LAST REMAINING HABITAT FOR PAINTED PARTRIDGE SAVED

In August, 1993, foreign investors presented a plan to Sri Lankan government officials to clearcut 2,000 hectares of forest to develop pineapple plantations. The proposed plantations were near the Gal Oya Reservoir, which supplies water to local communities and farmers. The Gal Oya National park is home to medicinal plants, over 100 bird species and over 80 mammal species, including Sri Lanka’s largest population of Asian elephants. The area is also the last remaining refuge for the endangered painted partridge. (Illustration, page 6)

Similar operations in Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines have had devastating effects. Hemantha Withanage, Staff Scientist for the Environmental Foundation, Ltd., and E-LAW Sri Lanka, contacted E-LAW U.S. for information.

E-LAW U.S. provided information detailing the ecological damage caused by clearcutting, such as soil erosion, habitat loss, and diminished ground and surface water quality. E-LAW U.S. also outlined the environmental and health impacts of pesticides used in pineapple cultivation to combat the mealy bug and other pests.

Armed with this information, Hemantha convinced government and company officials of the social and environmental harm that the project would cause, and the extensive measures that would be required to prevent such harm.

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HIGHLIGHTS

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TRANSPORTATION IN A CROWDED WORLD

The transportation alternatives that communities choose will greatly affect the long-term quality of their ecosystems and economies. Railways are emerging as the best choice for the environment and for community prosperity.

In Sri Lanka, a modest railway line links the sea port and airport in Colombo, the nation’s capital. Developers have proposed to scrap the railway line and replace it with a multi-lane expressway. The proposed development would displace 2500 families along the route. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposal does not consider the alternative of upgrading the present railway line for improved transportation of freight and passengers.

Lalanath de Silva, President of E-LAW Sri Lanka and an attorney for the Environment Foundation Ltd. (EFL) in Colombo has taken the case on behalf of the affected community.

He called on the E-LAW network for reports showing the benefits of railways over highways.

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ARGENTINIANS WORK IN EUGENE

Two young lawyers from Argentina, Laura Sybut and Marcela Flores, are in Eugene this winter as a part of E-LAW’s working exchange program. Laura and Marcela are recent law graduates of the University of La Plata and are opening a law firm with one other attorney in La Plata, south of Buenos Aires. They are visiting Eugene to learn U.S. environmental law and see how U.S. environmental lawyers practice, to help them with their own practice.

Marcela and Laura also helped draft laws regarding medical waste, and a general environmental law establishing procedures to assess environmental impacts. After helping to write environmental laws, Marcela and Laura want to start practicing law so they can work to enforce these laws. Both recognize that environmental laws mean little if they are not actively enforced.

Marcela and Laura believe their biggest challenge will be raising awareness about environmental problems. Laura explains that many fields, including the environmental field, need more public participation. A military dictatorship ruled Argentina between 1976 and 1986. During that time, more than 30,000 people ‘disappeared’, including many activists. The primary concern of the Argentine people has always been individual rights. She feels that people must begin to think about public rights and the environment. Flores adds, “People think that the public lands are the government’s responsibility.” and often don’t understand how the pollution affects them personally, and so do not act.

Both women seek to help the public recognize the link between pollution and public health, and empower citizens to use the courts and the newly enacted laws of Buenos Aires Province. Through the University of Oregon Law School, they are studying Administrative and Public Lands law and working with the Western Environmental Law Center to litigate environmental cases. They are also studying at the American English Institute. At E-LAW, they are learning electronic mail and working with E-LAW staff on their current cases in La Plata. Upon their return, they will work closely with the newly created E-LAW Argentina and Susana Castiglione. E-LAW will continue to support their excellent work on behalf of the environment in Argentina. Laura and Marcela can be reached on e-mail at elawtrain@igc.apc.org or by phone at the U.S. Office until early April.

NEW E-LAW OFFICES

We are pleased to announce the addition of four new offices to the E-LAW international network. Representatives of eight of the nine E-LAW offices convened in Baguio, Philippines for E-LAW’s fourth annual meeting in January. Each year, E-LAW representatives consider potential new offices. This year, E-LAW Colombia, E-LAW Argentina, E-LAW Israel, and E-LAW India join E-LAW’s nine existing offices working to challenge environmental degradation, protect biodiversity and defend human health.

E-LAW ARGEN TINA Susana Castiglione of Buenos Aires will create E-LAW Argentina. Susana worked closely with the late Alberto Kattan, who is considered the father of environmental law in Argentina. She carries on his legacy through the Alberta Kattan Foundation and E-LAW Argentina.

E-LAW COLOMBIA will be a project of FUNDEPUBLICO in Bogota, Colombia. German Sarmiento, founder of FUNDEPUBLICO, has advanced actions popular throughout Latin America. Acciones populares provide citizens access to the courts in public interest cases.

E-LAW INDIA M.C. Mehta of the Indian Center for Enviro-Legal Action in Delhi and Anand Grover of the Lawyers Collective in Bombay will combine forces to create E-LAW India. Mehta has devoted his life to environmental law and worked tirelessly to preserve the Taj Mahal and the Ganges River. The Lawyers Collective provides legal services on a wide range of progressive causes.

E-LAW ISRAEL The Israeli Union for Environmental Defense (IUED) will create E-LAW Israel. Alon Tal is the Executive Director of IUED, which is the only public interest environmental law organization in Israel. IUED also has staff scientists and a laboratory for public interest work.

As E-LAW offices, these people and their organizations will add their own scientific, legal and strategic resources to the network and increase the collective knowledge available to public interest advocates around the world. Their contributions will strengthen E-LAW’s ability to protect our global environment.

UGANDANS PROTECT LAKE MUNYANYANGE FROM SALT WASTE

In the Summer 1993 E-LAW Update we reported a case involving a proposal to reopen the Lake Katwe salt plant in Uganda. The plant would dispose of salt waste byproducts to the nearby Lake Munyanyange, home to many exotic birds and endangered plants. E-LAW U.S. analyzed the reported chemical composition of salt waste byproducts from Lake Katwe, and the potential environmental impacts of disposing of these wastes in a fragile lake ecosystem.

Livingstone Sowanyana, Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative, recently wrote with good news about the case. He reported: “The information you provided on disposal of wastes from Lake Katwe Salt Plant was very useful. With such data I was able to make a strong case. I am pleased to inform you that plans to continue waste disposal into the lake have been abandoned. Thanks to E-LAW.”
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