

June 2009



Galápagos

Newsletter

Letter from the Field



Dear Friends of the Galápagos:

As we move ahead into 2009, the future of Galápagos Islands conservation looks bright. We have good news on two major fronts: the approval of the new Ecuadorian constitution, which incorporates environmental and biodiversity issues, and the re-election of President Rafael Correa, who has lent so much support to conservation in the islands.

Also moving ahead, in April the WWF Galápagos Program and partners convened the first-ever scientific workshop on assessing the vulnerability of Galápagos to climate change. The workshop drew the support and participation of the Ecuadorian government and the Galápagos National Park Service.

While the Galápagos is vulnerable to climate change, it is one of the best-protected places on the planet. Biodiversity in the islands has demonstrated resilience to variable changes in rainfall and temperature when an El Niño storm has hit the region. Nevertheless, workshop participants confirmed the need to minimize environmental stresses by adopting management measures that enhance the resiliency of ecosystems and species.

The workshop produced the Declaration of Santa Cruz, in which Ecuador's minister of the environment and all partners and participants agreed to invest in climate change research for Galápagos. The declaration included agreement on the need to translate the workshop recommendations into adaptive management actions that will protect the biodiversity and communities of the Galápagos.

This was a strong start to a new phase of conservation work that has become more and more urgent as the pressures of climate change have grown. WWF is ready to move forward with our partners to meet this challenge in the extraordinary environment of the Galápagos Islands.

Lauren Spurrier
Managing Director, Galápagos Program

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1 Working Toward a New Tourism Model for Galápagos

Eliécer Cruz, M. Sc., Ecoregional Director, WWF Galápagos Program

Worldwide fame has turned the Galápagos Islands into one of the most in-demand tourist destinations. While tourism has become the islands' main economic source, it has also brought new challenges: higher demand for imported goods and fossil fuels, higher risk of introduction of invasive species, more demand for qualified labor (which comes primarily from mainland Ecuador), more migration, and more infrastructure needs.

In the past, tourism management in the islands has had many strengths and a history of successful changes. Unfortunately, tour operators in Galápagos have adapted their businesses to the market demand, moving from long-duration visits to trips with bigger impact and shorter length (e.g., cruises). This also means that the majority of goods acquired by tourists come from businesses outside the islands, which is leading to an increasing undercapitalization of the Galápagos.



For these reasons, stronger changes are needed to achieve a real ecotourism that supports the islands' conservation and improves quality of life. Currently, WWF has an important opportunity to help do this through reforms being introduced for the Galápagos Special Law, which was passed in 1998 and now must be adapted to the new Ecuadorian constitution approved in 2008.

Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism

WWF staff in the Galápagos are taking this opportunity to help build a good tourism management model based on these objectives: conservation of the natural resources of the Galápagos; participation of the local community in the social, economic and environmental benefits generated by tourism; and satisfaction of the tourists' expectations.

To date, WWF and other organizations have supported the Ecuadorian government in building a new tourism model for the islands through territorial and urban planning, and through organizing tourism activities in accordance with environmental standards. Support for such initiatives from the Galápagos municipalities, the Tourism Chamber, and the National Park Service has shown that there is an interest in doing sustainable tourism right.

To move forward, there is a need to reform existing regulations and create new ones to promote a low-impact tourism that supports longer stays and implements a concessions system. It is essential to strengthen the institutions that manage tourism and to develop incentives for certification processes, good practices and quality standards. There also is a need to establish financing mechanisms to cover the real conservation costs of the islands and more effectively control investments by creating participatory conditions for local residents.

To begin meeting these needs, WWF and the BID-FOMIN project (supported by the Inter-American Development Bank) funded three studies to understand the overall carrying capacity and economic underpinnings of different tourism models. An inter-institutional working group was established to analyze the studies and develop the elements of the new model. And WWF hired a consultant to help the park service design the new model – a process that is under way.

