

Addendum I: Mirador Basin in the Press

EL MIRADOR - A NEW GUATEMALAN STRATEGY FOR THE MAYA BIOSPHERE



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(translated to English)

In what looks to be a model for new development and conservation, the Guatemalan government is looking to tourism in the Peten instead of agriculture to save the forests of the Maya Biosphere. New tourism will be the future of development in Mesoamerica, returning prosperity. Only now, instead of Mayan harvests, there would be tourists and hotels instead of cattle.



Mirador Basin National Monument

This is the new Guatemalan governmental proposal to stop the advance of the agricultural border in Petén and to avoid settlement and agriculture to invade the Maya Biosphere Reserve. This implies the economic transformation of the Peten, because tourism would become the motor for the development of the communities that live in this protected area and is the bet of the current Berger presidential administration.

For that reason, the President initiated consultations with the civil society, non-governmental institutions, cooperative Organizations, industrialists, mayors and political leaders of the northern department to discuss and obtain support for the project. The objective is that, in the long term, sites like El Mirador are major tourist attractions similar to Tikal, where most of visitors to Petén is concentrated.

El Mirador, for example, by his historical value, could become the model for success in this project. In order to avoid further destruction of the forests, declared protected zones since 1990, the suggestion to the communities is to promote tourism-based activities dedicated to the observation of wildlife, birds and insects and other adventure tourism. This would extend the border areas between the biosphere and the present zone of agricultural earth use so they do not come further north in largest department in Guatemala-Peten.

Several organizations execute small projects of this type. Now, the Executive Secretary of the Presidency, Eduardo González, is coordinating an effort with these organizations so that the project becomes a "Objective of The State".

Phases of the Plan

The official name of the project is "Integral Program of Sustainable Development in the Reserve of the Mayan Biosphere". Initiated in June of 2004, the project will be divided in several phases. While the total amount of the investment has not been defined, for next the four years, the program will have investment of between \$5 million and \$20 million dollars (Q40 million and Q160 million). The only thing defined at the moment is the cost of the studies for the feasibility study of the project which is being financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This planning and consultations with stakeholders will be finalized by July, 2004. The next stage will involve strengthening governmental institutions in Petén.

Old cities, new poles of investment In parallel, a group of experts contracted by the Government, is mapping and evaluating 125 immersed cities in the rainforest and other 200 smaller sites in this protected zone, because not all the Mayan ruins of the biosphere will support the arrival of tourists. The site with the greater attention is El Mirador, located seven kilometers from the border of Mexico and a two day trek by foot or on the back of a mule from the nearest community of Carmelita. El Mirador's historical value makes it "a highest priority and destiny for development", says González, "because the last investigations indicate El Mirador to be the cradle of democracy in the hemisphere and the largest structures existing in the Maya world." The combination of exploring old Mayan large cities in the forest, complemented with wildlife, nature and adventure tourism, will obtain after several years, according to estimations of González and Perez, who the richer green zone of Guatemala is transformed into one of the main sources of income of the country.

Credit Available

Although does not exist a number considered for the total investment that will become in Petén, the Inter-American Development Bank (I.A.D.B.) considers to finance the project. A delegation of the Bank visited the last week the area to know the program. That "ample process of conceptualización", says to Gerard Johnson, resident representative of the I.A.D.B. in Guatemala, allows the Bank to give support to the plan. President Óscar Berger and Johnson signed in Petén an agreement of loan by \$550 thousand dollars (Q4.4 million), destined for the studies of tourist load in the reserve, among others. To it given \$150 thousands in June are added. In the phase of execution the bank would grant more financing. The contributions of the I.A.D.B. in projects for Petén are near \$20 million (Q160 million) annual. This one quick \$500 million (Q4 billion) for all the country. Eduardo González esteem that each phase does not have to surpass \$20 million (Q160 million).