cultures and customs of the region. We see the establishment of this medium for education and dissemination as something urgent, given the idiosyncrasies of the region. We have conceived this project as being an integral element of the environment, something positive like the Coyote Melon.

Faced with the challenges of growth in the region—a low population density, its recent political incorporation into the

national government, a high degree of natural attraction and its proximity to the strong investment sector of the United States—we understand the implications of the pressures for development. Dealing with these challenges and pressures will require informed citizens who have the chance to participate in the decisions that affect their land, water, air, biodiversity and their future. We invite others to join with us, to participate in building this medium and to fight for a stable future for the region.

All work on behalf of Melóncoyote is voluntary.



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## OPINION

Groups applaud CEC for probing government role in seaside mega-resort schemes

By Kent Paterson\*

## MONTREAL

Mexican and international environmental organizations are praising the decision of the Montreal-based Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) to investigate the permitting of large-scale real-estate developments on the coast of the Gulf of California.

“By approving these projects, Mexico is failing its obligations to protect wetlands, coral reefs and species of environmental and international importance,” Natural Resources Defense Council America Advocate Carolina Herrera told the CEC.

The Gulf of California, or Sea of Cortez, dubbed the Aquarium of the World by late underwater explorer Jacques Cousteau, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is vital to the tourism and fishing industry and to protected species such as sea turtles that depend on its coral reef and shores for survival.

The CEC, based in Montreal, announced on Nov. 12, it would investigate charges against the government made in a citizen petition filed by the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA), the Centro Mexicano para la Defensa del Medio Ambiente, the Red Ecologista por el Desarrollo de Escuinapa, Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo, Wildcoast, la Sociedad de Historia Natural Niparajá, Greenpeace México, Los Cabos Coastkeeper, la Alianza para la Sustentabilidad del Noroeste Costero, and Sumar-Voces por la Naturaleza.

The commission called on Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto’s administration to answer their complaints that the Environment and Natural Resources Secretariat broke the law in granting approval of four coastal real-estate ventures in Northwest Mexico.

In question are the adjacent mega-resort proposals of Entre Mares and Paraiso del Mar in La Paz, capital of Baja California Sur, as well as the Cabo Cortés development just to the south on the gulf’s largest coral reef of Cabo Pulmo, and the Costa del Pacifico project renamed Playa Espiritu, which is located in the nation’s largest wetlands near Mazatlan, Sinaloa.

The Baja California Sur proposals were cancelled following intense pressure on the administration of former President Felipe Calderon, and the Sinaloa project failed to become his flagship tourism feat when local residents visiting wetlands experts insisted on revamping it.

Petitioners assert that the developments would significantly impact the Bay of La Paz, the El Mogote mangrove spit and nesting area, and the Cabo Pulmo coral reef, as well as the Marismas Nacionales fishing resources in Sinaloa and Nayarit on the other side of the Gulf of California.

The plaintiffs’ case contends that Mexico is “failing to effectively enforce the Ramsar Convention and the provisions of Mexican environmental law applicable to environmental impact assessment, the protection of wetlands, and the conservation of endangered species.”

The Ramsar convention, also known as the U.N. Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, is a treaty named after the Iranian city where Mexico’s delegation was among those that signed it in 1971.

Mexico has 139 sites and 8,833,094 hectares of wetlands “of importance” listed under the Ramsar Convention.

Sandra Moguel, legal adviser to AIDA, called the CEC’S action an important advance in applying international and national law.

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(Photo: Courtesy of Earth Justice).



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## Las Cruces Dam threatens agriculture and fisheries

By Sumar, AIDA, Nuiwari, Consejo Náyeri, and the Consejo Intercomunitario del Río San Pedro\*

### TEPIC

With the construction of the Las Cruces dam on the Río San Pedro Mezquital, the 617 foot spillway would retain 90% of the sediments and nutrients that have fertilized the land downstream under cultivation and given life to the coastal lagoons of the National Wetlands, and would result in severe impacts on agricultural and fishing activities, warned NGOs on February 14.

The environmental impact statement (EIS) presented by the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE), reveals "the artificial flow regimen would eliminate or diminish the quantity of intermittent runoff in downstream areas, creating an imbalance in the processes of sediment transport and soil replenishment, as well as in the interconnection between areas of seasonal accumulation."

Chapter 5, page 80 notes that "this impact is related to the decrease in the fertility of soils and of the lagoon system through modification of nutrients and organic material."

Around 10,000 agriculturalists depend on the seasonal inundations of the Río San Pedro, and their annual production has been valued at more than US\$79.4 million.

Chapter 5, page 74 of the EIS discusses the impacts on the coastal zone, pointing out that according to the CFE's study "the biological productivity of marine waters will be most affected by changes in planktonic composition, which in turn will strongly impact the species dependent on the plankton. Included are species of great commercial importance for both the region's and the nation's economy."

Fishing and oyster farming in Nayarit supports more than 2,000 fishing families and generates goods valued at more than US\$11.9 million annually.

The negative effects will be felt throughout the Gulf of California, since the wetlands in Nayarit are the principal breeding grounds of shrimp, points out project opponents.

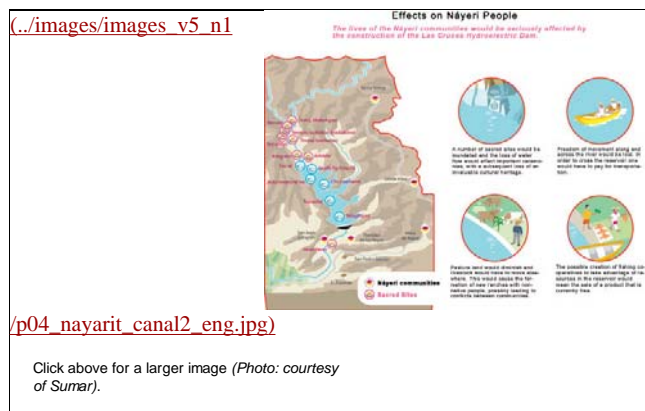
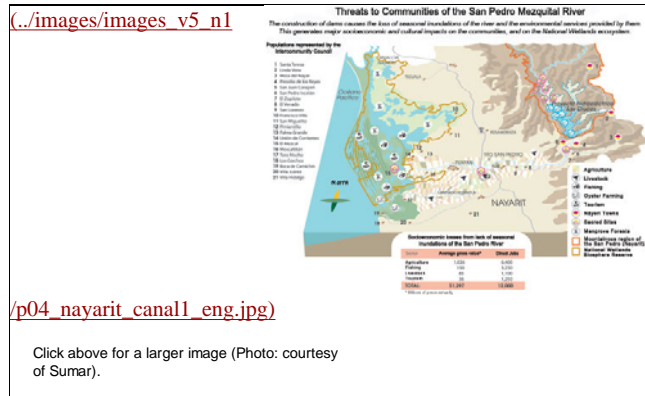
Currently the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat) is evaluating the CFE's EIS in order to decide if it will authorize or reject the project.

Rural organizations, ejidos, and fishing cooperatives have publicly protested the dam.

They believe the dam is unwarranted based on the EIR findings. The plant would be non-operational for 66% of the time, the turbines shut down for more than 20 hours per day during 8 months of the year. It would generate less than 1% of the energy demand for the central-west region, and would hold back 90% of the sediments that the San Pedro Mezquital River provides, eliminating needed nutrients for commercially important species both in the agricultural valley and in the coastal lagoons of the National Wetlands Biosphere Reserve.