2 Galápagos Fuel-Handling Facility Earns Environmental Certification

Irma Larrea, Senior Program Officer, Galápagos Program

On December 15, 2008, the fuel-handling facility at Baltra received official environmental certification. The facility underwent extreme renovations in order to meet certification standards, which are part of a 10-year plan developed by WWF and Toyota, in conjunction with the Ecuadorian government, to transform high pollution energy systems to more sustainable and renewable energy sources. It is one of only a few facilities in Latin America to hold this certification.

“This achievement demonstrates the enormous impact public, private and conservation entities can have when they join forces for a common goal,” said Lauren Spurrier, WWF’s Galápagos managing director. “The completion of this project and its certification are milestones in our effort to protect one of the world’s most precious and historically significant ecoregions and preserve the livelihoods of the many people who depend on these islands for their survival.”

This accomplishment was realized less than two months before the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, a scientist well known for his species and evolution work in the Galápagos Islands. The islands have seen dramatic changes since Darwin’s exploration, with a huge growth in population and an expanding tourism industry. Establishing the safe, environmentally sound handling of fuel supplies has been a major challenge brought about by this growth.

After a tanker spill released 240,000 gallons of fuel into the waters surrounding the islands in 2001, WWF and Petroecuador, the state-owned oil company, identified fuel transportation and storage as a major environmental concern that needed to be addressed immediately. WWF and Toyota worked together to develop a technical assessment and design for renovations to the Baltra facility.

The renovation included replacing the old, leaky tanks and installing a state-of-the-art computer system to monitor tank levels and facility operations. Petroecuador allocated funds for implementation, and construction in line with the highest

environmental standards was completed in December 2004. In 2008, a final investment of \$1 million refined the facility’s environmental management system, allowing it to attain official certification.

The facility was awarded ISO 14001 certification – which verifies that the facility is environmentally sound – by the Bureau Veritas Certification, a third-party certification body.

“The Galápagos now has one of the safest and most modern fuel depots in Latin America,” said Bill Reinert, national manager for advanced technologies at Toyota Motor Sales. “WWF’s conservation expertise and Toyota’s engineering prowess are the perfect combination for real transformation in the Galápagos, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Ecuadorian government to reform the islands’ energy systems and guide the region to a more sustainable future.”



“Ensuring that development is sustainable and environmentally sound is essential to protecting the places we treasure in the Galápagos. We hope this effort can serve as an example to the rest of the world,” said Commander Brummel Vásquez, vice-president of environment for Petroecuador.

3 Tackling Bycatch on the Path to Sustainable Fisheries

Pablo Guerrero, M. Sc., Ecoregional Coordinator, WWF Galápagos Program

Bycatch occurs when fishermen, in pursuit of their targeted catch, unintentionally hook or trap other sea life. Its impact on sea turtles is of particular concern, because all five species of marine turtles are at risk of extinction in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, where the status of the leatherback, loggerhead, and hawksbill sea turtles is most critical. However, much of this impact can be avoided with a few relatively minor modifications to fishing gear and fishing practices.



The Sea Turtle Bycatch Reduction Program, an initiative of Ecuadorian fishing authorities and WWF, was started in Ecuador in 2004. The partners are ASOEXPEBLA (the Ecuadorian fish exporters association), the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, and the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation – Japan.



The program relies on the use of circle hooks, which reduce the catch of sea turtles up to 90 percent and do not affect the taking of other commercial target species. The implementation strategy is based on substituting the commonly used J hooks with the less harmful circle hooks, carrying out voluntary testing, training fishermen on best fishing practices, and data gathering done by observers onboard ships using longlines. Trial runs have launched from several Ecuadorian ports, including Manta, Santa Marianita, San Mateo and Esmeraldas.

A database has been developed. Data analysis is expected to verify the advantages of circle hooks and other gear modifications, and eventually lead to solutions to sea turtle bycatch in the longline fishery. So far, onboard observers have taken data on 435 fishing trips, with a total of 2,089 longline sets, representing 330,569 hooks in the water.

4 Broad Cooperation Results in New Fisheries Management Plan

Mauricio Castrejón, M. Sc., Fisheries Consultant, WWF Galápagos Program

At the end of a collaborative process among many stakeholders, a new Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) for the Galápagos Marine Reserve was approved in January 2009. Over a three-year period, WWF provided key technical expertise to the Galápagos National Park as this milestone plan was being developed.



