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Putting Smithsonian Science to Work:

A New Plan for Panama's Coiba National Park and World Heritage Site

Conservation of one of the greatest natural wonders of the Eastern Pacific took a great leap forward as the Republic of Panama's National Environmental Authority received the new management plan for Coiba National Park at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

UNESCO, the United Nations Foundation and Conservation International supported three years of effort facilitated by Juan Maté, coordinator of marine technical agreements at the Smithsonian, which culminated in the presentation of the planning document June 23.

Nearly \$11 million will be sought over the next five years to establish the public outreach, resource management and administrative and security programs needed to make the park an effective protected area. The plan identifies seven terrestrial management zones and two marine areas.

Panama's Coiba Island, the largest island along the Pacific coast of Central America—a former penal colony—became a National Park in 2004 and a World Heritage Site in 2005. Coiba, home to endemic animal and plant species, forms part of the Eastern Pacific Marine Corridor with Ecuador's Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica's Cocos Island and Colombia's Mapelo and Gorgona Islands.

“Coiba National Park is rich in biodiversity and presents countless opportunities for scientific research,” said Eldredge “Biff” Bermingham, director of the institute. “The Coiba management plan is an excellent example of the union between science and conservation to improve management of natural resources for the benefit of all.”

At the request of Panama's National Environmental Authority, the Smithsonian directed the planning team composed of Panamanian professionals who worked closely with the Authority's director's council and scientific committee. Neighboring communities, institutions, educators and authorities in Panama's Province of Veraguas contributed substantially to the plan.

According to Ligia Castro de Doens, Minister of Conservation and the Environment and general director of the Environmental Authority, “The management plan provides guidance for Coiba

National Park managers, setting forth the objectives, norms, directives, possible uses and strategies for the preservation and sustainable use of this World Heritage Site.”

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, headquartered in Panama City, Panama, is a unit of the Smithsonian Institution. The institute furthers the understanding of tropical nature and its importance to human welfare, trains students to conduct research in the tropics and promotes conservation by increasing public awareness of the beauty and importance of tropical ecosystems.

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