

Protecting Patagonia

Advocates protect the wild rivers and native forests of southern Chile's Aysén region.

E-LAW advocates in Chile have scored a tremendous victory for the snowy peaks and icy fjords of Central Patagonia. Toronto-based Noranda Inc. has canceled plans to build three dams and one of the world's largest aluminum smelters in the Aysén region of southern Chile.

The infamous "Alumysa Project" called for damming three wild rivers and flooding old growth forests -- threatening dozens of endangered and endemic species.



Puerto Aysén, Chile

Indeed, the region's free-flowing rivers are what attract aluminum producers. Smelters demand enormous amounts of energy. When aluminum producers see remote wild rivers, they think cheap hydropower.

E-LAW partners at Fiscalía del Medio Ambiente (FIMA) led the fight against Alumysa. They called on E-LAW U.S. Staff Scientists Mark Chernaik and Meche Lu to evaluate the project's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Mark and Meche found that, contrary to Chilean law, Noranda failed to justify the location for the project or describe the effects of toxic fluoride emissions. Another serious flaw in the EIA was its extremely limited information about the flora and fauna that would be impacted by the \$2.7 billion project.

Chile's President Ricardo Lagos sided with FIMA and a broad coalition of community organizations and salmon farmers, declaring the site unfit for Noranda's project. Shortly thereafter, Noranda withdrew the project.



Lake Yulton

E-LAW U.S. congratulates FIMA for its success challenging unsustainable development and protecting Chile's unique ecosystems. In the wake of this tremendous victory, FIMA's president, Fernando Dougnac, was awarded the Government of Chile's 2003 National Environmental Prize for "Protection and Conservation of Biodiversity."

On receiving news of his award, Fernando wrote to E-LAW: "I want to share this prize with all of you since the exchange of ideas and information through the E-LAW network has been one of the most important sources of motivation and support throughout my career as an environmental lawyer."

E-LAW U.S. has worked with Fernando since 1994 and helped him launch FIMA in 1998. FIMA is now one of the world's leading public interest environmental law organizations.

For more information about this E-LAW Impact or FIMA, contact the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide at elawus@elaw.org.