

9th WORLD WILDERNESS CONGRESS

**WILD9!
Feel, Think, Act**

**Merida, Yucatan, Mexico
Monday, November 9, 2009**

Water, Watersheds, Water in the Yucatan.

Report by Marti Johnston, Delegate

Attendance sponsored by Akumal Villas with donations and moral support from the Akumal community including Ixchel Boutique, Turtle Bay Bakery and others. THANK YOU!

Brief Perspective

WILD9 is an international environmental congress which convenes every three or four years at different places around the globe. The protection of wilderness and preserving biodiversity is critically linked to water systems, all of which are integral to solving huge issues related to climate change. The themes and threads: multi-disciplinary participation, collaborations from local to trans-boundary partnerships, new paradigms.

The specific focus of my attendance on this day of the conference, Water, Watersheds and Water in the Yucatan, was to hear what was being said about protection for the underground river system and cenotes in the Yucatan. In the Quintana Roo, over 750 km of the system has been charted, an estimated 15%. It is thought that at this point, much of the water is still fresh and pure. In addition to the implications of fresh water in a country (and world) facing water shortages and drought, this unique karstic system with rainforest and water filled caves contains a great biodiversity of endemic, and endangered, flora and fauna. These flooded caverns are richly decorated with stalactites, stalagmites and columns and also holds a variety of archeological, anthropological and paleontological treasures. Truly, this is a place on Earth that is part of humanities world heritage.

Before UNESCO can consider this treasure as a World Heritage Site it must have the protection of the federal government in the country of location. In this case, Mexico, a nation that actually has pretty decent environmental laws. During opening ceremonies on Friday, November 6th, President Calderon committed words of protection for water and mangroves to an international audience. Resolution 17 touches this asking for legislation to hold him accountable (see list of all 42 resolutions: <http://www.wild.org/resolutions-from-wild9/>):

WILD 9 call[s] upon His Excellency Felipe Calderon, to instruct and encourage the Ministry of Ecology, the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), the Governors of the of the States and Municipal Presidents of Mexico, to take immediate action to legislate the protection, management and planning of the landscape and seascape within their own jurisdiction.

The landscape of the Quintana Roo is the still wild jungle; the seascape is the Mesoamerican Reef. The rivers flow *beneath* the jungle and *into* the sea, the relationship is implicit.

On the day of the 9th, I heard presentations by two Mexican government officials speaking specifically to water: Jose Luis Luege Tamargo, General Director of the National Water Commission, (CONAGUA) and Salvador Anta, SEMARNAT. Luege referenced the President's words above and added that "the Yucatan watershed is enormous and is the most important in the country. Technical studies have to be done and inventories taken of the cenotes." (See notes highlighted below *.) According to Anta, "There is not a national policy of water management. But, there is a legal framework for programs in water, the environment and forest protection." (See notes highlighted below**.) The two main issues/obstacles are 1) the complexity of federal agencies who have to work together to create an integrated plan, along with the actors at local, municipal and state levels who are actually responsible for the implementation of federal legislation. Among the players exists opposing interests; 2) enforcement of the laws.

Outcomes

There were numerous Resolutions put forth by delegates, accepted and declared by the WILD9 Congress. There is also “The Merida Message”. Please visit the WILD9 web sites for the detail: <http://www.wild.org/mensaje-de-merida/>.

Resolution 34: Wilderness Policies and legislation in Mexico

<http://www.wild.org/blog/resolution-34-wilderness-policies-and-legislation-in-mexico/>

Resolution 17: Legislation for the protections, management and planning of landscape in Mexico
<http://www.wild.org/blog/resolution-17-legislation-for-the-protections-management-and-planning-of-landscape-in-mexico/>

Salvator Anta also spoke to civil society and communities initiating co-management with the government. My long-term objective is to raise awareness and a voice among a coalition of concerned citizens, ONG's and all players in order to build bridges. This is to support the federal government, holding them accountable to develop and enforce a plan of protection for the underground rivers and cenotes, making it a federally protected region. The dream is to see this unique place on Earth as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. To this end I am simply sharing information. The following pages are notes of the presentations I attended during the day with some personal observations, questions and impressions included.