The disappearance of the seasonal inundations of the river and the nutrients that it carries to the valleys and the coastal lagoons would cause high impact on farming, livestock, fishing and tourist activities, that annually benefit directly around 10,000 producers with US\$23.6 million, according to the World Wildlife Fund and the Gonzalo Río Aronte IAP Foundation of Mexico.

If the useful life of the dam is 50 years, it would stand idle approximately 33 of those years. However, it would cost US\$618.3 million according to leaders of the NGOs Sumar, AIDA, Nuiwari, the Náyeri Council, and the community Council of the Río San Pedro.



This amount is equivalent to the budget for Tepic for 8 years.

The other four months, from July to October, the turbines would function between 18 and 21 hrs per day, generating 778 gigawatts, or just 0.9% of the energy demand projected by 2026 for the west-central region.

Of the 9 states that comprise this region, Jalisco is first in demand, with 24.9% of the electricity sales, while Nayarit is in last place with only 2.8%.

From the beginning of the exploratory studies for the hydroelectric project, the CFE has systematically violated the rights of the zone's indigenous towns, says the NGOs. Although the EIR admits that some of the most important sacred sites and ceremonial centers would disappear, such as at Muxatena, the NGOs complain that the people have not been consulted.

For the Nayeri, Wixarrika, Tepehuano, and Mexicanero towns, the Río San Pedro is part of their territory, a basic part of their spiritual life and the center of their traditions and cultural identity.

The Río San Pedro Mezquital is the last remaining river without dams or hydroelectric plants in Northwest Mexico, the seventh largest river in the country, the source of sustenance for communities in central Nayarit, and the principal source of drinking water in southern Durango state.

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**Centenario Canal Irrigation Megaproject will put an end to floods and ecosystems**

By Agustín del Castillo\*

**TEPIC**

If stopping the Santiago River's nutrient flow to the National Wetlands in the early 1990's caused an ecological disaster, what more harm could come if they took *just* a little bit more from that ecoregion?

That seems to be the logic of the new and ambitious Centenario Canal construction project being promoted by the federal government and the state of Nayarit for the upper zone of this coastal plain. The project seeks to modernize approximately 106,250 acres and increase the state's grain production by 50%.

These are development model statistics that appear to go unquestioned, similar to those used by the Echeverría administration in the 1970's that first opened these delicate ecosystems to investment and large-scale construction projects.

"The Mexican president, Enrique Peña Nieto, announced the construction of the Centenario Canal that will substantially increase the irrigation area of cultivable lands and will increase food production of Nayarit [...], benefitting more than 7,000 producers.

"With this, the modernized agricultural lands in Nayarit will grow about 50%, and most importantly: it is expected that the project will increase the state's production of corn by 500%, rice by 300% and beans by 250%," states a presidential news release issued Nov. 4, 2013.

"It's an enormous hydro-agriculture infrastructure project: the main canal will be almost 37 miles long and will carry 60 cubic meters per second of water."

In comparison, the Chapala Guadalajara aqueduct carries a maximum of 7.5 cubic meters, allowing the capital of Jalisco to extract up to 200 million cubic meters annually.

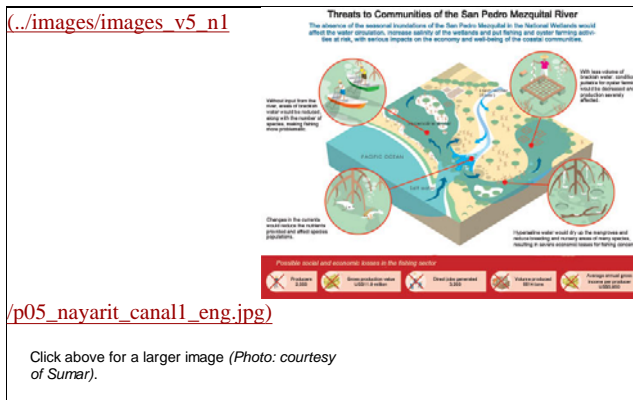
"The distribution network of canals will have a length of about 200 miles," according to the press release. "Five hundred and forty control structures will be built - pumps and conduits - as well as a drainage system and a network of access roads totaling about 270 miles."

"Resources on the order of US\$556 million will be invested in the Centenario Canal." In terms of its sustainability, the water supply for this project is guaranteed because it will be fed by the Rio Santiago.

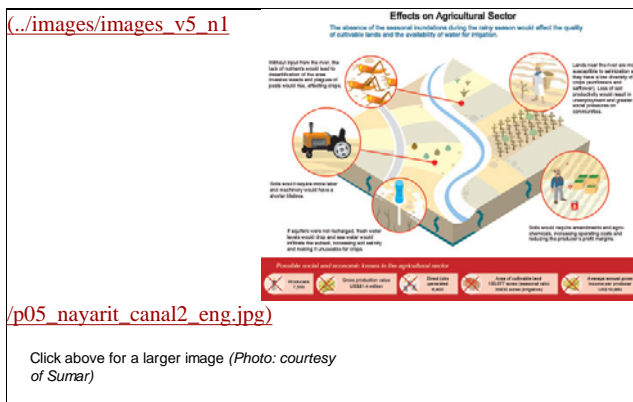
"This project is going to take advantage of the existing infrastructure. Along this river there are already three electric plants: Aguamilpa, El Cajón and La Yesca, with huge water reservoirs," adds the publication.

However, it makes no reference to the importance of the floods and the sediments they carry for these ecosystems or to the economic losses that will occur by preventing them. These effects will be seen in fishing, agriculture, livestock farming, and tourism as well as local cultures.

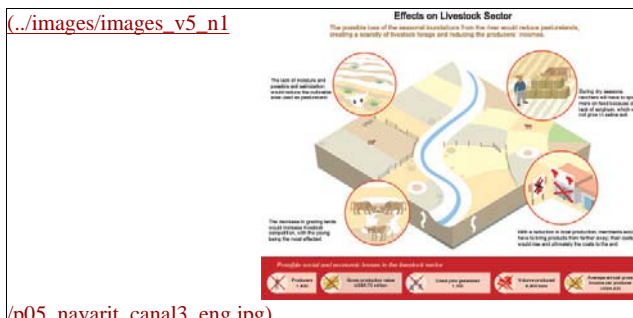
No mention of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is made, and one doesn't exist that analyzes how the hydrodynamics and fertility of the National Wetlands, a federally designated protected natural area, would be altered.



[p05\\_nayarit\\_canal1\\_eng.jpg](#)



[p05\\_nayarit\\_canal2\\_eng.jpg](#)



[p05\\_nayarit\\_canal3\\_eng.jpg](#)



In the past, the retention of sediments and decreased water volume due to the Aguamilpa Dam has resulted in an impoverishment of downstream soils, the complex but well documented problem of salt intrusion of the aquifers, and the loss of coastal beaches at a rate of 33 feet per year.

Click above for a larger image (Photo: courtesy of Sumar).

The lands that used to benefit from the surplus waters of the Santiago are being transformed little by little into wastelands due to the lack of fertile silt and increasing salinity.

