

**CONSUMERISM IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES CAUSES DESTRUCTION OF
WETLANDS IN THE TROPICS
EXAMPLE:
EXPANSION OF SHRIMP FARMS WITHIN A PROTECTED AREA
RAMSAR SITE # 1000**

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Wetlands are ecosystems with high biodiversity that are perennially or seasonally flooded by fresh, brackish, or seawater with a maximum depth of 6 meters. In some cases they are swamps marshes, bogs, lakes or lagoons, usually accompanied by grasses, marine algae, mangroves or other vegetation. In other cases, they are temporarily dry but become productive and full of life during the rainy season.

Fig. # 1: BIODIVERSITY, TRADITIONAL FISHING AND WETLANDS TRAFFIC WETLANDS:



Mangrove Forest



Mangrove ecosystems including flats, lagoons, swamps, pasture and so on are seen as useless land by hotel operators, shrimp, and other "developers," thus justifying the destruction of wetlands and replace them with hotels, housing colonies, shrimp farms and other activities they consider most productive, regardless of environmental damage, and the social and economic cost to local communities and humanity.

DESTRUCTION OF WETLANDS IN HONDURAS
Fig. # 3: WINTER WETLANDS (Laguna)



Fig. # 4: SUMMER WETLANDS (Playon)



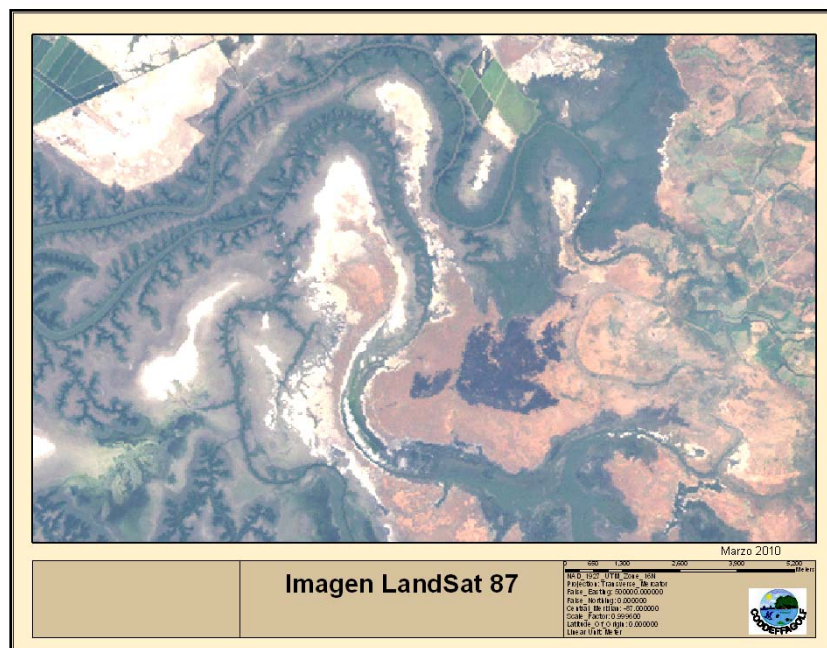
Fig. # 5: WETLAND CONVERTED INTO A SHRIMP FARM



On 2 February 1971, several countries gathered in the city of Ramsar in Iran to draft the Ramsar Convention, which entered into force in 1975. It currently considers the environmental, social and economic value of wetlands. It is concerned with the conservation of waterfowl, fish, crustaceans, reptiles, mammals, and all the indigenous biodiversity of the ecosystems mentioned above. In addition, it considers their importance for carbon sequestration (the mitigation of climate change), control of pollutants, regulation of groundwater salinity, water storage, restoration of fisheries, food independence, contribution to marine primary productivity, economic and social contributions, decreased erosion, and protection from winds and storms, among other benefits.

Since 23 October 1993, Honduras is one of the contracting parties of the international Ramsar Convention, consisting of more than 158 countries that meet every three years to present their "country report." Honduras boasts of having declared and protected five "Ramsar Sites" that together comprise 223,320 hectares of wetlands supposedly under state protection. In this opportunity and as an example of false "protection" we can refer to what is happening in one part of the "Ramsar Site # 1000" in the Gulf of Fonseca.

IMAGE # 1: WETLAND ECOSYSTEMS, “LA BERBERÍA”, 1987 LANDSAT SATELLITE IMAGE.