SIGLO XXI Convention Center

Keynote Presentations

Grand Chief Samuel Gargan, Canadian Dine of the Deh Cho people.

Tribal land is in the Yukon and around the Mackenzie Mountains, and the headwaters of the Nahanni River which are part of their creation story. Collaborating with Parks Canada, the Deh Cho were part of the process of a major accomplishment in land protection, The Nahanni National Park Expansion. This watershed is huge, the scale of wilderness protected, huge.

Regarding protecting wilderness, he says that resiliency is not really working, that in the past days he has heard the term used. But, nothing is self-sustaining, everything is linked. It is our collective duty to protect the land. One land, one continent.

In his area, of 212,000 square kilometers, 70% is protected. There is development planned but done in stages, guided by a five year plan. Not all land will ever be open to development.

Former Grand Chief Jerry Antoine, predecessor of the Grand Chief Samuel Gargan, and instrumental in the Nahanni National Park Expansion.

A global vision is built into the language of the Dine. That language was denied for a long time. He expressed appreciation that the first word in the subtitle of the conference title was “siento”, “feel” which leads to spirit. Actions are like the Nahanni watershed, planning ahead for 7 generations.

Creation stories come from the land, which equals home. All of us are responsible.

Alan Latourelle, CEO Parks Canada. Instrumental player in the Nahanni National Park Expansion. (World Heritage Site: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/24>)
Guardians, guides, storytellers.

Each protected area is soul and part of the future.

Heart – nation building; creating the love and commitment for living heritage of Canadians.

Teaching that we are truly one with the land.

Natural diversity.

Natural resources fully committed but the human race still growing.

Pointing to four major accomplishments:

1. In 2009, increased the size of the Nahanni National Park which was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1978, the first year that the UN began designating sites.
2. Wilderness has now been included in stringent environmental law.
3. The spirit generated to continue protection.
4. A significant apology was made to the indigenous people of Canada and a promise to cooperatively manage new relationships for wilderness protection. Hope, inspiration, with/for the Deh Cho.

How?

1. Have the courage to dream. The elders dreamed the protection of the entire watershed.
2. Have the courage to trust.
3. Have the courage to work together: Parks Canada and the Deh Cho.
4. Use the best science, conservation science regarding species, minerals and other resources.
5. And use aboriginal knowledge.

The critical success factors for current and new protected areas:

1. Recognize importance of biodiversity.
2. Aboriginals need a voice.
3. Recognize daily wilderness management. Species and future generations.
4. Local communities have a critical role: social and economic.
5. Challenge to creative new paradigms of thinking.

The goal is to have 50% of Canada's wilderness protected. The country has:

- Boreal forests that have never been logged.
- Cliffs like in Yosemite National Park.
- Waterways like in the Colorado Plateau (Colorado River).
- Waterfalls where Creator gave the Dine their law.

What would be interesting to know is:

Ratio of Canada's size to wilderness and then to protected/conserved places.
Compared to Mexico's size to wilderness, and protected areas.

How big is the Nahanni watershed wilderness compared to Yucatan's underground river system? 4000 hectares protected: Nahanni; 750 kilometers of chartered rivers=15%.

The scale of Canada's Nahanni National Park Reserve, a major watershed, its status as a World Heritage Site, could be a beacon for Mexico to treat the watershed underground river system of the Quintana Roo, making portions available to be named world heritage sites. Keep the jungle jungle, protect as much as possible... put in infrastructure for the ejidos (sewage/waste treatment) and truly adhere to sustainable development practices on the coast, meaning...limits, a moratorium on golf courses....

Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher. Worked with NOAA. Vice President of Polar Programs.
Earth Observation: An Eye on Wild Earth

Politics / Military / Environment

Earth observations systems are being developed. The science of climate change and an action plan for climate change: A system of systems.

Earth Observation

Fundamental to existence of humans for 1) adaptation, 2) as a basis of scientific measures, 3) economy: local/regional/global.

Examples

- Nations sharing information across borders about weather, disease, seismic activity.
- Combining information from different observation systems, i.e. for the tsunami's and public health.

Background

- Earth Observation was first conceived as part of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development along with the G8.
- Then there was an actual Earth Observation Summit I.
- The group is multi-disciplinary, comprehensive, integrated.