To the south, less water and silt. To the north, the dammed Río San Pedro. All of these areas are found within a Ramsar Site of International Importance that is currently home to the most extensive mangroves on the Mexican Pacific.

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## Nayeri reject Las Cruces Dam

### PHOTO ESSAY

*Photos and text by Machángeles Carvajal\**

#### PRESIDIO DE LOS REYES

**On February 15, the Náyeri tribal governor from the town of Presidio de los Reyes, accompanied by its judges and the community activist**



**Odilón de Jesús López (on left), start the meeting on the Las Cruces Dam project that the CFE (Federal Electricity Commission) is planning to build on their tribal lands.**

**Heidy Zaith Orozco Fernández, representative from the NGO Nuiwari discusses relevant portions of the Environmental Impact Statement for approval.**



**The meeting took place at the main square in Presidio de los Reyes, Nayarit, ahead of**



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**the official public consultation scheduled for Feb. 20 that seeks to gain permission for the building the dam.**

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**The Náyeri town's authorities, the Cora, sign document rejecting the damming of the last open river in northwestern Mexico.**



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**Preparing hats and flags: The meeting took place during the season of the traditional "Mi Vida" festival that is led by 5-year old girls.**



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**Preparing hats and flags: The meeting took place during the season of the traditional “Mi Vida” festival that is led by 5-year old girls.**

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## Yaquis make progress in fight to recover tribal water

By Miguel Ángel Torres\*

### VICAM

On Feb. 14, Yaqui tribal authorities announced a truce, ending the blockade that they had maintained on Highway 15 since May 2013.

The blockade of the Vicam section of the main highway between Mexico City and the border city of Nogales was in response to the plundering of water from the Yaqui River so that it could be piped to the state capital of Hermosillo via the Independencia Aqueduct.

“We want to demonstrate to the President that we are giving him the benefit of the doubt, since he has begun to comply with the convention signed this past Jan. 21 and is regaining our trust in his administration,” declared tribal authorities.

“Therefore, our tribal government, with the consensus of our people, has decided to declare a truce in our public protest on the international highway,” they said in front of representatives of the federal, state, and municipal governments.

The statement made reference to the agreements signed in the offices of the Secretary of the Interior in Mexico City. Prominent among these is restricting water delivery for Hermosillo to that which is designated purely for actual human consumption, as long as doing so does not result in the theft of water designated for the Yaqui.

“Given the advances made in complying with the January 21 convention, and in conjunction with our religious traditions, and the proposal to complete the consultation that was ordered by the federal Supreme Court, we are obliged to declare this truce,” they announced.

In attendance at the meeting in Vicam were David Korenfeld, the Director General of the National Water Commission (Conagua); Luis Alberto Padilla Aguilar, representative from the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fishing, and Food; and the Undersecretary of the Interior, Luis Miranda Nava.

The Yaqui, in the words of its spokesperson Mario Luna, made it clear that their “unshakable fight for water has not ended. We are not giving up on our principles. At the same time we hope that the government will continue to comply fully with the spirit of the convention signed on January 21.

The policy of ignoring applied to the Yaqui by Guillermo Padrés, governor of Sonora, led to the intervention by other agencies. Padrés did not attend the meeting.

In recent months his administration has tried to break the unity of the Yaqui tribe through fraud and repression, all of which has been duly denounced.

Padrés has lost every legal case in which the Yaqui have responded in order to prevent him from further theft of the water to which they have had rights for more than 2500 years.

Construction of the Independencia Aqueduct began at the end of 2010 at a cost of US\$306.35 million as a part of the *Sonora Sí* program to transport 75 million cubic meters per year of water from the Río Yaqui and the El Novillo reservoir to the Río Sonora basin.

The project would consist of 90 miles of steel pipe. It would travel through 5 municipalities: Hermosillo, Ures, Mazatán, Villa Pesquera and Soyopa. Perspectives on the legal outcome favor the Yaquis, and there are a number of options for resolving the issue such as those contained in the *Report on the Impacts Caused by the Implementation of the Independencia Aqueduct in Yaqui Territory*.

Dated November 2013, it consists of 4 proposals: to increase the efficiency of the potable water delivery system in Hermosillo; to facilitate or increase graywater treatment, reuse and recycling; to acquire water rights and build aqueducts in the Río Sonora basin itself; and to build a sea water desalinization plant.

The proposed plant would have a production capacity of 660 gallons second, which is the equivalent of 75,000,000 cubic meters per year, and would use reverse osmosis technology. This would mean the construction of a 90 mile long counter slope aqueduct with a 203-foot elevation gain from the coast at Playa Cochorit in the municipality of

In Vicam, official Yaqui spokesperson Mario Luna Rojas (left) and tribal authorities announced the suspension of the highway blockade that has lasted eight months (Photo: Kenya Cuén).



**Empalme.**

The study was carried out as part of the project titled “*Subordination, antagonism and autonomy within the sociopolitical movements in Mexico and Latin America*” as part of the Research and Innovative Technology Projects Support Program (APIIAT) of the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the Autonomous University of Mexico.

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## OPINION

Are we Sonorans or idiots?

By Rosa María O'Leary Franco\*

### HERMOSILLO

It would seem that the objective of the "authorities" is to profoundly demoralize all Mexicans.

We watch as the price of everything rises, from even the most basic of staples, the give-away of our natural resources, and how public, social and job security is non-existent.

And those with a license to steal continue to lie and picture a magnificent, progressive Mexico through their rose-colored glasses.

We listen to our "brilliant" legislators in their ridiculous and cynical "debates" reveal personal secrets, all of their scandals and crookedness, and nothing happens, absolutely nothing. These arrogant bigwigs plaster the city with propaganda, not only creating visual contamination, but also an immeasurable fury over such shamelessness. Everyone in politics is currying favor with someone and much of the public is ready to vote for the most adept liar.

Then there's always a "rebel" who emerges, the people's candidate, who denounces all of the chicanery, but still nothing changes. He's the one who knows all about the sewer's depths because he has spent his entire life there. Oh, and they think this is a good guy, the one who speaks the truth. And you can find them at both the local and national levels – part of the system, just dumpsters, drains and dissipators of the people's rage.

That's our country, where theft by the authorities is sanctioned, where they take over the public places for private profit, and they do a great business under the cover of their terrible impunity.

That's our state, where we have permitted endless plunder, miserable wages, and the loss of employment security. Workers are treated as disposable commodities in mines such as Cananea and Nacozari, under the thumb of Sergio Almazán Esqueda and his Mexican Mining Chamber. They are deprived of their livelihoods and replaced by new-hires with pitiful salaries, just like in all the *maquiladoras*. Meanwhile the aim is to wipe out our indigenous communities and hand the land to the corporations, in which the politicians happen to be business partners.

A list of the shams, contamination, and institutionalized lies would be endless. But the worst crime of all: the deaths of 49 children in the ABC Day Care Center Fire<sup>1</sup> together with the irreversible harm to more than 70 children and their families. Nine years later, there's still no justice and it's as if nothing ever happened here.

Will we no longer react to anything? Are we already the living dead?