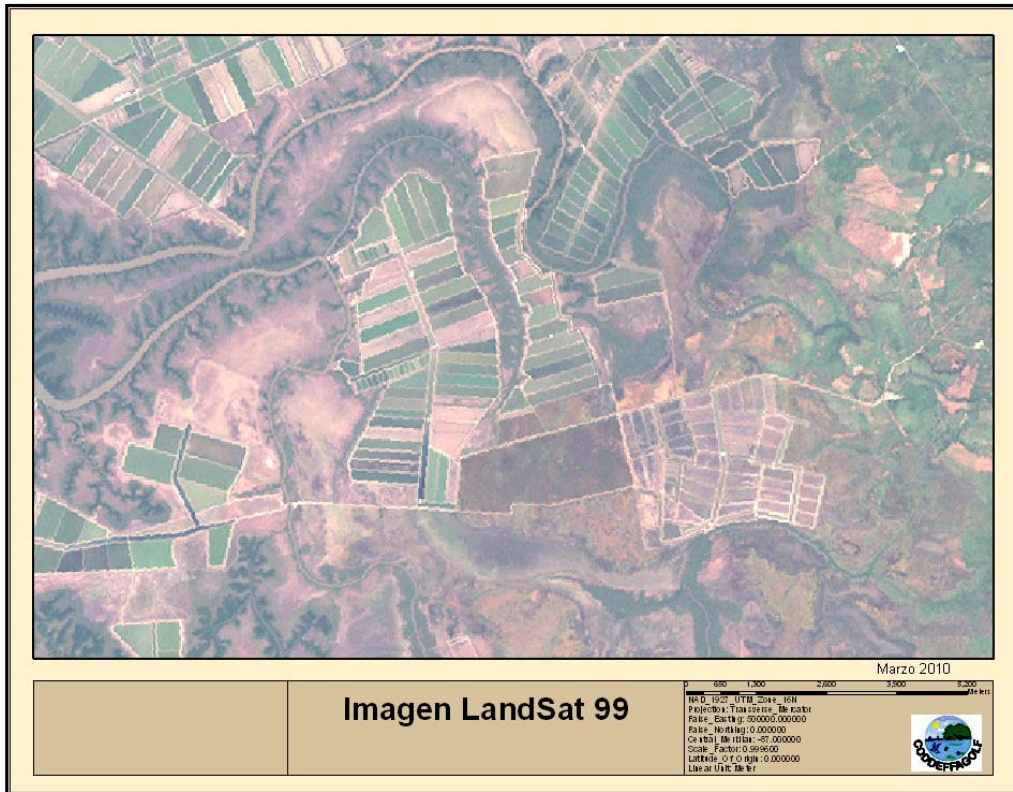


In 1987, we see the tropical coastal wetland ecosystem of “La Berbería” (Barbary) irrigated by streams, along which are mangroves, and scattered grasses, poaceae, legumes and other vegetation on saline level ground, called flats. This group harbors large resident and migratory biodiversity. It is of interest to fishing communities and allows them access to firewood, hunting, fishing and recreation in mangroves, lagoons, and estuaries in the gulf.

The expansion of shrimp aquaculture in Honduras began in 1972. By 2010, it remains without any plan for its development and expansion. The only mechanisms controlling its growth are shrimp

diseases, the fall of international shrimp prices, falling demand, and sometimes pressure from local communities. The destruction, pollution, and displacement of communities plus the plundering of natural resources have caused a social movement aimed at reducing its impacts. The NGO (CODDEFFAGOLF) that leads the movement since 1988 has set the objective to achieve the declaration of Wetland Protected Areas in the Gulf of Fonseca.

IMAGE # 2: EXPANSION OF SHRIMP AQUACULTURE IN THE PROTECTED AREA AND PART OF THE "SITE RAMSAR # 1000," LA BERBERÍA "



In the Landsat image 1999 is we see destructive shrimp expansion in “La Berbería”, Municipality of El Triunfo, Choluteca. To conserve the remaining wetlands CODDEFFAGOLF proposed to establish a protected area, within which are included sections of shrimp farms called “intensive use zones”, in order to halt their expansion.