Current

- Group on Earth Observation (GEO)
- Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS)
- 9 benefit areas: disasters, health, climate change, weather, energy, agriculture, biodiversity, water, ecosystems.

The organization is non-United Nations based. There are 80 nations and 56 international ministerial level representatives. There is a 10 year plan that addresses the following:

1. Wilderness, especially land:

- Unspoiled areas must be preserved.
- Our survival depends on biodiversity.
- Life depends on the physical, biological, chemical, all three combined.

2. Making information available to scientists to plan.

3. Ocean:

- Mountainous regions
- Coral reefs
- Deserts
- Numerous undiscovered species

Humans have created dead zones:

- Marine debris: 700 tons of debris near the Hawaiian Islands
- Loss of apex species, predators
- Decimation of coral reefs
- Endangered species
- Ocean acidification: carbon changing ocean

4. Polar region is the most difficult to study.

5. Wilderness and Climate as a system which is connected to earth in purest form.

- Global Climate Observation
- Global Carbon Monitoring

6. Preserve a viable future.

- Marine sanctuaries
- Sustainable Fishing
- Observing Systems
- Ecosystem Management
- Recovery Projects
- Setting aside areas for study

They are working for interconnected systems across the globe.

For more information:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Earth_Observation_System_of_Systems

<http://www.earthobservations.org/>

Panel: Wilderness and Water – The Status in Mexico

Ramon Perez Gil, Water Program Director, Gonzalo Rio Arronte Foundation (FGRA): Funder.

Water is from nature and we can not neglect it. Wilderness and water have to be part of environment, society and economics.

The foundation has five strategic areas: Water cultures, water for marginalized community, combining projects, comprehensive projects; Looking for all groups to participate.

A core project is the creation of a strategic alliance with World Wildlife Fund.

Carlos ?

Looking at Water, Nature and its Relationship

- Economic factors: supply and demand
- There is over exploitation of water (more used than recharged by nature) by industry, household, traditional use (?). Springs are dry and elements of biodiversity is down. We are eliminating an important resource.

Public policy is the problem specifically related to agriculture and the subsidies they are given by the government. The change of subsidies to address overuse issue would encourage new uses and technology. De-couple water subsidies.

Link to climate change related to reduction of water.

The [RAMSAR] Convention on Wetlands came into force for Mexico on 4 November 1986. Mexico presently has 113 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance, with a surface area of 8,161,357 hectares.

Omar Vidal, World Wildlife Fund and FGRA Alliance

The main challenge is the scarcity of water. It has led to serious degradation of wildlife systems. Over exploitation is of a national and regional concern. Water shortage has a huge affect on society. Over exploitation is by dams, pollution, and invasive species. There are social, economic, political issues affecting the environmental problems. Rarely is it a lack of rainfall.

We have to preserve ecosystems. Conservation equals biodiversity for river basins and wetlands. There needs to be a dialogue with agriculture and industrial interests, not just local interventions.

It is an important challenge to fight over exploitation. 8 of 13 watersheds have 40% or more extractions. This increases the risk of shortage.

There is a Natural Water Law of 2004. But it lacks enforcement and systems. Sustainable aquifer management needs to be measured by the quantity and quality of diversity.

****Jose Luis Luege Tamargo, General Director of the National Water Commission, CONAGUA.***

The federal government has a strategy for water which is parallel with wild life. A critical issue is the degradation, the deforestation and inappropriate use of soil.

We recognize that water is now a matter of national security. The commitment of the federal government is for conservation. A water program is in the national plan for management. They

are currently looking at wetlands inventory. There is a plan for the Yucatan for cenotes. (or a plan for a plan?)

The Mexican government has to get alignment in the federal policy of multiple agencies: water, forestry, CONANP, agriculture, social.

In Mexico, ALL of the water belongs to the nation. But, there is a complex dialogue between local and federal entities. In the Mexican constitution, there are two articles related to water which supersedes state and local laws.

In accordance to the word's spoken by President Calderon in the opening ceremonies, the federal government is making a commitment to water and to mangroves.

