
[Iron mining threatens Guatemalan mangroves](#)

Government authorities in Guatemala continue to promote metal mining, despite the widespread opposition of local communities and indigenous peoples. Consultations carried out among local populations have clearly demonstrated that they are completely against the further development of mining activities.

For years, metal mining projects have been planned and carried out in the country's mountainous areas. What came as a surprise was the news two years ago that four reconnaissance and exploration permits had been requested for the potential exploitation of iron and other metals on the country's southern coast.

Together, the companies Tikal Minerals, a subsidiary of Mayan Iron Corporation, and Fire Creek Resources, a subsidiary of G4G, have received authorization and permits from the Ministry of Energy and Mines for the exploration of a total of more than 3,000 square kilometres. Tikal plans to explore the iron sands along the southern coast beaches, while Fire Creek is focusing its reconnaissance activities on metal deposits in the coastal seabed. Both initiatives pose a grave threat to the natural environment of the region in general, but particularly to the mangrove ecosystem.

Guatemala's mangroves provide a wealth of benefits to local communities, who depend on them for subsistence and commercial fishing activity, as well as the harvesting of other edible species, including shrimp, crabs, crayfish and snails, among others.

Tikal Minerals submitted an environmental impact assessment (EIA) to the Guatemalan authorities for its proposed "Porvenir Central" project in December 2010. The company's proposed area of operations spanned a total of 98 square kilometres. Located within the area specified is one of only two protected mangrove areas in the entire country, Sipacate-Naranjo National Park, as well as other associated ecosystems such as wetlands, marshes, coastal lagoons and sandy beaches.

The EIA was challenged by numerous environmental organizations, including the SAVIA School of Ecological Thought, the Guatemalan Coordinating Committee for Mangroves and Life, the Residents Association for the Integrated Development of Champerico, Redmanglar International, and the Citizens Alliance for the South Coast.

The Ministry of Environment recently announced its rejection of the EIA, on the grounds that the negative impacts of the project would outweigh the benefits. But those of us who know what mining companies are capable of doing in order to achieve their goals are fully aware that we cannot simply sit back and declare victory. We will remain alert to any appeals filed by the company's legal representatives to overturn the decision to reject its proposal, as well as further attempts to explore and exploit the metal deposits in our characteristic black sand beaches in the future.

The voracious greed of these companies has come up against a formidable obstacle. The opposition of the people who live along Guatemala's coasts is growing by the day, and they are fully prepared to do whatever it takes to defend their beaches, wetlands and mangroves, united in a common

cause: Mangroves yes, iron mining no!

By Carlos Salvatierra, Executive Secretary, Redmanglar International, redmanglar@redmanglar.org