

2.86 Protection of the Macal River Valley in Belize

RECOGNIZING that the tropical forests of Belize provide some of the richest and best-preserved habitats for endangered flora and fauna in Mesoamerica;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING the large proportion of natural areas of Belize that are protected under national law;

ALSO RECOGNIZING the efforts of the Government of Belize to maintain and preserve these protected natural areas;

NOTING in particular that the Macal River Valley provides an important habitat for endangered species of international value, such as the Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), Morelet's Crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*), and Belize's national animal, the Central American Tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*);

ALSO NOTING that the upper Macal and Raspaculo Rivers are included in IUCN's Tapir Action Plan as one of the last strongholds in Central America for the Central American Tapir;

RECOGNIZING that the Macal River Valley contains a floral floodplain habitat, classified as 'riparian shrublands in hills', which is very rare in Belize;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that approximately 80 per cent of this habitat exists along the Macal and Raspaculo Rivers;

AWARE that the Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao*), and many other species which inhabit the Macal River Valley, are listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES);

ACKNOWLEDGING that it is likely that less than a few hundred individual Scarlet Macaws remain in Belize;

ALSO ACKNOWLEDGING that recent sightings have shown the only known nesting sites for the endangered subspecies of Scarlet Macaw – *Ara macao cyanoptera* – to be in the Raspaculo and Upper Macal River Valley, with most of them being along this 'floodplain' habitat;

NOTING that the local subspecies of the Scarlet Macaw is morphologically distinct from the nominate subspecies and that the range of the local subspecies is restricted to extreme southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and Nicaragua;

FURTHER NOTING that the local subspecies is more threatened than the nominate subspecies;

AWARE that IUCN has recently adopted an Action Plan to save the world's threatened parrots;

NOTING that a run-of-the-river dam, known as the 'Mollejon dam', was built on the Lower Macal River in the early 1990s and is now majority-owned by Duke Energy of the United States;

BEING AWARE that Belize Electricity Limited, a private company, majority-owned by Fortis Inc. of Canada, has submitted documentation to the National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC) of Belize, proposing to build a second hydroelectric and water storage dam, known as the 'Chalillo Project', in the Macal River Valley;

NOTING that the Chalillo Project would flood parts of the legally designated Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, Chiquibul Forest Reserve, and parts of the Chiquibul National Park;

RECOGNIZING that the area to be flooded also includes some of the flora, the floodplain habitat of Belize, and some of the nesting sites known in Belize for *Ara macao cyanoptera*;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that important habitat for other endangered species would be flooded;

AWARE that the NEAC found the preliminary documentation by Belize Electricity Limited incomplete due to its lack of documentation on the possible effects the dam would have on wildlife;

RECOGNIZING that an Environmental Impact Assessment on the proposed project is now being prepared and is scheduled for completion by mid 2001; and

STRONGLY REAFFIRMING that all decisions regarding the proposed project must take into account the best interest of the people of Belize and their desire to achieve balanced development;

The World Conservation Congress at its 2nd Session in Amman, Jordan, 4–11 October 2000:

1. URGES Belize Electricity Limited together with its majority owner, Fortis Inc., to conduct a fully transparent and participatory environmental impact assessment of the proposed hydroelectric facility and, unless such EIA shows that the project would not cause significant degradation or destruction of wildlife habitat and the natural environment, agree to terminate the project;
2. URGES the NEAC of Belize to:
 - (a) follow and apply the laws of Belize on environment and environmental impact assessment with regard to the proposed project, with special attention to participatory processes and conformity with best international practices; and
 - (b) unless the EIA shows that the project would not cause significant degradation or destruction of wildlife habitat and the natural environment, recommend against approval of the project;
3. CALLS on the Government of Belize to:
 - (a) maintain its record of environmental stewardship;
 - (b) continue to protect the populations of endangered species found in Belize; and

- (c) continue to require that fully transparent and participatory environmental impact assessments be completed before any decision is made on the proposed dam and, unless the EIA shows that the project would not cause significant degradation or destruction of wildlife habitat and the natural environment, not to allow the construction of the Chalillo Dam in the Macal River Valley;
4. REQUESTS the Director General of IUCN to provide technical and scientific support to Belize during the preparation, review, and evaluation of the EIA.

This Recommendation was adopted by consensus. The delegations of the State members Australia and New Zealand indicated that had there been a vote they would have abstained. State and Agency members United States refrained from engaging in deliberations on this Motion and took no national government position on the Recommendation as adopted, for reasons given in the US General Statement on the IUCN Resolutions Process (see p. 76).