The federal geographical institution (INEGI) who makes the official geological maps must interact with the forestry agency to match inventories. (To see copies of the INEGI maps representing underground water and cenotes, versus a rendering compiled from the charting of divers go to pages 7-9 at http://www.saverivieramaya.org/aguas_con_los_cenotes_eng.pdf.)

The Yucatan watershed is enormous and is the most important in the country. Technical studies have to be done and inventories taken of the cenotes.

We don't have the environment and development coordinated.

The central issue related to the cenotes is sanitation. Waste water is not treated. There are no sanitation/treatment systems in some places. Septic tanks do not always work. He says, remove 100% of them. Water treatment plants need to be made to guarantee water purity.

Focus needs to be on regulation of:

- A protected zone
- Waste management
- Clean up

Analysis of the underground river flows (*CEA is part of a team receiving federal money in March of 2010 to begin testing flows from Akumal to Punta Allen.*)

The Mexican government has never had an ecological focus, and there are lots of interests. CONAGUA is taking on the commitment in 2010 to setting a standard.

Program changes: No idea who this guy is

84% of water usage is for agriculture. Technology must be implemented to reduce water use. Subsidies perverted to electric power for extraction of water. Subsidies should be redirected.

Richard Hansen, Archeologist, Idaho State University. El Mundo Maya I: El Mirador, Guatemala -- The Role of Wilderness in El Mundo Maya, Past and Present

Taking a cultural approach and working on a huge section of land for protection and conservation on the Guatemalan/Mexican border on the back of archeology. Preserving a wilderness corridor through a marriage of culture and environment.

Creating new models
Sustainable economically
Systems based

The Mirador-Calakmul region is being explored/uncovered as a place in the heart of Mayan culture. There are wetlands, lowlands and in 800,000 hectares of rain forests; *no people*.

Roads are now being built and making problems. Because of roads fire is being introduced and destroying forests. Roads are access for logging operations. Drug traffickers are buying land, clearing it out and grazing cattle. This clear area makes for nice landing strips, the roads give access out.

A resolution is being sought to create a bi-national protected area, keeping it road-less, preserving wilderness.

Exposition Hall

The photography says so much, so well, about the precious beauty on this planet, compelling the eye, the feelings, the wonder. The International League of Conservation Photographers made a very strong presence through the artwork. Bringing in the art as an integral component strengthens the message. The writings, the writers, books released, awards for both writing and photography. The exposition center beautifully curated and designed for the exhibition. A particular display of penguin pictures.....clay figurines photographed repeatedly in a variety of settings, including desert, graffiti written city walls, and other oddnesses. Delightfully tricked me.

Afternoon Concurrent Session:

Water in Mexico: Community Management (Part 1). Organized by World Wildlife Fund.

The community level is where many decisions are made. Common theory. Famous for community management of rain forests.

Management equals

1. Knowledge
 - Scientific
 - Traditional: social, ethical; cultural; feeling
2. Practice
3. Institutions
 - Family, assembly, elders, councils, rituals
 - Global, federal, state, municipal, community

Producing food is closely linked to water.

Increased water quality needs the decrease of pollution, namely the agriculture and chemical policy.

Vertical management is not positive. Need a more adaptive management, or co-management policy.

Edgar Vega, Anthropologist, INE

Water and the territories of indigenous pueblos.

Social properties are ejidos and communities. Almost all of the Yucatan Peninsula is social land but there are not appropriate laws. In many places in Mexico, indigenous people live at or near the headwaters of watershed basins, but are not members of the basin communities.

****Salvador Anta, SEMARNAT**

There is not a national policy of water management. But, there is a legal framework for programs in water, the environment and forest protection. Nothing is integrated. There needs to be a linking of public policy to the community level. This is new and not universal throughout Mexico. Communities and civil society are initiating co-management with government. Funding from the outside is helping to develop models for community management along with some federal dollars. Process and skills are being developed.

In Oaxaca and Guerrero programs are happening: capture; conserve; manage.

1. Recover/restore to collect water for cattle raising. There are 2 projects: Water for Ever – linked to civil society; Shared Water, GEA – Agua compartida
2. Reforestation; redoing soil
3. Alternate and Processes of Development.

CONAFOR and SEMARNAT are working together to support communities.

