



The Mangrove Action Project

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Mangrove forests are some of the most productive and biodiverse wetlands on earth. Yet these unique coastal tropical forests are among the most threatened habitats in the world. They may be disappearing more quickly than inland tropical rainforests and, so far, with little public notice. Growing in the intertidal areas and estuary mouths between land and sea, mangroves provide critical habitat for a diverse marine and terrestrial flora and fauna. Healthy mangrove forests are key to a healthy marine ecology.

In many areas of the world, however, mangrove deforestation is contributing to fisheries declines, degradation of clean water supplies, salinization of coastal soils, erosion, and land subsidence, as well as the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. In fact, mangrove forests fix more carbon dioxide per unit area than phytoplankton in tropical oceans.

Mangrove forests once covered 3/4 of the coastlines of tropical and sub-tropical countries. Today, less than 50% remain. Many factors contribute to mangrove forest loss, including the charcoal and timber industries, urban growth pressures, and mounting pollution problems. However, one of the most significant causes of mangrove forest destruction in the past decade has been the consumer demand for luxury shrimp, or "prawns", and the corresponding expansion and production methods of export-oriented shrimp aquaculture. Vast tracts of mangrove forests have been cleared to make way for the establishment of coastal shrimp farm facilities. The failure of national governments to regulate the shrimp industry adequately, and the headlong rush of multilateral lending agencies to fund aquaculture development without meeting their own stated ecological and social criteria, are other important pieces to this unfortunate puzzle.

The great earnings of shrimp culture are short-lived, while the real costs in terms of consequent environmental ruin and social disruption are long-term and astronomical! While the immediate profits from shrimp farming may satisfy a few, vast numbers of coastal residents, once dependent on healthy coastal ecosystems for fishing and farming, are being displaced and impoverished.

Founded in 1992, The Mangrove Action Project (MAP) is dedicated to reversing the degradation of mangrove forest ecosystems worldwide. Its central purpose is to promote the rights of local coastal peoples, including fishers and farmers, in the sustainable management of coastal areas. MAP provides four essential services to grassroots associations and other proponents of mangrove conservation: 1) It coordinates a unique international NGO network and information clearinghouse on mangrove forests; 2) It promotes public awareness of mangrove forest issues; 3) It develops technical and financial support for NGO projects; and 4) MAP helps publicize within the developed nations the basic needs and struggles of developing countries' fishing and farming communities affected by the consumer demands of the wealthy nations. (This is done through a quarterly newsletter, action alerts, and published articles, as well as planned public forums and presentations.)

MAP's international network has grown to include over 350 NGOs and more than 200 scientists and academics from over 50 nations. MAP is currently expanding the effectiveness of its coalition work by solidifying its ties with other major environmental and activist groups in both the Southern and Northern Hemispheres. Through its wide network, MAP hopes to stimulate the exchange of ideas and information for mangrove forest protection and restoration. Also, MAP will work to promote effective regulations and enforcement to ensure sustainable shrimp aquaculture practices which include participatory coastal resource management, responsible consumer choices, and strategies for the implementation of these and other solutions.

The Mangrove Action Project maintains a Web site at <http://www.earthisland.org/ei/map/map.html> and offers membership in MAP, including the quarterly newsletter, for US\$25 annually for individuals, US\$100 for organizations.

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