Proposal

The Galapagos-Cocos Swimway is an area of ocean rich in biodiversity, measuring approximately 120,000 sq. km, that follows the Cocos Ridge - an underwater mountain range that links the Galapagos and Cocos Marine Reserves. Recent studies have demonstrated that sharks and turtles use the swimway to migrate between the marine reserves, putting them at grave risk to industrial fishing.

Turtle Island Restoration Network and our partners propose a bilateral initiative to protect the Cocos-Galapagos Ridge Swimway between Ecuador and Costa Rica. The goals are:

1. To protect populations of threatened migratory species & increase resilience of commercial fish stocks;
2. To foster technological innovation in the fields of open water management, bycatch reduction & biological/oceanographic research;
3. To promote sustainable fishing practices & increase the share of benefits for artisanal fishermen;
4. To show leadership on a global level in the development of bilateral marine conservation actions; and

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Background

In 2003, the governments of Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Panama signed the Declaration of San Jose, creating the **Eastern Tropical Pacific Seascape (ETPS)**. This area of over 2 million hectares comprises the entire national waters of all four nations. The objectives of the ETPS are to protect key biodiversity, to foster sustainable fishing and employment in coastal communities, and to promote regional cooperation.

Two of the most important biodiverse hotspots in the ETP are **Galapagos Marine Reserve** and **Cocos Island National Park**. Both are UNESCO World Heritage Sites and provide protection to a host of threatened endemic, native and migratory species. Both host some of the world’s most recognized eco-tour dive sites, generating millions of dollars in revenue. They are some of the last remaining sites in the world where huge schools of hammerhead sharks may still be found.

They provide important habitats for several endangered and critically endangered turtle species, including Eastern Pacific green turtles and leatherback turtles respectively. Whale sharks migrate through their waters. Yet once these species move outside the boundaries of these marine reserves, they are threatened by longline and purse seine industrial fishing vessels.

These two areas are linked by a 700 km chain of seamounts called the Cocos Ridge. Studies have shown that several key marine species move between these two Marine Protected Areas, including scalloped hammerhead, Galapagos, silky and whale sharks, and leatherback and green sea turtles.
Importance

The Cocos Ridge is a highly productive area, where industrial purse seine and longline fishing takes place. Yet many of the vessels fishing here are not from Costa Rica or from Ecuador.

Both nations now adhere to the United Nations Law of the Sea, and claim 200 Nm exclusive economic zones. This means that the entire area of ocean between the limits of the Galapagos and Cocos marine reserves lies either in Ecuador or Costa Rica.

Both countries are now in a position to:

1. protect their biological resources;

2. ensure that the benefits of the ocean are directed towards their own people; and

3. enforce their sovereignty.

“Illegal fishing is driving sharks and sea turtles toward extinction, and we will do everything we can to end this assault on the very ocean ecosystems that sustain life for humans and all living things.”

- Todd Steiner, Executive Director of Turtle Island

Endangered Scalloped Hammerhead Sharks use the Swimway...
Capturing the World’s Attention

More than 13 scientific publications, 11 scientific presentations, 7 documentaries, and hundreds of media hits have been generated from our work in Cocos Island, Costa Rica. Turtle Island’s and our partners’ landmark marine research, combined with innovative conservation programs that make use of the best available technology, have captured the world’s attention. See examples below.

**TV & Documentaries**

- National Geographic Channel

**Newspapers, Magazines & Blogs**

- The Tico Times News (Costa Rica’s Newspaper of Record)

**Scientific Presentations**


**Scientific Publications**

Scientific Publications


Scientific Presentations


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Documentaries, Films & TV


Newspapers, Magazines & Blogs


Clemmes, Danny, Conservationists Turn to Drones to Protect Cocos Island. Discovery. July 25, 2015.


