

VIEWPOINT

Tuna plant accord brightens celebration

What a cause for celebration — environmentalists have worked out a settlement with the west coast tuna plants that could actually put Mayaguez Bay on the road to recovery.

The good news came just in time for environmental fair held in Rincón this weekend to commemorate the 26th anniversary of Earth Day today.

The western corner of the island — centered in Rincón and extending to Aguadilla and Mayaguez — has served up more than its share of environmental success stories. The first chapters of others probably got started this weekend.

The tale of how Mayaguezanos for Health and the Environment convinced the tuna plants to stem the flow of waste products released into Mayaguez Bay will go down in the books alongside the 1993 tidings of how they stopped a coal plant from locating along the bay.

Mayaguezanos executed this latest feat under the leadership of president Juan Carlos Martínez Cruzado, a faculty member at the University of Puerto Rico's Mayaguez campus and a key figure during the eight months of quiet negotiations that ended with the signing of an agreement last Friday.

Those wondering how they reached this accord may find clues in the words of another negotiator for Mayaguezanos, Father Henry Beauchamp.

"When we sat at the negotiating table, it was the tuna executives and us. We said



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we wanted the lawyers to be mere observers," the Catholic priest explained.

He also suspected that the group's willingness to pursue legal action against the plants helped make their case, especially because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency took them seriously and advised the tuna plants to do the same.

But the Star Kist and Bumblebee executives were acting of their own accord in defining the agreement, and for that they deserve our real respect.

They listened to concerns about how high levels of nitrogen harm the coral reefs by encouraging the growth of algae, and responded by agreeing to reduce their daily output of nitrates and nitrites to one-eighth of the amount that had been requested under the original proposal.

The amount of oil and grease oozing into the bay will be cut by more than four-fifths, and the amount of total suspended solids will run 10 times lower than originally planned.

As a result, the "mixing zone" located where the discharge pipe meets the bay should be able to dilute the output to

relatively harmless levels, environmentalists believe.

What's more, scientists will have the resources to see for themselves the benefits of this decline in discharges, a vast improvement over the current load entering the bay from the tuna companies' waste treatment plant.

In a crowning move that earns the tuna plant executives special kudos, Star Kist and Bumblebee have committed more than half a million dollars for three years of studies to measure restoration of Mayaguez Bay and to figure out how to restore it even more, Beauchamp said.

It's an excellent way to take advantage of the expertise on hand at the UPR-Mayaguez campus, known for its sciences, particularly its marine sciences.

The campus is fertile ground for environmental leadership as well. Martínez Cruzado's predecessor as Mayaguezanos president, Julia Mignucci, also is a faculty member. Mignucci led the group into keeping a coal plant proposed for Mayaguez off-line.

Opponents made a convincing argument that the coal plant's cooling system would heat up Mayaguez Bay, which many say has noticeably deteriorated over the past few decades.

The latest agreement goes a step further by clearing the way for the recovery of Mayaguez Bay.

It can also provide inspiration for other environmentalists with their eyes on west coast.

Surfriders Foundation and the Ecology

League of the Northwest are taking to the water around the Capitol today to demonstrate their opposition to a resort planned for the Aguadilla coast, among other things.

Although it's too early to call, we can only hope that officials will recognize the value of the area for low-scale ecotourism rather than a mega-resort with more than 700 hotel and condominium units.

And the Puerto Rico Ecology League of Rincón has been logging its own successes. Besides organizing the annual Earth Day festivities, action by the group forced the official recognition last month that radioactive contamination remains at the site of the nuclear plant in Rincón.

The Rincón group also has developed some regulations that, if enacted, could keep the ocean's largest mammals from getting scared off by whale-watching ships. The western coast attracts large numbers of singing humpback whales during the season — and large numbers of tourists to Rincón new whale-watching park, where they can see them even from land.

With the presence of whales, world-class surfing conditions and undeveloped beaches, the west coast holds a strong promise for attracting ecotourists, a market niche not served by the island's many luxury hotels.

Mayaguezanos' recent success at cutting down on the incoming pollution helps make this hope seem like more than a pipe dream.

Rush for telescopes leads to embarrassment

By MARK GENRICH
The Phoenix Gazette

A year ago the University of Arizona suffered its most stunning defeat of the last decade when the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld an earlier decision by U.S. District Judge Alfredo C. Marquez, ruling that the UofA must for the first time in 10 years, complete the lawful environmental impact studies for the project before building its third telescope on Mount Graham.

Seven years ago the Arizona congressional delegation pushed through federal legislation that exempted the UofA from conforming to U.S. environmental and cultural laws including the Endangered Species Act and the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

That action allowed construction of

their time.

In their rush to build on the mountain, they bungled the site selection for the \$60 million Large Binocular Telescope (formerly called the Columbus).

Not only did UofA scientists not do all of their homework, they used flawed data in what little studying they did do.

In the end, they chose the worst of six possible mountain locations, where wind would have caused unacceptable optical distortions.

Building the telescopes anywhere but "clustered off the west end of the existing fuel-break" would have triggered all sorts of messy environmental reviews.

Nevertheless, the university sought and obtained permission from the Department of Interior to build on a new site — in an area that has had more squirrels in all years before and after its selection.

Finally, the 9th Circuit ruled that if the project were to continue where the UofA

Oh, yes.

There was one item of particular interest.

An Arizona Republican congressman offered legislation on behalf of the UofA — a not inconsequential constituent — that would override the 9th Circuit Court's order regarding Mount Graham.

Appropriations measures have gone to President Clinton's desk laden with all sorts of anti-environmental goodies, and the Mount Graham goody will, once again, soon be among them.

But Budget Director Alice Rivlin concluded in March that, "No compelling evidence has been provided as to why the proposed site should be shielded from the normal application of environmental law."

In fact, the manufacturing of new mirrors for the Large Binocular Telescope is unlikely to be completed before all of the required environmental studies are done, so the UofA clearly has time to do the studies the law now requires.

Simply put, UofA officials don't want to complete the environmental studies because they are embarrassed by the fact that detailed studies will confirm there are superior alternative sites, those that are environmentally sound and that do not desecrate land the Apaches hold sacred.

In 1988, Sen. Dennis DeConcini said Arizona couldn't wait.

The UofA plowed ahead, and Mount Graham was forever changed.

Haven't we learned anything?