

RES 3.041 Protection of the Macal River Valley in Belize

RECALLING that the 2nd World Conservation Congress (Amman, 2000) adopted Recommendation 2.86 *Protection of the Macal River Valley in Belize*;

RECALLING that Recommendation 2.86 identified the tropical forests of Belize as providing some of the richest and best-preserved habitat for endangered flora and fauna in Central America, and in particular, described the outstanding conservation values of Belize's Macal River Valley, an area that features important habitat for species of international significance, including the Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), Morelet's Crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*), Belize's national animal, the Central American Tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*), and a local sub-species of Scarlet Macaw (*Ara macao cyanoptera*), numbering fewer than 200 in Belize;

RECALLING that Recommendation 2.86 also referred to the proposal to build a hydroelectric storage dam, known as the 'Chalillo Project' on the Upper Macal River, which would flood parts of the protected Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, Chiquibul Forest Reserve, and parts of the Chiquibul National Park;

FURTHER RECALLING that Recommendation 2.86:

(a) Urged the sponsors of the Chalillo Project to conduct a fully transparent and participatory environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the proposed hydroelectricity facility, and to agree to terminate the project unless such EIA shows that the project would not cause significant degradation or destruction of wildlife habitat and the natural environment;

(b) Called on the government of Belize to require that a fully transparent and participatory EIA be conducted for the project and not to allow construction of the project unless such an EIA showed that the project would not cause significant degradation or destruction of wildlife habitat and the natural environment; and

(c) Requested the IUCN Director General to provide technical and scientific support to Belize during the preparation, review and evaluation of the EIA;

FURTHER RECALLING that the 2nd World Conservation Congress adopted Recommendation 2.87 *Protected areas and the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor*, which highlighted the various initiatives signed and supported by regional governments concerning the Corridor, and which called on the States of Mesoamerica to continue implementation of, and compliance with, their regional and international environmental commitments;

NOTING that the Belize Electricity Company Limited (BECOL), owned by Fortis Inc. of Newfoundland, Canada, submitted an EIA of the Chalillo Project, prepared with financial support from the Government of Canada, to the Government of Belize in August, 2001;

AWARE that the wildlife study for the EIA, conducted by the Natural History Museum of London, concluded that the project would cause significant degradation and destruction of wildlife habitat and the natural environment, resulting in "significant and irreversible reduction of biological diversity in Belize" and the "fragmentation of the proposed Mesoamerican Biological Corridor";

AWARE that this wildlife study recommended that if a decision were made to continue planning for the project, substantial additional research about the potential impacts on wildlife should be undertaken, and stated that "much more information is required for an informed and defensible decision";

NOTING that IUCN Mesoamerica provided a technical analysis of the EIA that concluded that the EIA was insufficient and required “more biological, ecological, geological, hydrological and socio-economic baseline studies, from which to have a justified and solid final decision”;

AWARE that the National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC) of Belize nonetheless approved the EIA, that the Department of Environment allowed the project to go forward, that the courts refused to overturn such approval, and that construction began in May 2003 and is currently ongoing;

NOTING that approval for the Chalillo Project was conditional upon fulfilment of an environmental compliance plan that includes studies of the safety and geological suitability of the site, studies of the Maya heritage sites that would be affected by the project, monitoring of the project site and evaluation of the construction effects on wildlife and the natural environment;

FURTHER NOTING that access to the project construction site has been restricted and that there is no publicly available information about any follow-up to the studies and assessments referred to above, including the results of any archaeological or monitoring studies, or studies of the effects of construction on wildlife and the natural environment;

REAFFIRMING the view expressed in Recommendation 2.86 that all decisions regarding the project must take into account the best interests of the people of Belize and their desire to achieve balanced development; and

RECOGNIZING that a public and transparent accounting of the benefits and effects of this project serves the best interest of the people of Belize;

The World Conservation Congress at its 3rd Session in Bangkok, Thailand, 17–25 November 2004:

1. CALLS on the Government of Belize to create an independent commission of national and international experts, including those identified by local communities, to:

(a) investigate and report on the potential benefits of the project, as well as the impacts of the continued construction of the project on public safety, water quality for downstream communities, wildlife populations, and on the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor; and

(b) include in this report recommendations for future action, including measures to minimize harmful impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat, and steps to ensure compliance with these measures;

2. CALLS on BECOL and Fortis Inc. to make available to the public, and to any such commission as referred to in paragraph 1 above, all available data that are relevant to the project’s potential benefits, safety issues, and environmental effects; and

3. REQUESTS the IUCN Director General to provide, to the extent possible, technical and scientific support for the proposed commission to assist in determining the project construction impacts on public safety, water quality and wildlife populations, and on the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor.

The Environment Department, Norway, provided the following statement for the record:

We regard [this Resolution] as debating an internal matter and will urge members not to forward such resolutions to a world congress as it is out of line for others to take a stand on it.

State member Sweden abstained from voting on this motion for reasons given in the Swedish Government’s general statement on the motions process (see page x).

The Department of State, United States, provided the following statement for the record:

State and agency members United States refrained from engaging in deliberations on this motion and took no national government position on the motion as adopted for reasons given in the US General Statement on the IUCN Resolution Process.