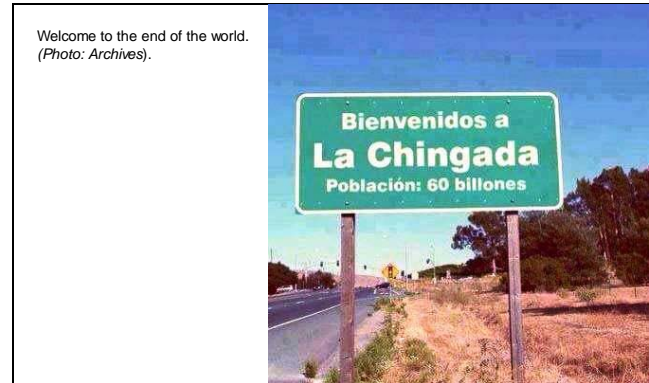
From somewhere in *Pendejolandia*<sup>2</sup>, which I wish would reclaim the name of Mexico.

\*Sonoran activist, winner of the Convergencia Party's 2011 "Benito Juárez García" national prize.

<sup>1</sup> read more [here \(http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world\\_now/2012/06/mexico-abc-fire-protest-corruption-hermosillo-parents-justice.html\)](http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2012/06/mexico-abc-fire-protest-corruption-hermosillo-parents-justice.html) about the tragedy.

<sup>2</sup> "land of the absurd"

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## New program to help the Gulf of California Islands region address climate change

By Griselda Franco Piedra\*

### GUAYMAS

After a year of intensive work developing a plan to help the Midriff Islands region in the Gulf of California to respond to climate change, the project's architects are calling for greater participation in order to spread the plan throughout the entire gulf region.

In January 2013, the Mexican Fund for Nature Conservation, through its call for proposals for Strategic Innovative Projects, approved the plan titled the

*“Development of a Program for Adaptation to Climate Change for the Protected Areas of Flora and Fauna in the Gulf of California (Sonora) Mexico Using a Participatory Approach.”*

The environmental group Natural Spaces and Sustainable Development (Endesu) and the National Commission on Protected Natural Areas (Conanp) are heading the project through the offices of the *Protected Areas of Flora and Fauna (APFF) Gulf of California Islands* in Sonora.

The program is designed to help communities act on matters like mitigation, adaptation, communication, coordination, development of pilot field projects and methodological tools. It is also aimed at strengthening institutional and technical capacities, incorporating key players, and meeting institutional regulations.

Ana Luisa Figueroa Carranza, director of the Gulf of California Islands APFF, states that the program wants to bring in other partners in order to jointly develop a regional Program for Adaptation to Climate Change that can analyze the entire region and promote synergy of the three levels of government with other important regional players.

In developing the project, the vulnerability of marine, island, coastal, economic and social environments are to be studied in relation to the APFF's conservation efforts, beginning with the micro region of the Midriff Islands. The analysis will be conducted using the Atlantis Ecosystem Model, a software program that considers all parts of the marine ecosystem: oceanography, fisheries and food webs in a spatial representation of the study area.

According to its Management Plan, the Gulf of California Islands APFF includes 898 islands offshore of five northwest Mexican states. The area is approximately 1,000 miles long, with a maximum width of almost 127 miles at the latitude of La Paz, BCS and a minimum width of 52 miles near Tiburón Island. Its surface area (including the islands), is estimated at 109,000 square miles.

Because of its enormous size, the Gulf Islands APFF is divided administratively into four sectors: Baja California, Baja California Sur, Sinaloa and Sonora.

The directors of the APFF in Sonora are responsible for the protection of 240 islands along almost 620 miles of coastline. To better manage the area it has been divided into a total of 6 micro regions including the Midriff Islands, the Upper Gulf Region, Guaymas San Carlos, the Yaqui Region, Bay of Tóbari, and Southern Sonora.

Within the Midriff Islands micro region, there are “priority areas” that are located from the northern tip of Isla Angel de la Guarda to Isla San Pedro Mártir, covering the communities of Bahía de Kino, Punta Chueca, El Desemboque and Puerto Libertad in Sonora and the Bahía de Los Angeles and El Barril in Baja California.

The program is using the *“Guide for the Preparation of Programs for Adaptation to Climate Change in Protected Areas”* prepared by Conanp in 2011 in order to meet its goals in the region.

The guide is a “methodological approach allowing for the development of adaptation strategies aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems, biodiversity and the services these habitats provide, as well as the activities of human communities in natural landscapes and different methods of conservation and sustainable use.”

Following the steps detailed in the guide, and with the advice of Foundations of Success, a nonprofit organization committed to working with professionals to improve conservation, thirteen virtual forums were held in 2013. The forums brought together 25 specialists from a variety of institutions and countries and who were experts in the flora and fauna of the region to form marine and terrestrial technical advisory groups.

Three additional workshops were held with approximately 25 attendees. Of these, about fifteen were representatives of the local, state and federal government, including: the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA); the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change (INECC); the Commission for



Ana Luisa Figueroa (left), director of the Gulf of California Islands APFF, leads the workshop Dec. 4-6 that was aimed at defining pilot projects with representatives of local, state and federal governments (Photo: Miriam Nunez).



Ecology and Sustainable Development (CEDES); the government of the State of Sonora; the Mexican Secretariat of the Navy (SEMAR); the Port Captain.; six from the central headquarters and the Gulf of California Islands APFF offices of Conanp in Sonora and Baja California; and the Biosphere Reserve Isla San Pedro Mártir. Four were community representatives of monitoring groups or environmental educators in Bahía de Kino, Sonora. They will all share the responsibility of monitoring the process and evaluating the results of the vulnerability study.

*\*Communications professional by vocation, feminist and activist by conviction*

### First class graduates in the *Gulf of California Community Leaders Program*

By *Griselda Franco Piedra\**

#### BAHÍA DE KINO

The first class graduated Jan. 31 in the Gulf of California Community Leaders Program, run by the non-profits Comunidad y Biodiversidad A.C. (COBI), Pronatura

West, and the government's National Commission on Protected Areas (Conanp). The graduates, all residents of the communities of Bahía de Kino and Puerto Libertad in Sonora, and Bahía de los Angeles in Baja California, will be tasked with teaching and inspiring their neighbors in the responsible management of natural resources in the Midriff Islands region.

Alejandra Mesa from COBI, and coordinator of the project, stated that the program's objectives are to "empower local people from the fishing communities, imparting them with knowledge and necessary skills to become agents of change in their communities."

The curriculum was developed through interviews, conversations, and a workshop with, and for, participants in the fishing industry from Bahía de Kino and Puerto Libertad, as well as with non-profit organizations (Environmental Defense Fund, Niparajá, Pronatura, RARE, the Mario Molina Center) and governmental institutions (Conanp, Conapesca, Inapesca, INCA Rural, FIRA and FIRCO).

They agreed that there would be four basic modules necessary: a) leadership, b) communication, c) negotiation and conflict resolution, and d) the importance of the Gulf of California and the Midriff Islands region in relation to fisheries and conservation.

The training took place Jan. 22-28 and was headed by: Ángel Luís Martínez from Invoca/Dignidad; Alan García from the Center For Civic Collaboration (CCC); Gerardo Hernández from Anagrama Consulting; María Espinosa, Mario Rojo and Alvin Suárez from COBI; Miguel Ángel Cisneros from the Regional Center for Fishing Studies (CRIP-Guaymas from Inapesca); and Felipe Amezcua from the Institute for Ocean Sciences and Limnology at UNAM.

