Ecological Society of America
1990 M Street, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036

President Daniel Ortega
Embassy of Nicaragua
1627 New Hampshire Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20009

February 23, 2015

Dear President Ortega,

On behalf of the Ecological Society of America (ESA), the world's largest professional society of ecologists, I am writing you concerning construction of the Interoceanic Canal that would run through Lake Nicaragua to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. As you are aware, the Nicaraguan Grand Canal commission that represents the Nicaraguan government approved the canal project and awarded a long-term contract (50 years with a renewal of additional 50 years) to a Chinese-based company, Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development (HKND). Although construction began in December of 2014, a full review of the project's environmental impacts has not yet occurred.

Scientists from the InterAmerican Network of Academies of Science joined biodiversity, engineering, and hydrology experts from Nicaraguan Academy of Sciences and the International Council for Science to caution that the project must minimize unintended adverse consequences to prevent economic, environmental, and social harm.

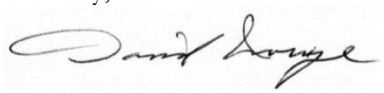
ESA joins the international scientific community in urging an open discussion between scientific experts, HKND, and the Nicaraguan government about the Interoceanic Canal's environmental impacts before more construction continues.

The project is expected to include construction of roads, pipelines, and coastal harbors as well as a new railroad, airport, and coastal tourist facilities. Editorials in *Nature* and *Science*, two of the world's leading science journals, have called international attention to the potential direct and indirect impacts of the projects.

Environmental impacts are likely to affect several biological reserves of tropical forests and coastal zones. Apparently, the current plans for the Canal's selected route will require building two sets of locks and dams on each side of the isthmus, and construction of a dam and a large reservoir (Lake Atlanta). The route will cross a 105-km shallow section of Lake Nicaragua, also known as Lake Cocibolca, the largest lake in Central America and the second largest tropical lakes in the Americas. It is estimated that the approximately 500-m-wide and 30-m-deep channel could require the removal of around 1.2 billion tons of sediment from the lake bottom in addition to a great deal of soil removal to complete the terrestrial sections of the canal. The dredging and deforestation within the watershed would potentially accelerate ongoing eutrophication of the lake thereby creating degradation of the lake's healthy aquatic ecosystem. This degradation will negatively affect local fisheries, recreation economies, and drinking water quality.

Thank you for your consideration of ESA's request for an open discussion among scientific experts, HKND, and the Nicaraguan government about the environmental impacts before more Interoceanic Canal construction proceeds.

Sincerely,



Dr. David W. Inouye
ESA President

cc: Ambassador Phyllis M. Powers, Ambassador Francisco Obadiah Campbell Hooker, Mr. Wang Jing