In July 1999, during the Ramsar Convention held in Costa Rica, Honduras shrimp farmers (ANDAH) are surprised by the announcement that wetlands of the Gulf of Fonseca have been designated as "Ramsar sites," (74,884 acres) which became the #1000 site among the world's wetlands. Massive protests led by the fishermen and CODDEFFAGOLF, forced negotiations with the shrimp industry. On 20 January 2000, this "Site" is included in the Protected Areas of the Gulf of Fonseca (81,378 ha) by Decree 5-99-E of the National Congress. “La Berbería” is assigned 5667 acres of wetlands. The objective seems to have been met as it is expected to halt the spread shrimp and put the remaining wetlands under conservation measures.

SHRIMP FARM “ EL FARO”:

A few months after the publication of the Decree, a Spanish company known in Honduras as the “El Faro” of Mr. Jaime Soriano disrespecting the Ramsar Convention, national laws and without environmental license converts over 100 hectares of wetlands in “La Berbería’s protected area into shrimp ponds. Complaints, demonstrations, and protests of fishermen are of little use. The company "El Faro" supported by the police and the complicity of government officials has its way. It forces fishermen to negotiate what are inadequate compensation measures.

SHRIMP FARM EMAR I:

Meanwhile the company **EMAR I** expands without an environmental license over tens of hectares.

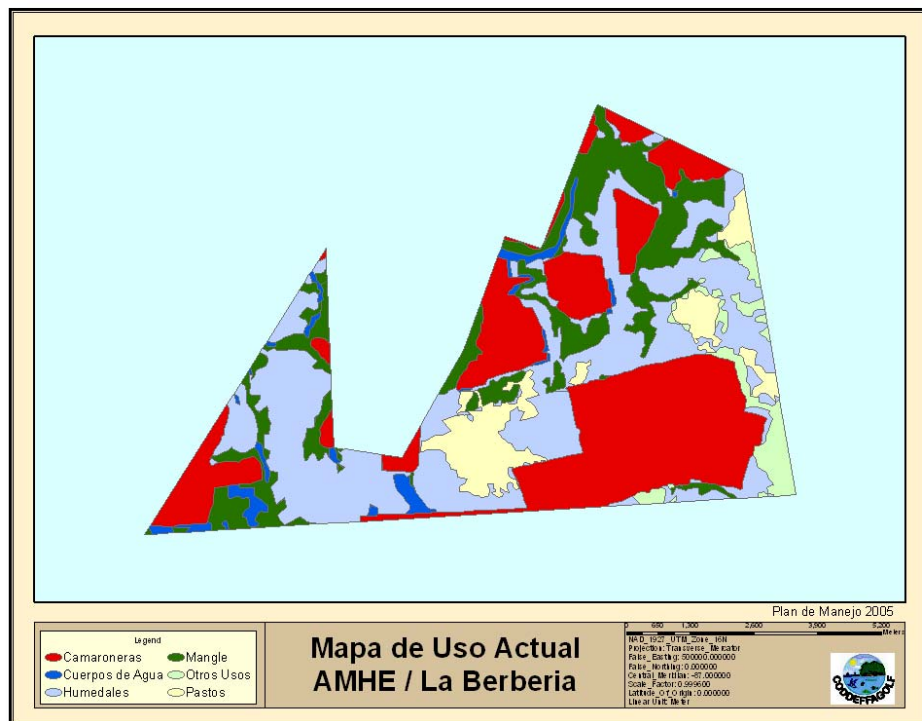
2004: CONDEMNATION OF "EL FARO", "GMSB" GOVERNMENT OF HONDURAS AND WORLD BANK

In 2004 the Central American Water Tribunal condemns the government of Honduras and the shrimp farms El Faro, Sea Farms of Honduras (GGMSB) and the World Bank for pollution and destruction of wetlands. The verdict is an ethical and moral conviction, and therefore does not result in any punishment.

2005: MANAGEMENT PLANS

After the legal declaration of the protected areas, (2000), shrimp farmers under ANDAH delay the approval of management plans until 2005. The management plans for the "Sub System Natural Protected Areas of the Southern Zone,” which includes “La Berbería” are submitted and approved only under local, national and international pressure.

IMAGE # 3:
USE MAP BY MANAGEMENT PLAN 2005



The picture above shows the continuous expansion of shrimp farms into wetlands (in red) in complete disregard of the Ramsar Convention and the Act of Congress in November 2005.