As a result of the training, the graduates discovered that they share a common objective: to learn and acquire skills in order to work for the welfare of their communities and the environment. Beginning in March 2014, they will start to implement work plans in their respective communities.

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[../images/images\\_v5\\_n1/p09b\\_univer.jpg](#)

The first graduates of community leadership class (Photo: Courtesy of Comunidad y Biodiversidad, A.C.).





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## City and country await Colorado River water

By César Angulo\*

### MEXICALI

Citizens from Sonora and Baja California are waiting for the first of the water that will be released from dams in the United States for the ecological restoration and use in the coastal ecosystem and the Colorado River Delta.

For decades, water rarely reached the mouth of the river since it was diverted by canals at the U.S.–Mexico border into irrigation and urban use in Mexicali, Tecate and Tijuana.

But these days, the environmental groups that work on projects to preserve the river's delta and its wetlands could not be happier. They are waiting for Minute 319 to take effect, under an agreement signed on November 20, 2012 by representatives of the International Boundary and Water Commission (**IBWC** (<http://ibwc.state.gov/home.html>)) of Mexico and the United States, which promises to release enough Colorado River water to reach the delta.

The action will mark an important achievement in the 15-year struggle for environmental groups, scientists and citizens who have pushed for additional river water to be used in ecological initiatives.

The first water released will be as a pulse flow, a timed release from of the dam. Among the goals of the project, the new water flow aims to protect wetlands linked to the delta, as well as projects supporting the recovery of the riparian ecosystem in the bed of the river that serves the agricultural valleys between San Luis Río Colorado and Mexicali.

“The pulse flow is a unique and unprecedented event in the global context,” said Jennifer Pitt director of the Colorado River Project of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and co-president of the binational workgroup that helped negotiate the agreement for the release.

Beginning on March 23, the United States and Mexico will send 130 million m<sup>3</sup> (or approximately 0.7% of the annual average flow of the Colorado River) towards the delta downstream of the Morelos Dam, located on the Colorado River just south of the U.S.–Mexico border.

The pulse flow will have a peak of 120 m<sup>3</sup> per second over a number of days and will last 8 weeks, with a reduction in the flow towards the end of the event.

“The pulse flow is an essential ingredient in the restoration,” said Francisco Zamora Arroyo, director of the Colorado River Delta Legacy Program at Sonoran Institute. “We know that a relatively small quantity of water can make a great difference in the health of the delta region.”

Minute 319 recently received the “Partners in Conservation Award”, granted by the United States Department of the Interior which recognizes achievements in conservation efforts including cooperative activities among a diverse range of organizations.

The Minute, entitled “Interim International Cooperative Measures in the Colorado River Basin Through 2017 and Extension of Minute 318 Cooperative Measures To Address the Continued Effects of the April 2010 Earthquake in the Mexicali Valley, Baja California”, establishes a series of measures for joint cooperation between the two countries related to water storage, management during conditions of low and high storage, salinity, investment in water conservation projects to benefit the two countries, and water for the environment.

As part of minute 319, Colorado River Delta Water Trust will send an additional 65million m<sup>3</sup> of water in the next five years as a “base flow” - a small but constant quantity of water that will help to maintain the habitat created by the pulse flow, as well as restoration sites where native trees are to be planted.

“An essential component of the delta restoration activities is the joint work with the communities and water users in the region,” mentioned Yamilett Carrillo, director of the Colorado River Delta Water Trust. “In this process, water

([../images/images\\_v5\\_n1/p10\\_rio-colorado.jpg](http://www.meloncoyote.org/issue_v5_n1/p10_rio-colorado.jpg))

The flow of the Colorado River from the United States to Mexico makes possible the rich ecosystems that act as shrimp hatcheries and refuges for migratory and other birds (Photo: Bionero via Save the Colorado River Delta, National Geographic Image Collection).



The *Red del Alto Golfo de California y Delta del Río Colorado A.C.* is looking to fill the position: *Coordinador(a) en el Departamento de Gestión* in Puerto Peñasco, Sonora. The application deadline is April 30. Read more [here \(pagina20.html\)](#).



allotments for agriculture and urban users will not be affected by the implementation of the pulse flow.”

A coalition of environmental organisms including the EDF, Sonoran Institute, Pronatura West, the nature Conservancy, Redwood Center and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation kicked off the campaign “Raise the River” to raise the funds necessary for the delta restoration.

“Together, we are hoping to rewrite history to reestablish ecosystems and return some of the river’s natural amenities to local communities long deprived of a healthy environment,” said Pitt “If we can show the long-term benefits of binational cooperation to help water users and the environment, there’s no telling what we can achieve with long-term commitments to sharing water across borders.”

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## Binational event draws cooperation to safeguard of Tijuana's 'last lung'

By Aníbal Méndez Martínez\*

### TIJUANA

More than 300 people marched through the Arroyo Alamar on Feb. 15 to defend one of the last "lungs" that provides residents of this industrial city with various environmental services.

"The goal of this event is that people know the Arroyo Alamar natural area still exists and that we have time to save it," said Lourdes Lujan, a member of the Chilpancingo Collective for Environmental Justice and nearby resident to the second stage.

"We call on Conagua to formally collaborate with the Arroyo Alamar technical committee and commit to looking for sustainable development in what's left of Alamar," added Lujan.

In addition to the Chilpancingo Collective, other participating organizations included the Environmental Health Coalition, Recimec (Citizen's Network for the Community Improvement), CESDI (Education and Sociocultural Diversity Center), Nativ@s, Border Environmental Education Project, Tijuana Quality of Life, Cicea Papalotzin, Gapeti (Tijuana Environmental Ecological Patrol Group), Tijuana Environmental Group, Remexmar B.C. (*Mexican Network of Environmental Waste Management of Baja California*), CEIT (Global Education and Technology School), Hope Foundation of Mexico, and Ollin Calli.

Until recently a healthy riparian ecosystem, Arroyo Alamar now is largely plastered with concrete slab, part of a channeling project by the federal government.

The wooded area of this binational river is a natural resource that provides environmental services to the community and represents the last natural lung of Tijuana.

The first two stages of the drainage project have been completed, and there is progress of about half a mile on the third stage, which threatens to topple trees in the densest area of the ravine.

During the event "Yo Soy el Alamar," people hiked through the area channeled during the third stage, and held a press conference and artistic event.

"We are looking for sustainable development in our communities; Tijuana and San Diego deserve a healthy river, not only for migratory and endemic plants and animals living in the Alamar woods, but for the right that citizens have to count on places like these" said Magdalena Cerda, director of the Environmental Health Coalition.

In the third stage of the Alamar project, the closest to the Tecate River, there is still a wide assortment of plants and animals native to the area, such as woodpeckers and black herons.

It is part of a valuable ecosystem that, with its environmental services, mitigates pollution caused by the presence of the *maquiladora* industry and could see its beneficial impacts reduced due to the upcoming construction of a road along this stream.

[../images/images\\_v5\\_n1/p11\\_tijuana.jpg](#)

During the event "I am the Alamar" people walked to defend one of the last "lungs" of this industrial border city (Photo: courtesy of Alamar Sustentable).



