

Coastal Range Agreement [Summary:](#)

Jan 13, 2003

A Conservation Victory for 2003: Chilean Government Agrees to Change the Route and Standards for the Southern Coastal Highway Alleviating the Single Most Important Threat to the Valdivian Coastal Forests.

In the Valdivian Temperate Rainforest Ecoregion, 2003 began with one of our most significant conservation victories to date. On January 11, the Coastal Range Coalition signed an agreement with the Chilean government calling for major changes in the Southern Coastal Highway project in order to protect the Valdivian coastal rainforests.

The Coastal Range Coalition (CRC) is a federation of 15 environmental, indigenous and social organizations.

The Agreement

The CRC and Chilean government signed an agreement titled:

“Public-Private Cooperation for the Implementation of a Scenic Minimum Impact Route and the Conservation of Biodiversity in the Coastal Range: Redesign of the route and standards for the coastal highway in the 10th Region and mechanisms for the creation of protected areas.”

The agreement was signed in the City of Valdivia by the highest relevant authorities of the Chilean government, including:

Minister Javier Etcheberry, Ministry of Public Works (MOP)
Regional Governor Patricio Vallespin, 10th Region
Executive Director Gianni Lopez, National Environmental Commission (CONAMA)
Executive Director Carlos Weber, National Forest Corporation (CONAF)
Minister Jaime Ravinet, Ministry of Housing and Public Lands.

This is a detailed agreement and provides a number of specific commitments on the part of the Chilean government, including the following areas:

- **Route Change:** Over 80% of the highway's route is changed by this agreement, moving the highway from the route originally planned along to coastline, to the “East-side Alternative” put forward by the CRC . This moves the project inland out

of the priority area's main block of forested wilderness and away from the fragile coastline. Of the approximately 300 km involved in the project, the agreement states that 250 km will change. Another 20 km have already been constructed, and the route for the final 30 km will be determined through studies and with the participation of the CRC. According to this agreement, the guiding principle for this review will be the use of existing roads and minimization of environmental impact.

Environmental review: Every section of the highway construction will require a full environmental impact assessment. These are voluntary commitments since Chilean law does not require EIA's for road projects.

- **Technical standards:** The standard for the entire route will be changed from an industrial penetration route with a minimum standard of 70 km/hr to a "scenic route" with a minimum standard of 40 km/hr. This means that the direct impacts of the project can be greatly reduced, as it can now include more curves and steeper grades, thus requiring less earth movement.
- **Participation:** A technical committee will be formed to supervise highway design. The CRC is guaranteed a seat on this committee which will be chaired by the CONAMA.
- **Protected areas:** For the first time, all of the relevant authorities commit to the establishment of a protected area in the northern portion of the coastal priority area. Specific mechanisms are set out including protection of existing fiscal land and a land swap for private lands.

Baseline situation before the CRC campaign:

Before our engagement on this issue the Southern Coastal Highway was being built without any environmental review and without public debate. It was a "stealth project" driven by a presidential order and had never been subject to the standard cost-benefit analyses or public debate. No other environmental organization was engaged on the issue.

Prior to the environmental campaign, the road was being built without any environmental review. Chilean law does not require environmental impact assessment for road projects. In the approximately 20 km. built the project which is surrounded by recent clearcuts and eucalyptus plantations, looks like a stripmine with enormous road cuts eroding into the Pacific ocean.

The highway would have constituted a penetration road for the timber industry through the otherwise largely roadless area of approximately 900,000 acres of coastal rainforest.

Coastal Range ecosystems and the need of protect them were almost non existing in the politic agenda, and authorities historically did not pay attention to the area, and its outstanding biological values. The role of local stakeholders have not been considered as

counterparts at all in the political decisions, especially indigenous communities, and environmental groups.

Next steps

In order to ensure that the government follows through with its commitments, the CRC must monitor the implementation of the agreement and also continue the successful communications campaign which created an environment for change. The CRC must actively engage with the environmental review and route design process for the coastal highway..

Additional support will be necessary for further steps in the consolidation of new protected areas, including fundraising, site selection, negotiations, management, human resources and technical capabilities among partner organization and government agencies.