2008, SHRIMP FARM EXCASUR: Destruction is spurred by high international demand for shrimp. In 2008 CODDEFFAGOLF presents a complaint during a Workshop on Protected Areas, attended by regional and central authorities. It presents images in “La Berbería” where shrimp farmers have been caught "red-handed" using 6 tractors to destroy hundreds of acres of wetlands without an environmental license. The authorities order a halt to operations but they are resumed the next day to finish the shrimp farm which is called EXCASUR.

FIG. # 6: CAMARONERA EXCASUR



2010 EMAR I SHRIMP AND EMAR II: On January 26, 2010 EMAR II is granted an environmental permit for construction of shrimp farms in 169 hectares by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (SERNA) in a unique process that lasts only 5 days (21-26 January). In that short period, it also gives a license to EMAR I that was operating for several years without environmental license. SERNA issues three favorable opinions among its own agencies, in a single day before the inauguration of a new president! The authorities concerned provide access to areas for "intensive" shrimp aquaculture. CODDEFFAGOLF asks for the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) to locate the site, but this is not considered by the environmental authorities and very soon they destroy 169 hectares of wetland within the Protected Area and Ramsar site.

FIG. # 7 : EMAR EXPANSION ON “LA BERBERÍA”



As if this were not enough, EXCASUR, who had earlier been punished for environmental crimes, only waited for EMAR II to conclude with impunity its shrimp farm, to start expanding on their own on tens of hectares, claiming to have an environmental license dated December 15 2009.

FIG. # 8 : EXCASUR EXPANSION ON “LA BERBERÍA”



The irony and cynicism is that in all these cases the police and army have been protecting operations, equipment and facilities of the shrimp farmers. The President of the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise (COHEP) expressed: We need more security because while farmers in the Lower Aguan try to recover land, in the south (Gulf of Fonseca) they have "seized" a shrimp farm and this cannot be allowed because it will scare away investment." Other news media blame "the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez of being the cause of the protests" (!!).

FIG. # 9: HEAVILY ARMED POLICE PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENTAL DESTROYERS



To prove that government officials work in cahoots with shrimp farmers, the CODDEFFAGOLF decides to conduct an evaluation in the field to check the spatial location of the area of interest. The conclusions are:

With the analysis of a geographic information system (GIS), it concludes that the area is not "intensive multiple use" with which the authorities seek to justify their crime and also:

That the zoning of the Management Plan categorized as "intensive multiple use zone" are the same areas of shrimp farms that already existed at that time (1999). Therefore, there was no room for expansion to this area.

That the granting of environmental permits that led to the expansion of aquaculture within "Ramsar Site # 1000 in "La Berbería" did not consider the General Environmental Law. It did not respect the National System of Environmental Impact Assessment. It did not respect the Protected Areas Act 5-99-E. It did not respect "Site Ramsar # 1000" or the guidelines of the Management Plan.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS:

Local level:

On March 5, 2010, over two hundred acres of wetlands were converted into shrimp farms in the Gulf of Fonseca in addition to thousands of others that have already been converted. In “La Berbería”, wildlife has lost most of their habitat, and fishermen have lost or are struggling for access to the mangroves, and food sources for survival. They are also pressing the industry directly for compensation’s measures? What about environmental mitigation’s measures?

National level:

The discrediting of the Honduran' legal system is almost complete. The institutions that work for environmental conservation act as junior business partners and recently participated in a coup d’etat. The coup plotters seem to remain in power behind the mask of a new Democracy. The Director of ANDAH is the brother of former dictator Micheletti. He seems to have taken advantage of their relationship to reach agreements between ANDAH and government institutions, agreements that are attacks on natural resources. These conventions and agreements are still in force under the new government.

International level:

The Ramsar Convention seems to ignore this situation, which is not unique to Honduras, and although known, they have only limited power to advise the Government of Honduras on how to improve its behavior.

The World Conservation Union and Oxfam Novib, both in the Netherlands, the Wildlife Fund (WWF-USA) among other international NGOs seem to have shifted their interest in conservation and now are in the business of certifying shrimp aquaculture. ANDAH goes also after such certification.

The Ramsar Site # 1000, is a tiny example of what happens in all countries of the tropical zone of the planet, where the sum of impacts is contributing to climate change, destruction of biodiversity and loss of food self-sufficiency.

As the insatiable demand for shrimp continues in Europe, Japan, USA and Australia, wetland ecosystems continue to disappear. **Does it matter?**