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Threatened by desalinization plant, citizens demand: "Let Lagunita del Ciprés live"

By César Angulo\*

MEXICALI

Ensenada activists and local citizens appeared at the office of Francisco Vega, governor of Baja California to ask him to declare Lagunita del Ciprés, on the coast of Ensenada, a protected natural area.

Hundreds of Ensenada residents have united to demand protection of this body of fresh water, located in the vicinity of the housing tract *Infonavit Punta Banda* and El Ciprés Beach to the south of the city of Ensenada.

[../images/images\\_v5\\_n1/p12\\_lagunita.jpg](#)

The public requests official protection for this beach to the south of Ensenada (Photo: courtesy of [bionero.org](#)).



It is the last remaining coastal lagoon along Todos los Santos Bay and is threatened by the desalinization plant project that former mayor Enrique Pelayo is trying to push through.

On Jan. 30, members of two groups, *Haciendo lo Necesario*, y *Arte y Medio Ambiente en Armonía* (literally: "Doing what's Necessary" and "Art and the Environment in Harmony") presented the show "Lagunita el Ciprés, Let It Live" along with a photography exhibition in the central plaza of the governor's office in Mexicali. Their message was clear: The desalinization plant would mean the desiccation of the lagoon and a permanent change to habitat that is refuge to thousands of migratory birds.

In attendance was José Luís García Chavira, representative of the state's Secretariat of Environmental Protection, who promised to follow up on the proposal to declare the lagoon a protected natural park.

Environmentalist Rita Beadle Luna said they will also ask the state Congress to request the governor accelerate protection of the site.

### **History and Public Management**

The diary of the Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo expedition (1542) describes the large freshwater lakes of the bay known as Ensenada de Todos los Santos as a source of life for a large city. Population growth has shrunk these large lagoons, doing away with most of this natural source of water.

Today, Lagunita del Ciprés is the only wetland in the area that has survived the intense and frequent threats.

For a body of fresh water right next to the ocean, it has a unique system comprised of a basin, lagoon, dunes and beach. The combination is one of the city's most valuable natural areas and worthy of conservation.

For many years people have used it as a recreational area.

The system provides environmental benefits, such as protecting the city from flooding during winter storms and retaining rainwater. It also benefits wildlife biodiversity because it is a nesting site, as well as a resting and feeding area for local and migratory birds.

Due to its great importance, the Urban Development Program of Ensenada's Population Center considers this a conservation zone.

Citizens have been asking federal government authorities to designate the lagoon as a protected area since 2011.

In June 2013, the signatures of 4,000 Ensenada residents were submitted to David Korenfeld Federman, director general of the National Water Commission (Conagua), requesting that the declaration be made. A copy of the document was sent to President Enrique Peña Nieto, José G. Osuna Millán, governor of the state at the time, and to the former mayor of Ensenada, Enrique Pelayo Torres.

On March 15, 2013, with support from civil society, the Secretariat of Environmental Protection announced the initiation of the designation process in the state's official newspaper.

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## Urbanization of world renowned wine growing valley halted

By César Angulo\*

### ENSENADA

Only the vigorous efforts of newly elected city council members prevented a recent move to expand urban real estate development at the expense of agricultural land and the supply of domestic wine.

In the first week of February, the new council members repealed the regulations of the *Municipal Plan for Urban Tourism Development for the Winemaking Valleys of Northern Baja California*.

The document, approved by the previous council, allowed urban and tourism development in the middle of Guadalupe Valley, one of the most important winegrowing areas in the country, and internationally recognized for the quality and variety of its vineyards.

The zoning change permitted construction of housing complexes, which would affect the valley's function as an agricultural area and producer of 90% of Mexico's wine.

Taking advantage of the fact that the rezoning decision signed on Nov. 13, 2013 by Ensenada's City Council had not yet been published in the State's official newspaper, the Governance and Legislation Commission of the current council rescinded Order 74-2013.

The November decision, clearly arbitrary and made after a "public" consultation in the style typical of the former council under Mayor Enrique Pelayo Torres, provoked anger and rejection from the then wine industry, business chambers, and the community at large.

New councilwoman María Verónica Hernández reported that the "Zoning Regulations for the Wine Growing Valleys" had not been published in the official state register, so it was never valid.

The winegrowing *Valle de Guadalupe* is one of the most important valleys in the country and world renowned for the quality and variety of its vineyards (Photo: CICESE).



Allowing the construction of housing developments in the valley would affect the area which produces 90% of Mexico's wine (Foto: CICESE).



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## OPINION

### Ensenada's environmental priorities

*By Sergio Morales Polo\**

#### ENSENADA

##### I. Potable Water

The current population of the port of Ensenada is approximately 330,000 inhabitants, whose water consumption is estimated at 136.8 cubic meters per person per year (99 gallons per day). This amount includes the water lost to leaks in the distribution system as well as that used to irrigate public gardens. It adds up to 45 million cubic meters of drinking water needed to satisfy the population's total annual demand.

[../images/images\\_v5\\_n1/p14\\_Ensenada.jpg](#)

Ensenada's 330,000 people put pressure on the habitat (Photo: Erick Falcón).



The amount of water available annually is only 35.6 million cubic meters. This number is derived from the 21.5 million cubic meters extracted from the aquifers that the National Water Commission (Conagua) has authorized, plus 14.1 million cubic meters that is provided by the López Zamora Dam. The difference, 9.4 million cubic meters, is currently being made up by additional extraction from the aquifers, resulting in damage that is already noticeable as an increase in salinity.

Inexplicably, 15 million cubic meters of treated water is wasted annually because it is dumped into the ocean. This water could replace clean drinking water from the Maneadero reservoirs now used for irrigation, thereby making up for the aforementioned shortage and alleviating the pressure on the aquifers.

The utilization of this reclaimed water would also allow the installation of the new desalinization plant to be postponed. Its location, approved by the city council in 2013, would negatively impact the coastal wetlands at La Lagunita and unfavorably alter the landscape.

On top of all of this, a number of years ago the city was allocated a quota of 9 million cubic meters of water from the Colorado River. However, it has yet to be utilized since, among other reasons, there is no aqueduct between Tecate and Ensenada.

##### II. Environmental Culture

The city looks dirty: garbage in the streets, vacant lots, and ravine bottoms; run-down, unpainted wooden houses in the very heart of the historic district; a lack of green space; and an inadequate garbage collection system that never meets the mandated twice weekly pickup schedule.

There is also no evidence of significant efforts to foster environmental awareness and practices within the population to improve the city's conditions. When considered all together, the above indicate that citizens and public servants alike lack a solid environmental culture.

##### III. Noncompliance of Environmental Regulations

Two of the municipal government's decisions have been arbitrary. The first was their choice of location for the desalination plant that was contrary to the site previously laid out in the Municipal Plan for Urban Development. Second was their approval of zoning changes, subsequently revoked, that would have allowed construction of dense residential developments along *La Ruta del Vino* (the Scenic Wine Route).

##### IV. Marine Landscape

The bay's natural beauty started to decline when the commercial docks for large cargo ships, fishing boats, and cruise ships were built. If these docks were relocated, it would be possible to reclaim the space in order to improve and spruce up the most important part of the tourist section which is located in the adjacent historic center of town. With this change, Ensenada could considerably improve its shipping image as well as strengthen its appeal to tourism, one of the city's most important, yet underrated economic sources.