There is a need for changes in legislation to allow better water basin management. Very important would be to have one single institutional unit. Currently it is uncoordinated with many stakeholders.

Community Territory; Marco Antonio Gonzales Ortiz, UNAM

Let's take a look at water beyond water. 63% of total rainfall is at basin heads. There is water management, basin management, or territorial management. 80% of the forests in Mexico are in indigenous areas. Mexico is the number two country in the world for having that much forest in the hands of indigenous people. There is regulation for 65%. 51% is in the hands of ejidos.

An important tool: territory management important to water management. They are creating knowledge, correcting mistakes. Small scale projects help us to learn. Planning processes are happening through community dialogues. Property, water, biological cycles, reproductive cycles, institutional.

Local water supplies stems from the basins. Three components at play for integrating basins at all levels reaching toward biodiversity:

1. Collective action
2. Institutional incidents
3. Regional integration

Writers' Workshop: Writing as Inspiration. Bob Barron, Fulcrum Publishing, Moderator.
Panelists: Boyd Norton, Chad Dawson, Michael McBride, Ian McCallum, David Torres.
Write from the heart. Have the courage. Light the candle.

Regarding brevity when writing:

Write hard facts.
Human spirit is a hard fact.

Go ahead and write the 4500 words but then maybe you have to get it down to 2500 words. It is possible to over write. Let work age.

Regarding showing work – exposing our self.

Overcome the desire to pull back; stay with the heart.
Timing is important. Sometimes we/the work is not ready yet. Let it incubate, let it mature. After work sits, then can reduce the amount of information and let the archetype shine through.

Quoting Arthur Miller (paraphrased) You can never say “I got it”. Always an amateur; the world is always new. Teach it to sing.

Courage takes discipline. Make it a game.

Evening plenary session held at Fiesta Americana, Merida.

Communicating Conservation and Wilderness.

Emily Loose, Director of Communications, The WILD Foundation

Using technology to communicate the conference: live streaming, blogging, twitter.

Writing to Save Wilderness – Making an Impact

Presentations by Robert Baron – President, Fulcrum Publishing, USA; David Torres, Editor, Este Pais, Mexico; Timothy Kelly, President National Geographic Global Media; Boyd Norton, Photographer, writer, USA.

David Torres, Editor, Este Pais. Looks like possibly an interesting proponent with a good forum for voice!

Timothy Kelly, President National Geographic Global Media. Leveraging the reputation and funds of National Geographic to be raising awareness in vast arenas, including social networking as well as new applications of traditional medias i.e. 24 hour televised National Geographic....

Boyd Norton, Photographer, writer. Acknowledgement of Ian Player's influence. Article in International Journal of Wilderness "Wilderness and the Human Soul".
http://www.wilderness.net/library/documents/IJWAug07_Player.pdf

Dr. Ian McCallum, Writer, psychologist; wilderness guide; Director Leadership and Education Projects – Wilderness Foundation, South Africa
Poignant. Carl Sandburg's "Wilderness"

THERE is a wolf in me ... fangs pointed for tearing gashes ... a red tongue for raw meat ... and the hot lapping of blood—I keep this wolf because the wilderness gave it to me and the wilderness will not let it go.

There is a fox in me ... a silver-gray fox ... I sniff and guess ... I pick things out of the wind and air ... I nose in the dark night and take sleepers and eat them and hide the feathers ... I circle and loop and double-cross.

There is a hog in me ... a snout and a belly ... a machinery for eating and grunting ... a machinery for sleeping satisfied in the sun—I got this too from the wilderness and the wilderness will not let it go.

There is a fish in me ... I know I came from saltblue water-gates ... I scurried with shoals of herring ... I blew waterspouts with porpoises ... before land was ... before the water went down ... before Noah ... before the first chapter of Genesis.

There is a baboon in me ... clambering-clawed ... dog-faced ... yawping a galoot's hunger ... hairy under the armpits ... here are the hawk-eyed hankering men ... here are the blond and blue-eyed women ... here they hide curled asleep waiting ... ready to snarl and kill ... ready to sing and give milk ... waiting—I keep the baboon because the wilderness says so.

