

## **REPORT ON MANGROVE ACTION PROJECT ACTIVITIES IN EL SALVADOR, JULY 2011**

Mangrove Action Project (MAP) Executive Director Alfredo Quarto and Board Member Fiona Wilmot joined Jim Enright of MAP Asia at an event at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, San Salvador, El Salvador, on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The event was a forum on mangrove restoration hosted by Fondo de la Iniciativa para Las Américas (FIAES), co-organized by Nathan Weller of EcoViva (USA) and Asociación Mangle (El Salvador). Jim Enright gave the keynote speech, entitled “Ecological Mangrove Restoration”, following a welcome by FIAES Executive Director, Jorge Alberto Oviedo, and an inaugural address on the national political agenda for the environment by Environment Minister Herman Rosa Chávez of the Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (MARN). The presence of the minister indicated the importance with which mangroves are held in El Salvador, particularly in the UN International Year of the Forests. Only 2% of El Salvador’s original forest remains, and only 40% of the mangroves remain from the 1950 level of forest cover. Over 250 persons attended, drawn from government ministries, civil society, academia and local dignitaries. It was reported on the front page of La Prensa Gráfica, the main Salvadoran daily paper, and prominent coverage remains on the FIAES and MARN websites.



At the July 8<sup>th</sup> Public Forum in San Salvador with Jorge Oviado of FIAES taking questions from the audience after Jim Enright’s keynote speech on EMR

The forum had been arranged to coincide with a four-day MAP-led workshop on mangrove restoration in Ciudad Romero, Department of Usulután. The workshop was limited to around 30 persons in order to ensure quality of experience, but could easily have been doubled due to the intense interest. Two participants traveled from Honduras (see their attached summary report) to gain the experience of both the classroom and fieldwork, based on Board Member Robin Lewis's lifetime expertise in mangrove restoration, and Jim Enright's personal case experiences from SE and S. Asia. Alfredo Quarto provided the global perspective on mangroves with many of his own photographs from around the world. Participants came from several government ministries, NGOs and natural resource enforcement agents, bringing a depth and breadth of expertise to the workshop that was truly remarkable.



Site survey at “El Caponte” with one of Asociacion Mangle’s “Mangrove Rangers” and Jim Enright of MAP

In addition to the forum and the workshop, MAP was invited by Minister Chávez to participate in two lengthy meetings with his advisory staff. At the first, immediately following the forum, Jim Enright presented select sections of his PowerPoint and answered questions from hydrologists and ecologists at the ministry. MAP was a little disconcerted to learn that a plan for a mega-tourism development project worth \$350,000 in start-up funds is under review at the ministry, in the center of the Biosphere Reserve of Jiquilisco,

the mangrove heartland of El Salvador. The project would impact not only mangroves and adjacent ecosystems, but also one of the few nesting sites for the highly endangered eastern Pacific hawksbill turtle, which depends on the healthy mangroves of the Jiquilisco estuary for nesting and foraging.

At the second meeting, Alfredo Quarto was invited to present on MAP's experiences with commercial shrimp farming to a joint meeting of MARN with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. The Vice Minister of MARN attended, as well as Jorge Oviedo of FIAES. Both meetings lasted at least two and a half hours, with over 20 staff members present.

Following the successful conclusion of the workshop, Jorge Oviedo invited remaining MAP representative, Fiona Wilmot, Nathan Weller of EcoViva and Walberto Gallegos of Asociación Mangle to FIAES to discuss next steps. It was agreed that there is a need for further workshops of this kind in other mangrove areas of the country, although Jim Enright's participation is not expected in order to realize this goal. A further outcome was an expressed wish to have Robin Lewis visit in order to assess restoration of the large area of mangrove loss at El Lloron possibly associated with the earthquake of January 13, 2001. As a permanent outcome, Director Oviedo suggested the creation of a pedagogic and research center in El Salvador, dedicated to mangroves and associated ecosystems that would serve all of Central America. It would be comparable in scope to the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute's facility in Bocas del Toro, on the Atlantic coast of Panamá, or the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) in Costa Rica, and Texas A&M's Soltis Center in Costa Rica, and fill a large institutional gap on the Pacific coast. This suggestion was favorably received by representatives of MAP, EcoViva and Asociación Mangle.

One product of the workshop was an invitation from long-time MAP associates in Honduras, CODEFFAGOLF, to organize a comparable workshop in their center in San Lorenzo, Honduras. This would involve participation by Alfredo Quarto and Fiona Wilmot, with regional support provided by workshop attendees. A tentative date for Spring 2012 was suggested.

A further outcome of the fruitful collaboration between MAP, EcoViva and Asociación Mangle was already realized at the annual meeting of the Society for Ecological Restoration, which was held in Mérida, Mexico, August 20-25, 2011. MAP Director Alfredo Quarto organized a special session on mangrove restoration with four pre-eminent world experts, drawn from the Philippines, Kenya, USA and Mexico. MAP collaborated with its forum associates from El Salvador on a display booth highlighting the importance of community involvement in mangrove restoration, and based this on the workshop in El Salvador. Board Member Fiona Wilmot is currently a Ph.D. student in the Geography Department of Texas A&M University, focusing her thesis on mangrove restoration in the



Central American Mangrove Corridor, encompassing El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. She joined Alfredo Quarto as co-facilitator at the meeting, along Robin Lewis and Nathan Weller.

It is anticipated that MAP will have a strong and influential presence on mangroves in Central America for the foreseeable future, both indirectly at the policy level, within the educational discourse, and at the implementation level within communities. Given this, MAP may wish to consider formalizing its presence on the ground through the creation of a local office to maintain the impetus for mangrove conservation and restoration, and open a new fund-raising arena to support its work in the region.



Site survey near “El Copante” with Jim Enright of MAP and Nathan Weller of EcoViva



Looking for solutions to massive mangrove die-off at the El Lloron site.





The newly forming winning team right after the July 8<sup>th</sup> public forum in San Salvador: left to right Walberto Gallegos of Mangrove Association of El Salvador, Fiona Wilmot MAP Board Member, Alfredo Quarto MAP Executive Director, Nathan Weller of EcoViva and Jim Enright MAP Asia Coordinator and Workshop Lead