This achievement is part of the ongoing work being done to move toward a sustainable fisheries management system in accordance with the principles of the Galápagos Special Law, which created the Galápagos Marine Reserve (GMR) in 1998. At that time, a comanagement system based on the principles of participation, a precautionary approach, and adaptive management was instituted.

The system works through the Participatory Management Board (PMB), made up of representatives of local stakeholders, and the Inter-institutional Management Authority (IMA), made up of representatives from the government ministries, the fishing sector, and the tourism sector. Thus, local stakeholders are represented in both decision-making forums and share the responsibility of managing the GMR with the Galápagos National Park (GNP).

In the early years of the reserve, several tools were developed to improve fisheries management. These included the *Management Plan for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of the GMR*, coastal zoning, a five-year (2002-2006) fishing calendar, and a fishing registry. In spite of these positive steps forward, it became clear that the comanagement system for the GMR had yet to achieve its main objective: sustainability. The two main resources of the GMR – the sea cucumber and lobster fisheries – were showing signs of overexploitation and collapse. Unemployment and social instability had increased, and credibility and participation in the comanagement system had declined.

In May 2005, PMB members considered the situation so critical that they asked for an evaluation of the current management model. They proposed the development of a more sustainable model to diversify resource use and to allocate fishing effort according to resource capacity. Once this action was ratified by the IMA, the PMB was charged with carrying it out.

In September 2006, a technical commission was created by the PMB to develop a proposal for a Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The plan was created through a participatory process that involved the GNP, the Union of Cooperatives of Artisanal Production of the Province of Galápagos, the National Institute of Galápagos (INGALA), and the National Fisheries Institute. Planners relied on an assessment done by WWF, the Charles Darwin Foundation, Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano, and FUNDAR-Galápagos.



After almost three years of work and dialogue, the IMA unanimously approved the plan in January 2009. It reflects the stakeholder's consensus about how they want to manage their fisheries in the coming years.

In the short term, the participatory processes used to develop the FMP have strengthened the interaction between fishermen and scientists, and have also strengthened inter-institutional communications. This has produced a closer working relationship between the GNP and INGALA, two of the most important management institutions in Galápagos.

In the long term, we hope that implementation of the FMP will reduce the level of conflict; strengthen the planning capacity of the GNP, PMB, and IMA; increase the participation in and credibility of the comanagement system; and contribute to achieving the management objectives agreed on by local stakeholders. WWF will continue to provide technical assistance to help stakeholders in the Galápagos Marine Reserve reach the goal of sustainable fisheries.

5 Our Vision for Latin America

Roberto Troya, VP and Regional Director, WWF Latin America & the Caribbean Secretariat

The year 2009 will remain in our memories and be known to future generations through history books mainly because of the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States – and because of the worst global economic crisis experienced since the Great Depression.

Many years from now, 2009 will be remembered as a year that combined changes and challenges, a year in which world leaders needed to work together to find creative solutions to overcome a serious crisis. But also, 2009 will be recalled as a time of opportunities to analyze, evaluate, adjust and improve our lifestyles, our efforts, and our work.



During these critical times, WWF's Latin America and the Caribbean Secretariat has decided to be proactive and has carried out an internal review of its strategic approach. Through this analysis, we want to promote actions, support efforts, and enhance our efficiencies to achieve WWF's conservation goals in Latin America. Our intention is to build capacity in the right places to achieve long-term change for lasting conservation, and to cultivate new and stronger strategic partnerships and alliances.

Marine priorities will be a focus of our work, as we address conservation challenges in sustainable fisheries and look at their complex impacts on economies and marine ecosystems throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Based on a multiyear strategic vision, we will seek to influence processes that are affecting marine diversity in positive or negative ways; to delineate linkages between marine environments and climate change; and to transform markets to promote sustainable fisheries and sustainable seafood consumption and production.

Our aspirations are ambitious but realistic. By embracing the changes, we expect to be able to continue to make a huge difference in the lives of people and the health of ecosystems in the region.



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