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Lack of rain supports CICESE climate change model: Winter along coast 60% drier

By Erick Falcón\*

ENSENADA

After registering precipitation levels 60% below the normal winter average along the Baja California coast, the CICESE 2 Climate Model developed by the Ensenada Center for Scientific Research and Higher Education (CICESE), is predicting only 40% of the usual rainfall for the rest of the current season.

According to data from the National Water Commission (Conagua), the average winter rainfall in the region is almost 250 mm. Up to this month, the recorded rainfall has been barely 60 mm, compared to the expected amount of around 150 mm. For the period of November 2013 to March 2014, the CICESE 2 Model predicted between 20% and 40% of the average precipitation for the region (or 50 to 100 mm), supporting the accuracy of the prediction model up to this point.

The outcome of the CICESE 2 Model was presented this past Nov. 12 at the 25th Mexican Climate Prediction Forum in Aguascalientes. These forums are organized by Conagua's National Meteorological Service so that institutions such as CICESE can present the results of their studies to the appropriate agencies in charge of issuing official weather predictions.

"In November, we said that it was going to rain less than normal this winter. And so far, it has rained only 15, 20 or 40 percent of the normal average, which is in line with what we said and therefore supporting the accuracy of the prediction," said Dr. Edgar Pavía López, researcher in CICESE's Oceanography Department, and one of the developers of the climate model.

CICESE 2 is a statistical model that uses global oceanic and atmospheric observations (sea surface temperatures and geopotential height) made by Ramón Fuentes Franco, who received his Ph.D from CICESE while working under Pavía and Dr. Federico Graef.

Fuentes currently works at the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy, but continues to collaborate with CICESE.

Pavía adds that they hope to validate the model's results for the November 2013-March 2014 season in the rest of the country, mainly in the northern states, with the goal of determining if the CICESE 2 model's prediction was accurate.

"We have seen in other years that the prediction has been successful in various states," he said. "So what we are going to do is see where it works better, in order to improve the accuracy of the system, while continuing our investigation and development of the new CICESE 3 model in the future.

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We recommend: "[USAN PRONÓSTICOS AMBIENTALES PARA RECUPERAR PESCA DE ABULÓN](http://www.invides.com.mx/medio-ambiente-mobil/3924-usan-pronosticos-ambientales-para-recuperar-pesca-de-abulon)"  
(<http://www.invides.com.mx/medio-ambiente-mobil/3924-usan-pronosticos-ambientales-para-recuperar-pesca-de-abulon>)  
(Photo: Courtesy NMFS).





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## Industry reports toxic residues in Baja California Sur

By Miguel Ángel Torres\*

### LA PAZ

Industry in Baja California Sur emits 14 toxic substances and their compounds into the air, water or soil: acetaldehyde (ethanal), sulfuric acid, acrolein (propanal), arsenic, benzene, carbon dioxide, cadmium, inorganic and organic cyanide, chromium, formaldehyde, mercury, nickel and lead. Thirteen of these are present in the state capital, La Paz.

The information was gathered from the most recent reports made by those installations subject to annual, mandatory, government reporting via the Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR).

In Baja California Sur, 638,461 pounds of contaminants were released into the air, 40,928 pounds into the water and 2,394 pounds into the ground. During this time, only 40.4 pounds were sent to a disposal facility, and 0.7876 pounds were flushed into the sewage system.

The emissions of the greenhouse gas CO<sub>2</sub> reached 2,769,671 tons.

The information in the PRTR published in 2013 represents emissions for 2012. It is available through the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat), the governing body for the program.

With the new Mexican law (NOM-165) published January 24, it is expected that beginning in 2014, an improvement in the quality and quantity of available information on toxic emissions from fixed sources in Baja California Sur will be available, in addition to data from the rest of the country.

For the first time, the measure requires companies to report to the PRTR the location and quantity of toxic waste produced as a by-product.

To date, five companies in Baja California Sur emitting toxic substances that merit monitoring by the federal government have submitted data to the PRTR.

Those that reported voluntarily, without coercion from Semarnat, were: the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE), the principal electricity generator; Exportadora de Sal, which operates an evaporative salt works facility which also produces chemical byproducts; Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex), the country's oil and petrochemical company; the hotel business Promociones Turísticas; and Roca Fosfórica Mexicana II which reports under the classification of minerals, iron and steel manufacturing.

So far, toxic emissions have been reported in four of the state's five municipalities: La Paz, Los Cabos, Comondú and Mulegé. None were reported in the municipality of Loreto.

In the most recent reporting year, 1,754,845 tons of residues were released into the air of the state's capital city, almost exclusively from CFE, while Pemex reported that it only released three tons.

Pemex was the only industry emitting acetaldehyde (0.308 pounds per year), acrolein (0.0044 pounds) and benzene (0.374 pounds per year). Meanwhile the CFE and Roca Fosfórica are responsible for arsenic contamination of water sources, releasing 839 pounds per year.

The CFE released 4,718,660 pounds of NO<sub>2</sub>, and together with Roca Fosfórica emitted 9,908 pounds of inorganic cyanide into the water and 1.19 pounds into the soil.

The CFE, Pemex and Roca Fosfórica contaminated La Paz's water with 1,004 pounds of cadmium per year and its soils with 0.737 pounds. Except for Pemex, these same industries emitted 50,787 pounds of chromium into the water and 3.85 pounds into the soil.

In 2012, the CFE and Roca Fosfórica contaminated water with 257 pounds of mercury and soils with 0.0264 pounds.

The CFE in La Paz is one of Baja California Sur's five industries that made voluntary reports of their toxic wastes (Photo: Tali Nauman).



[../images/images\\_v5\\_n1/p16b\\_smog.jpg](#)

La Paz – The burning of fossil fuels from both vehicles and electricity plants have made the city's smog infamous (Photo: Debra Valov).



These two industries along with Promociones Turísticas and Pemex disposed of 82,145 pounds of nickel in the water and 3.5 pounds in the ground.

The CFE and Pemex were the source of lead contaminacion, having released 44,120 pounds into the water and 0.55 pounds into the soil.

Finally, the records for for La Paz and Baja California Sur show Pemex had emissions of 0.0016 pounds of formaldehyde into the air.

According to Agustín Bravo, La Paz representative of the Mexican Environmental Law Center, knowing the quantities emitted helps in the analysis of human and environmental health, which must take into account the impacts on different segments of the population.

The CFE divulges little about the relationship between its contaminants and their effects on health, Bravo said. He proposes that the CFE takes responsibility for carrying out age-related epidemiological studies with the elderly, adults, and children.

The thresholds considered safe for Mexicans, as set by laws and regulations, have not been updated since the beginning of this century, and most are higher than those adopted by Canada and the United States.

Efforts by civil society to reduce the thresholds and to add new toxic substances to the mandatory reporting list met with resistance from industry representatives who took part in Semarnat negotiations for the NOM-165 during 2013.

The number of substances subject to mandatory reporting was finally set at 200 but the thresholds were not changed. That job was left for future consideration by all sectors involved.

The Mexican registry is part of a tri-national effort to reconcile the country's data with those of the United States and Canada, as a part of the environmental side-agreement to the North American Free Trade Agreement. Dissemination of this information is free to the public.

When Rafael Pacchiano Alamán, Semarnat's assistant secretary for Environmental Protection Management, presented the results of the 2012 reporting cycle, he noted that Mexico's PRTR also meets commitments made to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for strengthening the public's right to environmental information access.

