
Belize: villagers defend their mangroves

Placencia Lagoon in southern Belize separates the Placencia Peninsula from the southern Belize mainland. Mangroves in the Lagoon are an essential component of the Placencia Peninsula estuary system, filtering inland water, protecting the coastline and serving as home to large numbers species of the tropical wildlife. However, a proposal in course to build a two-lane causeway and a bridge across the Lagoon to connect it with the village of Independence in the mainland practically ignores environmental issues and just considers that the works will not upset the water flow of the lagoon nor threaten mangrove life.

On the contrary, many Placencia Peninsula residents fear that the causeway would significantly and adversely affect the Lagoon and the coral reef nearby. The livelihood of Placencia residents highly depends on the continuing environment health of the area, both for the small commercial fishing industry that has supported the area for hundreds of years, as well as for ecotourism. Local residents think that the causeway will be approved without an adequate environmental assessment, and that, if approved, proper environmental standards will not be enforced during causeway design and construction. They have organized themselves and went to the media with an anti-causeway petition. They consider that a project to build a causeway almost two miles long, including a forty foot high bridge to let boats through, is not the kind of undertaking that can be considered useful for the community nor good for the environment.

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