
Costa Rica: Gringos landing at Tortuga Landing

A computer. That is what the US citizen Paul Lambert, representative of the Tortuga Landing company offered the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE) as compensation for having built a 105 metre long and 4 metres wide road and for having eliminated natural regeneration in a forest in the terrestrial maritime area of Quepos, a Central Pacific locality. This occurred during a "conciliation" hearing which took place on 17 February at the Environmental Administrative Tribunal (file No. 184-05-3-TAA).

Previously, and unaware of the road and the felling, on 16 May 2005, the Costa Rican Federation for the Conservation of the Environment (Federación Costarricense para la Conservación del Ambiente - FECON) had lodged a complaint against Paul Lambert (File No. 05-007294-647-PE) with the General Attorney of the Republic, requesting the collaboration of the authorities to investigate an apparent case of fraud involving the sale of plots in the above mentioned forest, which is part of the State-owned national heritage and therefore inalienable and non-lapsing. That is to say: it is not private property.

The web site www.latitude9.com published an advertisement for Tortuga Landing, offering the paradisiacal forest on the shores of the tropical sea at Punta Quepos and showing a sketch of the urbanization project comprising fifteen exclusive plots, nine of which located in the terrestrial maritime area. The plots had the word SOLD written on them with the exception of one, valued at US\$ 450,000.

The text in English announced: "Last site up for sale at Tortuga Landing! Tortuga Landing is a private community located in an exuberant tropical forest on a private creek...The private sandy beach is one of the last Pre-Columbian points of arrival of marine turtles, preserved in a natural state... One of these plots, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a hectare, is located on the southern side of the beach and surrounded by virgin forest. One of the last sea-front opportunities in the area!" (Following the complaint, the text and graphic illustrations of the advertisement were removed from the internet page and replaced by others.)

When I learnt about the complaint to the Environmental Tribunal I asked to be included as a part of it and thus I learnt of other revealing data:

- In 1998, Paul Lambert commissioned the preparation of the Regulatory Plan for Playa Para (a land planning project) that only covers part of the beach (700 metres) and that is tailor-made to fit the Tortuga Landing project. Presently this Regulatory Plan is being contested.
- Neither Tortuga Landing nor Paul Lambert have an approved concession in Playa Para.
- In order to approve the concession to Paul Lambert, the Municipality of Aguirre conditioned it to the building of a road.
- Prior to his appointment as President of the Environmental Tribunal, Lic. Carlos Briceño Obando

carried out functions in the Presidency of the Republic and in the Municipality of Aguirre.

- To advise him on environmental matters, Paul Lambert relies on the services of the company “Alternativas de Gestión Ambiental Sociedad Anónima” - A.G.A.S.A. (Alternatives to Environmental Management Corporation), which includes members of the Costa Rican environmental organization Apreflofas.

I conclude with this reflection: In this increasingly polarized Costa Rica, it is not a coincidence that the three coastal provinces (Guanacaste, Puntarenas and Limon), the richest in biodiversity and where tourism brings in the most foreign currency, should paradoxically be the provinces showing the lowest rates of human development. In order to satisfy the needs of some under the pretext of “promoting ecotourism and attracting foreign investment,” turtles and natural wealth in general are irresponsibly being replaced by gringos, dollars...and computers.

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