
Mangrove Action Day- July 26th

Mangrove Action Project (MAP) has been working since 1992 to halt the rampant destruction of the earth's mangrove forest wetlands that are threatened by unsustainable development. Such industries as charcoal and petroleum production, tourism and urban expansion, golf courses and marinas are all threats to mangrove forests today. Still, the largest threat stems from industrial shrimp aquaculture production, which is the largest contributor to current mangrove loss. Shrimp farms are located along the coastal zones for convenience for the investors, but at the cost of the coastal wetland zones which are cleared of mangroves to make way for the hundreds of thousands of acres of shrimp ponds. The shrimps are raised for export in most cases, and the ponds themselves may last only a few years before being shut down because of pollution and disease problems affecting the farmed shrimp. Today, as a telling testament to this wasteful industry, there are over 250,000 ha of abandoned shrimp farms around the world, and over 1 million ha of important, productive coastal wetlands, including mangroves, have been devastated for the sake of a luxury seafood product for the wealthy nations to enjoy. But at what costs?

Over half the world's mangrove forests have been lost to such short-sighted development pressures. Today, only around 15 million ha of the estimated original 36 million ha of mangroves still exist, while much of the remaining mangroves are degraded and in poor health. Each year, around 150,000 ha or more of mangroves are being cleared. This loss of mangroves represents a serious threat to the future of life on this planet for several very relevant reasons.

For one, mangroves play a vital role in coastal biodiversity, acting as nurseries for juvenile fish and supplying much of the detritus that becomes part of the coastal food chain supporting a vast array of life in the process. Mangrove wetlands play an important role as stop-over sites and feeding sites for migratory birds. Mangroves also help hold coastal soils in place, preventing erosion and sedimentation, which can suffocate the sea grass beds and coral reefs, which are already threatened by pollution and global warming. They also filter out pollutants from upland, thus keeping the sea water purer. Mangroves themselves sequester massive amounts of carbon in their leaves and branches, as well as store carbon in the soils beneath their root structures. When mangroves are cleared vast amounts of carbon are released into the atmosphere contributing further to global warming.

Mangroves also protect coastal communities from hurricane force winds and wave surges. Many scientists believe that mangroves provided some important protection against the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that struck the coasts of Asia and East Africa. Those living behind healthy mangroves stood a much better chance of surviving the tsunami waves' onslaught.

For these reasons and more, in 2003, MAP joined other organizations from the global South to promote July 26th as Mangrove Action Day.

Background on Mangrove Action Day!

The plan to make this call to action arose during the "In the Hands of the Fishers Workshop" held in

Fortaleza, Brazil in early 2003. The workshop attendees came from Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, Colombia and Guatemala. The IHOF mainly focused on the issues surrounding mangrove and salt flats endangered by expansion of the shrimp farm industry, as well as strategies to help halt the continued expansion of these shrimp farm ventures. It was brought up during this workshop that an international campaign involving local fisherfolk should be undertaken where participating NGOs and local community representatives organize their own local events on the same day, thus linking these local events with each other to make an international movement or action.

July 26th was chosen because of its existing significance for the movement in Latin America led by Red Manglar. July 26th has been called the "Day of the Mangrove," commemorating that day in 1998 when a Greenpeace activist from Micronesia, Hayhow Daniel Nanoto, died of a heart attack while involved in a massive protest action led by FUNDECOL and Greenpeace, International. During this action the local community of Muisne (Ecuador) joined the NGOs in dismantling an illegally placed shrimp pond in an attempt to restore this damaged mangrove zone back to its former state. Since Hayhow's death, FUNDECOL and others have commemorated this day as a day to remember and to take renewed action to Save the Mangroves!

With no Greenpeace ship in sight on the horizon, we decided that the fisherfolk form cooperative flotillas to protest the destructive expansion of shrimp farming in their areas. This call got positive responses from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, Nigeria, Europe and the USA. And it looks like momentum is building globally for an annual commemoration of July 26th as Mangrove Action Day, with some groups organizing teach-ins, some mangrove tree planting, wetland clean-ups, protests and letter writing.

A New Call To Action on July 26th, 2009!

MAP wishes to lend full support to the plans and actions of all network members for Global Action on 26 July 2009. MAP staff and volunteers based in the Seattle area will be attending the 35th Annual Ballard Seafood Fest on 25-26 July, tabling at this popular Seattle event and talking with consumers about the problems of shrimp farming worldwide. MAP will be promoting our "Shrimp Less, Think More" Consumer Awareness Campaign.

We ask that you and/or your organizations please join us all in a global protest against the ongoing losses of the mangrove forest ecosystems and the local communities that depend upon the mangroves for their lives and livelihoods. Please send MAP your regional or local plans for actions that are meant to commemorate this international Day for the Mangroves! MAP would like to again share your plans and ideas with our global network. We look forward to hearing from you soon in this regard!

For more details, contact mangroveap@olympus.net