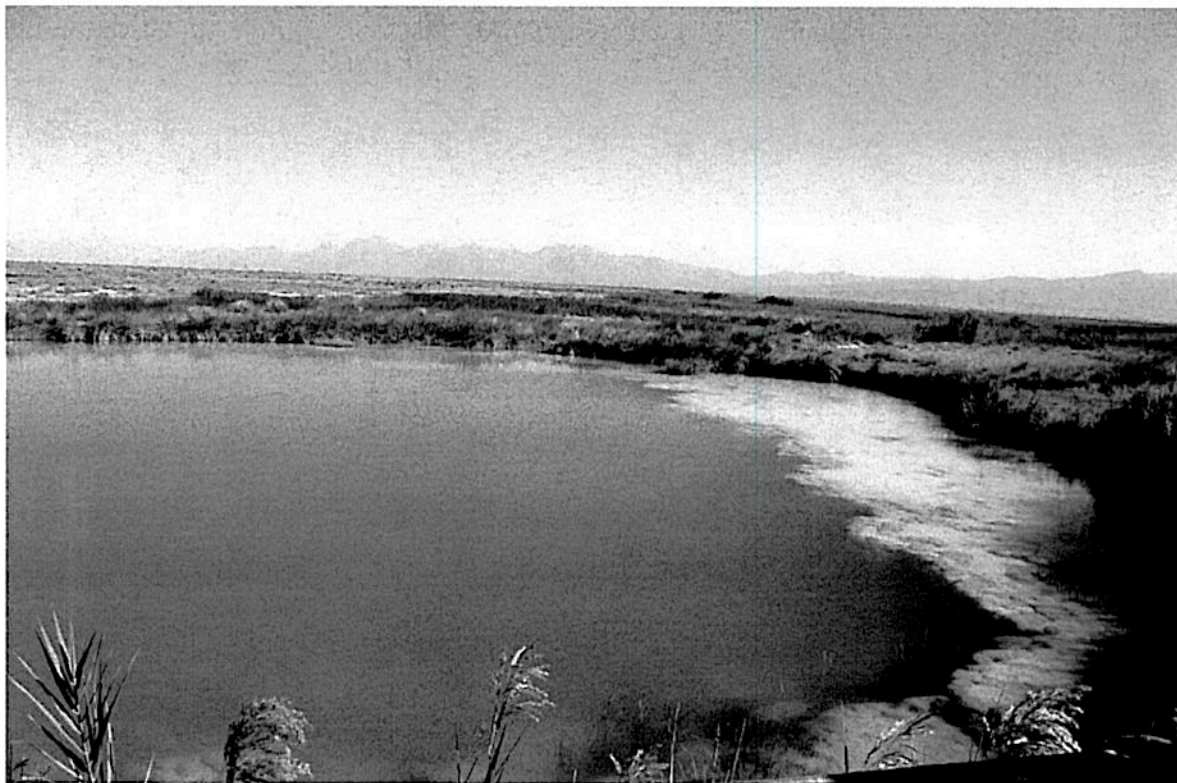


Press release

August 3, 2014

Conagua's unprecedented resolution serves as an example to the world by authorizing water concessions for "environmental use" to conserve biodiversity and valuable and unique ecosystems



Cuatro Ciénegas, Coahuila, México- In a historic event, the National Water Commission (CONAGUA) awarded for the first time in Mexico the concession of surface waters that flow from Pozas Azules Ecological Reserve, located within Cuatrociénegas' Area for Protection of Flora and Fauna, established by the National Commission for Natural

Protected Areas (CONANP), state of Coahuila, to the non-governmental organization Pronatura Noreste, A.C., for “**environmental use.**”

According to the National Waters Act, “**environmental use**” means the *minimum flow or volume necessary in receiving bodies, including streams or reservoirs of various types, or the minimum natural discharge flow of an aquifer, which should be preserved to protect the environmental conditions and the ecological balance of the system.*

By this act, CONAGUA establishes the necessary legal mechanisms to ensure the security and legal certainty of water resources needed to protect priority ecosystems, thereby supporting the healthy environment to which every person in Mexico is entitled for his/her development and well-being under article 4 of the Mexican Constitution, while also promoting sustainable development of water resources.

Mauricio de la Maza, director of Conservation of Pronatura Noreste explained that “although very important steps had been taken concerning water and the environment, it was necessary to establish a concrete mechanism to allow the granting of a national water concession for environmental use.”

Similarly, the CONAGUA said that this institution recognizes the social and environmental importance of water, since it is indispensable to sustain life on the planet, in addition to being an essential component for social welfare and economic development. Wasting of water, the competition for its exploitation, and pollution generate a growing problem, whose solution requires proper planning and management of water resources.

Edmond Grieger, Partner of Von Wobeser y Sierra, S.C. , who assisted Pronatura Noreste on a pro bono basis with this matter, stated: “This valuable project, in addition to implementing the principles of environmental protection set forth in the relevant laws, provides security and legal certainty in the protection of Cuatro Ciénegas and its water bodies with a legal instrument that protects them against acts by third parties that may endanger the environmental conditions and the ecological balance of this very important area.”

The Cuatro Ciénegas valley is located in the state of Coahuila, which is the third driest state of the country. In contrast with the rest of the state, Cuatro Ciénegas has numerous pools inhabited by abundant aquatic species that have evolved over millions of years to result in an incredible variety of plants and animals. The unique hydrological system of Cuatro Ciénegas has created a fascinating mixture of fish and reptile species that are found nowhere else in the world. On November 7th, 1994, it was declared an Area for Protection of Flora and Fauna encompassing 84,347 hectares. The reason for its protection lies in its natural beauty and the remarkable scientific value of its flora, fauna, and water.

However, practices that reduce the amount of available water have a direct impact on the survival of both aquatic and land biodiversity. As a result of these practices, over 70% of shallow lagoons - a critical habitat for waterfowl and other forms of life such as the endemic Coahuilan box turtle (*Terrapene coahuila*) - have been lost. The Garabatal river and its wetlands have also disappeared.

Magdalena Rovalo, General Director of Pronatura Noreste, commented: "This organization is privileged, because its ecological reserve Pozas Azules still has water. We conserve its springs that, surprisingly, have not lost their flowing water and biodiversity. However, this does not mean that we are not concerned about the ongoing disappearance of water bodies in the valley right beside us, so we remain focused on its protection and restoration."

With these actions, CONAGUA; Pronatura Noreste, A.C.; Von Wobeser y Sierra, S.C.; and The Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice realize *de facto* the full incorporation of environmental considerations and the social and economic value of national waters in the policies, programs, and activities relating to water resource management.