

INVITATION TO SECOND RAPID ASSESSMENT VISUAL EXPEDITION, BALANDRA RAVE

“ Dear all,

Some of you are already aware of something that is happening in the Gulf of California, in a beautiful area called Balandra. Rodolfo Ogarrio, the president of the Mexican Foundation for the Environmental Education wants to organize a RAVE in this area because land development and political influences are threatening the conservation of a proposed protected area.

Even though Balandra is not a big surface, we cannot let go these important opportunities for conservation. We cannot allow ourselves to lose this kind of "battles". We came up with an initial RAVE team that includes 6 photographers, including myself, that would lead the trip: (Annie Griffith Belt, Joel Sartore, Flip Nicklin, Jack Dykinga and James Balog)

We were considering SEPTEMBER as a provisional date for this RAVE. We need to act very fast and I am conscious that some of you won't be able to make it, but this is a very initial exploration of who would be available and the dates more convenient.

*Thanks for your interest
Patricio ”*

Below you will find a letter that Mr. Ogarrio sent to Cristina in order to explore the possibilities of sending a RAVE team to Balandra, in Baja California:

“ Balandra is a beautiful place in the northern end of Baja California peninsula. The marsh complex has a good extension of mangroves and it is surrounded by white sand beaches and steep sierras. In 2004, the City council of La Paz according to Mexican Constitution article 115 that allows municipalities to create protected areas, declared Balandra as a PA, with an approximate surface of 1900 hectares.

Unfortunately, owners of Balandra lands— set an appeal for legal protection to prevent the creation of this protected area and they won it, forcing the municipality to cancel the declaration.

Before the resolution of this legal procedure, Balandra had been temporarily included in the nomination presented to UNESCO to declare some of this marine protected areas and all the Gulf of California islands as a World Heritage Site, initiative that was approved in July 2005. However, after the municipality was forced to cancel the protected area declaration, they were obliged to remove Balandra from the UNESCO nomination.

Legal lobbying is being done in the municipality to avoid the legal inconsistencies that made possible the abolition of the protected area and the citizens are driving an exhaustive campaign to protect Balandra to all

levels, interviews, propaganda, TV, local information boots, etc...

Uncontrolled land development projects in Baja California peninsula is a big concern amongst conservationists in the area. I visited the area this weekend and some bulldozers are already working in some of the nearby properties, without any consideration of the desert vegetation or the topography, to sell the lands to a developer.

It is therefore a matter of urgency to support the local authorities and La Paz citizens in this hard and unequal fight to achieve the protection of this emblematic and unaltered place, an area of extraordinary natural beauty. A symbol for the city of La Paz that has attracted generations of citizens of the area in search of an encounter with nature, of spiritual harmony and peace.

If as soon as possible develop a photographic expedition of three days inviting some of the members of your organization we could obtain the so much needed photographic materials of highest quality in order to create a simple but convincing publication which tells the story of the area and the struggle to protect it against land developers."

Rodolfo Ogarrío