
Venezuela: Tourism development causes serious impacts on mangroves

Over the past 15 years, the Colina municipal authorities backing tourism development have granted lands bordering the De la Vela Mangrove. The consequent building of housing and shops has implied that these lands were filled with rubble at the expense of the ecosystem and the space necessary for mangrove growth.

As a response to this situation and concerned over the impact of tourism activities on the fragile ecosystem, representatives of Voluntary Environmental Monitors (Vigilante Voluntarios Ambientales) and the Ecologist Association for Environmental Preservation (Asociación Ecologista para la Preservación Ambiental - AEPA-Falcon) have lodged a series of complaints. An eye inspection of the De la Vela Mangrove (la Salinita) with the presence of authorities from the Municipality and the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, the owner of the land and a representative of the AEPA-Falcon NGO was carried out, resulting in a stoppage of land-filling activities in the zone near the bridge accessing Vela de Coro until such time the owner of the land submits a project for tourism development which he intends to implement in the wetlands.

The mangrove is a fundamental ecosystem for coastal protection against climatic inclemency. It is also the refuge, home and source of food for many species of fauna and flora and provides a series of goods and services to the people who inhabit its vicinity and who largely depend on the mangrove for their subsistence.

The development of the tourism industry, implying the construction of highways, roads, large buildings, mangrove felling or land-filling, will generate major impacts insofar as it will substantially modify this ecosystem.

Today, over a year after these complaints were lodged, there are people who are still determined to promote this tourism development in the Municipality of Colina at the expense of the mangroves, without questioning the environmental and social costs involved. No Environmental Impact Assessment of the De la Vela Mangrove, evaluating the damage caused to the ecosystem has yet been made.

While awaiting a valid decision by the national authorities, lands close to the mangrove are being filled to build housing with permits granted by the Colina Municipal authorities.

With the support of the Latin American Mangrove Network and Greenpeace International, in defence of coastal ecosystems and community life, those who are affected by tourism activities are demanding greater protection of mangrove systems. They also demand from the authorities the implementation of an Environmental Impact Assessment and, according to the results obtained, that the damage caused to the environment be repaired. However, more important is that the final results should be made known to the institutions and organizations involved in the environmental conflict and to the community in general.

Local inhabitants continue to wait for the preparation of a "plan for the sustainable environmental

management of the De la Vela Mangrove."

AEPA-Falcon demands that the Colina Municipal authorities and the authorities guaranteeing environmental and human rights in the country, prepare regulations or decrees protecting the mangrove ecosystem and that they come up with a valid solution for this environmental conflict, guaranteeing protection of mangroves, their diversity and respect for Human Rights and fundamental liberty of the affected communities.

Article based on information from: Anelis Teolinda Moya, e-mail: aepafalcon@hotmail.com "A un año del conflicto AEPA-Falcon exige mayor protección al Manglar de la Vela"