He announced that, within the framework of the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), Mexico, the United States, and Canada will soon be publishing an analysis of the North American PRTRs for 2005–2010.

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## Public consultation on the Los Cardones mining project one of the most attended in history

By Talli Nauman\*

LA PAZ

The public consultation called by the Environment and Natural Resources Secretariat (Semarnat) on the Los Cardones mining project was one of the most attended of its type in the history of the country.

With thousands of attendees, and even live coverage, both civil society and academia were present on Jan. 9 to express their resounding rejection of the investment project under the auspices of *Desarrollos Zapal del Grupo Invecture*.

From the beginning, the opposition complained that the agency had not responded to the public's requests to make available all of the information provided by the developers.

Semarnat released the project's investment information on Nov. 14, 2013. However, according to a statement made by the Mexican Center Environmental Law Center (Cemda) two days before the consultation, it did not include the appendices from the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), information crucial to fully understanding the project and to being able to make responsible comments within the evaluation process.

"This violates the right to public participation and access to information," said Agustín Bravo Gaxiola, coordinator of Cemda Northwest. "The appendices to the EIS are available in digital format and have been in Semarnat's possession since last year; therefore it is only a question of simple logistics," he stated.

The mining project was initially presented as Paredones Amarillos, later as Concordia, and now, for the second time, as Los Cardones.

*Desarrollos Zapal de Grupo Invecture* recently bought all of the Canadian company Vista Gold's stock in order to be able to file the EIS with Semarnat for the fourth time.

The enterprise says it intends to mine ore on two sites on 1,341 acres. The operation would consist of slag heaps, a tailings dam, a processing plant, and runoff water infrastructure. Investors also say a 22-mile-long aqueduct would connect to a Pacific Coast desalinization plant; an access road would be built, and other facilities would be constructed.

The mining operation would be within the Sierra La Laguna Protected Natural Area, where a decree prohibits "the dumping or discharge of contaminants into the soil, subsoil or any type of stream or body of water, or to develop activities that contaminate the area."

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Young people visiting the Sierra de la Laguna (Photo: Niparaja A.C.).



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Todos Santos, at risk of losing its magic

By Miguel Ángel Torres\*

TODOS SANTOS

With scarcely 2,013 households and 5,148 inhabitants, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, this “magical town”, so designated by the Secretary of Tourism, could become a living hell for its current residents if a planned mega-development is approved. The project is slated to provide more than 11,000 rooms integrated into 4,470 living units for a projected population of more than 60,000, not including the seasonal influx.

[../images/images\\_v5\\_n1/p18\\_todos-santos.jpg](#)

Todos Santos: sign [the petition](http://www.change.org/es-LA/peticiones/semarnat-salvemos-punta-lobos-no-al-proyecto-playa-santos) (<http://www.change.org/es-LA/peticiones/semarnat-salvemos-punta-lobos-no-al-proyecto-playa-santos>) to protect this landscape (Photo: *Salvemos Punta Lobos*).



The project known as the Playa Santos Integrated Tourism Development, Todo Santos, B.C.S. was registered on May 24, 2013 with the Environment and Natural Resources Secretariat (Semarnat) under Special Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) 03BS2013TD030. The EIS received favorable recommendation on Dec. 16, 2013.

According to the EIS, the plan calls for: the construction of three hotels, commercial zones and infrastructure such as roadways, accesses and parking; hydraulic drainage; an electrical network; a desalinization plant and water treatment plant; green areas with native plants; and protection for the zone's only wetlands.

An investment of US\$476.2 million would be made in an area of a little more than 988 acres.

The four project partners are: FRBC Todos Santos, S. de R.L de C.V.; FRBC Todos Santos 2, S. de R.L de C.V.; HSBC México, S.A.; and Inmobiliaria Punta Lobos, S.A. de CV.

When residents learned of the project they roundly rejected it. Their actions convinced the federal government to hold a public consultation on July 29. In attendance was the project's representative, Carlos Asali Harfuch, who presented information that differed from that contained in the EIS, which was conditional on a series of modifications.

Besides being rejected by the neighbors, the project was deemed by the National Biodiversity Commission to “environmentally unacceptable” because it “presented little information on the effect that the discharge of brine from the desalinization plant could have on the nearby environment. Additionally, there was no analysis that considered the effects on the marine organisms or effects from a regional perspective,” local news sources reported.

For its part, the National Commission on Protected Natural Areas (Conanp) pointed out that the project should adhere to the specifications of the regulation NOM-162-SEMARNAT-2012, for the protection, recuperation, and management of populations of marine turtles in their nesting zone, given that this endangered species occurs within the project's planned area.

Agustín Bravo Gaxiola, spokesperson for The Mexican Environmental Law, listed a series of anomalies that would need to be fixed in order to make the project viable, among them: the project must be evaluated in a regional context rather than in isolation; and insufficient data is presented for the water plan, which should correctly estimate the use and consumption of water by inhabitants of the development.

Additionally, he points out that the EIS should guarantee a respect for the uses and customs of the Punta Lobos fishermen, above all regarding their access to the beach, since the project is considering the construction of locked gatehouses. From the experiences of other projects, fishermen have ended up being blocked from their traditional access to the coast.

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## World's largest predatory fish receives protection

By Talli Nauman\*

### GOLFO DE CALIFORNIA

When Ed McGaa accompanied his children on a trip to Isla Guadalupe, Baja California, to swim with great white sharks, the sports and adventure enthusiast put his experience to the test.

The 77-year-old Native American tourist and author from South Dakota, USA, wanted to get to know this famous species firsthand. As a war veteran, he had already narrowly escaped the Grim Reaper several times.

"Would it be one of these giant sharks that would finally do me in? Perhaps. This could be it!" he recalls thinking. Obviously however, he survived to tell the tale.

Perhaps what he didn't know at the time was that there would be more opportunities to observe great white sharks up close, thanks to a new ban instated recently to protect them.

On January 17, 2014, the Official Journal of the Federation announced that a permanent ban had been established on the capture of great white sharks (*Carcharodon carcharias*) in national waters under federal jurisdiction.

"In the agreement establishing the permanent ban on the fishing and capture of great white sharks, it must be stressed that their capture is strictly prohibited...along both of Mexico's coasts," declared the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fishing and Food (Sagarpa).

It stated that "all great white sharks that are victims of by-catch from commercial fishing operations for other species, independent of the type of fishing fleet, as well as those caught by recreational and sports fishing vessels, must be released."

The ban is a result of *The National Action Plan for the Management and Conservation of Sharks, Rays, and Related Species in Mexico*. In regards to the plan, the scientific studies carried out by the National Fisheries Institute indicate that the great white shark, in spite of its being the largest predator in the world, requires protection. It is classified as a "vulnerable" species because of its slow growth rate, longevity, and low reproductive potential because of its small population of individuals that require 14 years to reach sexual maturity.

The measure is a result of Mexico's cooperation with the United Nations Organization For Food and Agriculture's international plan for the exploitation and conservation of sharks.

The Gulf of California is one of the areas most frequented by great white sharks.

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The Gulf of California is one of the areas most frequented by the great white shark (Foto: Wildlife Pictures / Jerome Mallefett / WWF-Canon).



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