



The Leatherback Trust

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NEWS RELEASE

President of Costa Rica Proposes First Elimination of a National Park, Parque Nacional Marino las Baulas

In a bold and unprecedented move President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica has proposed the elimination of the park that protects the last major nesting area for leatherback turtles in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

If approved, his proposed law will guarantee elimination of this leatherback population. The leatherback turtle is the largest sea turtle and has been swimming in the oceans for 110 million years. Over the last 20 years it has declined in the Pacific Ocean by over 90% from 90,000 adult females to less than 5,000. Less than 1,000 remain in the Eastern Pacific and most of them nest on Playa Grande, Playa Ventanas and Playa Langosta in Parque Nacional Las Baulas (Las Baulas Park). Development on nearby Playa Tamarindo and Playa Flamingo has eliminated leatherback turtle nesting on those beaches.

Under pressure from developers the President has decided to stop acquisition of lands for the Park. The proposed law will replace Parque Nacional Marino Las Baulas with a mixed refuge that will allow construction of houses and hotels three stories high within 3 meters of the beach and will establish a new system whereby developers and homeowners can veto any regulations proposed by the Ministry of the Environment with which they do not agree. This action will guarantee the elimination of the leatherback turtle population that now nests inside the park.

This is the first instance in which Costa Rica, with a world wide reputation for conservation, has moved to eliminate a park that was established in law. It may not be the last. If this proposed law is approved it will establish a precedent such that other parks that occupy land of interest to developers can also be eliminated and replaced with mixed wildlife refuges that allow extensive development. Parks such as Manuel Antonio, Santa Rosa and Refugio Cabo Blanco all have

beautiful beaches and views like Las Baulas Park. If Baulas can be eliminated then other parks can be as well.

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President Arias claims that he must eliminate the park because Costa Rica does not have funds to expropriate lands within the park. However, most funds used to date have been provided by donations to The Leatherback Trust and the Trust has a fund of \$2,000,000 available for completion of acquisition of the open land on the principal nesting beach Playa Grande. The President does not want to use those funds.

Developers claim prices for their land of \$1000 per sq meter or \$100 per sq ft, prices higher than for land along the New Jersey coast of the US. Official government appraisals for the land have ranged from \$8 to \$50/sq meter (the latter for lands with some improvements) based on land that has no development value since it is inside a park. President Arias has stated that owners should receive the \$1000 per sq meter price, thus making the price of land acquisition too high and making the elimination of the Park necessary. Since his statements new government appraisals reflect the high prices.

The Leatherback Trust has proposed a funding plan for land acquisition in Las Baulas and other Parks that would add a charge of \$1 to each hotel room and rental car rented per day in Costa Rica. This would raise at least \$10,000,000/year. With a secure funding stream Costa Rica could issue bonds and rapidly pay for all land acquisition in Las Baulas Park. Remaining funds could be used to pay land owners in other parks. This financial model is similar to plans used for new stadium construction in the US.

The bottom line is that elimination of Las Baulas Park will eliminate the leatherback turtle population that nests there and will start the process of elimination of the National Park system of Costa Rica. Completion of the land acquisition process at Las Baulas is feasible and affordable. The Leatherback Trust renews its standing offer to help in this process.
For more information

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