

In press. Proc. 24th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation. San José, COSTA RICA

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE GREEN TURTLE BAN IN COSTA RICA

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In 1999, the Constitutional Court of Costa Rica ruled that the green turtle fishery was unconstitutional. Subsequent national legislation has reinforced the ban on hunting and the prohibition of trade in green turtle products in Costa Rica. We evaluated the economic consequences of the ban by quantifying gross revenue from consumptive and non-consumptive use. We also estimated green turtle conservation expenditure and the energy contribution of the green turtle population to terrestrial ecosystems in Caribbean Costa Rica in 1998 and 2002. We identified and pooled key stakeholders into loosely defined groups to evaluate the economic consequences experienced by each group. We estimate the total green turtle gross revenue and conservation expenditure in Caribbean Costa Rica increased from US\$5,100,000 and an energy contribution to terrestrial ecosystems of 1,700 GJ in 1998 to US\$7,100,000 and 1,500 GJ in 2002. Our analysis shows that the ban on hunting has increased gross revenue from green turtle use, mainly by promoting continued growth of green turtle ecotourism. This is particularly apparent in Tortuguero National Park where tourism visitation to participate in nightly turtle tours continues to increase. However, in terms of economic income from legal activities, turtle fishers and traders have been negatively affected by the ban. A remaining challenge is to ensure that this group also benefits economically from non-consumptive ecotourism use. We believe detailed studies aimed at identifying income distribution within each stakeholder group would be highly beneficial. The results of such studies would be helpful to decision makers trying to define strategies to increase the proportion of economic benefits that reach key stakeholder groups.