There is an eagle in me and a mockingbird ... and the eagle flies among the Rocky Mountains of my dreams and fights among the Sierra crags of what I want ... and the mockingbird warbles in the early forenoon before the dew is gone, warbles in the underbrush of my Chattanooga of hope, gushes over the blue Ozark foothills of my wishes—And I got the eagle and the mockingbird from the wilderness.

O, I got a zoo, I got a menagerie, inside my ribs, under my bony head, under my red-valve heart—and I got something else: it is a man-child heart, a woman-child heart: it is a father and mother and lover: it came from God-Knows-Where: it is going to God-Knows-Where—For I am the keeper of the zoo: I say yes and no: I sing and kill and work: I am a pal of the world: I came from the wilderness.

Photography Keynote

James Balog, Fellow, International League of Conservation Photographers;
Trees, Ice and Water

Current project is documenting glacial recession with cameras set up to take photos every half and hour. This is happening at several major glaciers around the globe. Very major glacial loss now being recorder over the last couple of years. Scale is giant. Very profound impression to see the magnitude of change in very short period of time. <http://www.extremeicesurvey.org/>

What would be interesting to know is:

Vis a vis James Blaglog's photo documentation project: Does a baseline for glacial loss prior to the last 10-15 years exist?

Summary and Random Thoughts

The conference was very well organized in many ways. Media and technology certainly integrated. i.e. headsets for translations. Lots of AV that all seemed to be working pretty smoothly (this is by day 4). Monitors running the day's working sessions. Large screens on either side of the room with close views of speakers, and or/their presentation visuals, both at the conference center and the hotel. Volunteers were plentiful and helpful and bi-lingual for the most part. Buses and vans shuttling people back and forth. Morning sessions running on time, panels ending ahead of schedule!!!! Evening started way late. However, no recycling available at the Siglo XXI Center. A very young WILD9 volunteer said that someone would be going through all the trash to sort the recycling... you buyin' it? Fat chance. And yes, plenty of air conditioning....

Throughout the day there were many references made by speakers to the Jane Goodall and Sylvia Earle presentation on Sunday. Very inspirational for those who heard them speak, both presenters and other delegates I spoke with.

The Shadow

Wondering between all of the lines of the CONAGUA guy stating the underground river system is a priority area for the Mexican government. How much of his speech is only lip service? How likely can this government be that effective? Still, this is what I wanted to hear; what is now 'on record'. Can we hold these guys accountable? How does the international community support his important record? What do the resolutions of this Congress really mean in terms of action?

A colleague shooting out of a break-out session spitting mad because someone from the same company that authorizes/condones cruise ship dumping into the sea, is standing in front of the room acting like he is some kind of expert on any environmental issue, ever!

The hardest thing to bear was the evening plenary session at the Fiesta Americana. The only thing I know about Fiesta Americana is this: walking south down the beach from Aventuras Akumal one day in January 2009, trying to make it to Xcabel, a famous turtle nesting sanctuary, and I stumble upon bulldozers, sitting quiet amid leveled jungle/coastline interface. Included in

the devastation: mangroves and chit palms. Both protected; mangroves being a major endangered system. Investigations uncover that it is the property of Grupo Posada who is developing a Fiesta American resort and golf course.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Many words and intentions spoken, information shared, proclamations and resolutions....who is responsible? How do these things happen?

Deep ecology means looking at the human species as an equal to each an every species on the entire planet...equal. What happens if we become stewards instead of masters? What happens if we not only love our neighbor as ourselves, but if we look at the bees, the water, the manatees, the jungle, snakes....tabanos.....all as of equal valuable as our own egocentric life?

Right or wrong, guided, or, misguided, somehow this Congress convenes every three or four years to convey a message: this beautiful planet needs our voice, our thoughts, our unique contribution, whatever that is. Maybe it is the scientist, or maybe the artist, the journalist/writer, the clerk who files the files, the webmaster who drives the communication tool of the world wide web, maybe it is the community member who says "wait a minute", maybe it is the guest who witnesses mama turtle laying making her nest laying her eggs in the Place of the Turtles, who clamors at the chance to make a difference....whatever that means. Government bureaucrats, academics, environmentalists, conservationists....are they really the only ones to get a voice? What about a concerned citizen, a citizen of earth instead of a country, a state. What about *us*?