



**RESOLVING CONFLICT ISSUES AMONG RESEARCH,  
COMMUNITY INTERESTS, AND GOVERNMENT  
AGENCIES IN THE FOREIGN CONTEXT**

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## THE PROBLEM

Idea that research is fundamental to resource management can result in conflict.

Whether resource is

- Technological
- Agricultural
- Natural



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## **THE PROBLEM**

**Conflict between research and *community interests* may stem from differences in priorities for resource uses.**

- may assume interruption in lifestyle.**
- may expect income benefits to community.**
- may lack interest because do not understand benefits.**
- may not see knowledge as beneficial.**

**Conflicts between research and *government agencies* may stem from government priorities on implementing regulations, generating laws, and complying with conventions**

- decision-making using research findings not considered important.**
- may expect research to bring income benefits to government agencies.**
- may not understand how findings can be utilized.**



## **THE NEED**

**Need to resolve conflicts for benefit of all parties involved.**

**But, how to go about finding resolutions to conflicts among parties with the additional complication of the foreign context?**

**Present two examples of conflicts we experienced in the last year that threatened to derail our research efforts on sea turtles in the country of Honduras.**



## CONFLICT #1: THE STORY





### Background



- The Protective Turtle Ecology Center for Training, Outreach, and Research, Inc. (ProTECTOR Inc.) was started in 2007 to facilitate graduate students doing research on sea turtles in Honduras.
- Prior to ProTECTOR's work, no information on sea turtles available for Honduras.
- From 2006 – 2013, ProTECTOR Inc received research permits from Fisheries Honduras (DIGEPESCA). Good relationship. Changed from 1-yr permits to 4-yr permits. First in history.
- In 2014, ICF (National Protected Areas Managers Government Agency) recognized ProTECTOR Inc. doing research in protected areas of Honduras.
- Said ProTECTOR Inc. needed permit from ICF, but ICF had no communications with DIGEPESCA.
- We said, "OK, tell us how to apply for the permit and will do right away!!"
- ICF had no online or paper application process available. Told us to write projects, purposes, and methods, then submit this information.
- We did so and submitted in May, 2014.

# CONFLICT #1: THE STORY

## Problems

1. Immediate lack of communication from ICF (denied permit and put in file, but did not communicate decision).
2. Reviewers lacked understanding of research  research methods. Reached a part of proposal didn't understand – 
3. Once revised, results . Once again, when reached a part of proposal didn't understand - 
4. Revised several times until they said it was now fine, but needed to be signed by Minister.
5. In meant time, the Roatán Marine Park (a local NGO) wrote letter requesting that ICF NOT provide us a permit, because they did not want ProTECTOR Inc. to “harass *their* turtles.” (CONFLICT #2).
6. Now ICF said could not move the application until RMP withdrew the letter and gave their approval.
7. ICF agent sitting on permit – wanted a “Communication Tax”





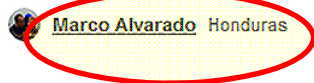
## **CONFLICT #1 (ICF): THE SOLUTIONS**

- **We revised methods in as clear terms as possible, ensuring that all information was provided to fully (and in simple terms) explain methods.**
- **ProTECTOR Inc. Country Director spent MANY hours meeting with and discussing/explaining research methods.**
- **In 2015, ProTECTOR Inc. facilitated an inter-governmental meeting to disseminate factual information regarding need for research, methods, need to streamline permit process.**
  - **Met with Fisheries, SAG, ICF, CITES, Min Environment, WWF Honduras, Dept. Biodiversity, and National University.**
  - **Clarified methods; prioritized research for managing turtles of Honduras; define responsibilities of actors; discussed standardizing and institutionalizing research protocols in Honduras; Fisheries resolved to renew research permits for ProTECTOR Inc. for 4 years.**
- **We learned the law; found international research could not be stopped by “private opinion” (i.e. letter from RMP) and that international research has highest priority.**
- **We did NOT pay “Communication Taxes.” Only leads to corruption allegations against us.**

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Petitioning <https://www.facebook.com/JerryHynds> and 2 others

# Protect our Turtles



Dear friends,

The purpose of this online petition is inform you of the growing concern by the local community here in Roatan, Honduras regarding the research efforts being pursued by one of the professors at Loma Linda University. Stephen Dunbar, is researching turtles and is working towards capturing, tagging, and taking blood samples of the wild turtles which inhabit Roatan's waters.

The objective of this petition is to ignite a call to action by Honduran lawmakers and those in key governmental offices to support the true conservation efforts of the dive and local community with the final objective of protecting the turtles which reside in the Bay Islands from invasive research practices.

## Victory

This petition made change with 110 supporters!

Share on Facebook

Add a personal message (optional)

<https://www.facebook.com/JerryHynds...>

Post to Facebook

Send a Facebook message

Send an email to friends

Tweet to your followers

<https://www.change.org/p/hl> Copy link



## **CONFLICT #2: THE STORY**

### **Background**

**Some Statements in the petition:**

**“... this so called conservation research program led by Mr. Dunbar. The grunt work is being conducted by graduate students working on their respective dissertations. In attempts to make a name for themselves, they are willing to put the community’s livelihood at risk.”**

**“One outfit out of Loma Linda University is trying conduct invasive research on the turtles which inhabit the marine park reserve. They are trying to grab turtles, take them to the surface, tag them, and take blood samples.”**

**“Who are the PhDs with prior experience conducting the research? Where is the case study on the effects of their study and what scientific journal have the findings been published in? Who is funding this research? What is the university’s (loma linda) stance on affecting the economy in a third world country for the sake of a professor to make a name for himself? Why is it so crucial to know what the turtles are eating anyhow? Once you know, will you go plant more of it?”**

## **CONFLICT #2: THE STORY**

### **Background**

**Petition was sent to:**

- **Trip Advisor**
- **Loma Linda City Council**
- **Senator Barbra Boxer**
- **Geoscience Research Institute**
- **Colleagues in sea turtle research**
- **Sea Shepherd**
- **Project AWARE/ PADI Foundation**
- **Conservation groups around the world**
- **Loma Linda Trading Post**
- **Biology Dept. UNAH**
- **Cornell Labs**
- **ICF**
- **Senator Diane Feinstein**
- **Loma Linda city manager**
- **Congressman, Pete Aguilar**





**CONFLICT #2**  
**Background**

**LLU Trading Post**

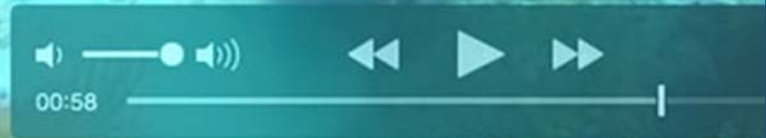
**Dear student body, faculty and staff,**

Join us against invasive research techniques in Roatan, Honduras

- pressure Steve Dunbar of Loma Linda to cease from these methods
- sign our online petition to protect turtles from invasive procedures



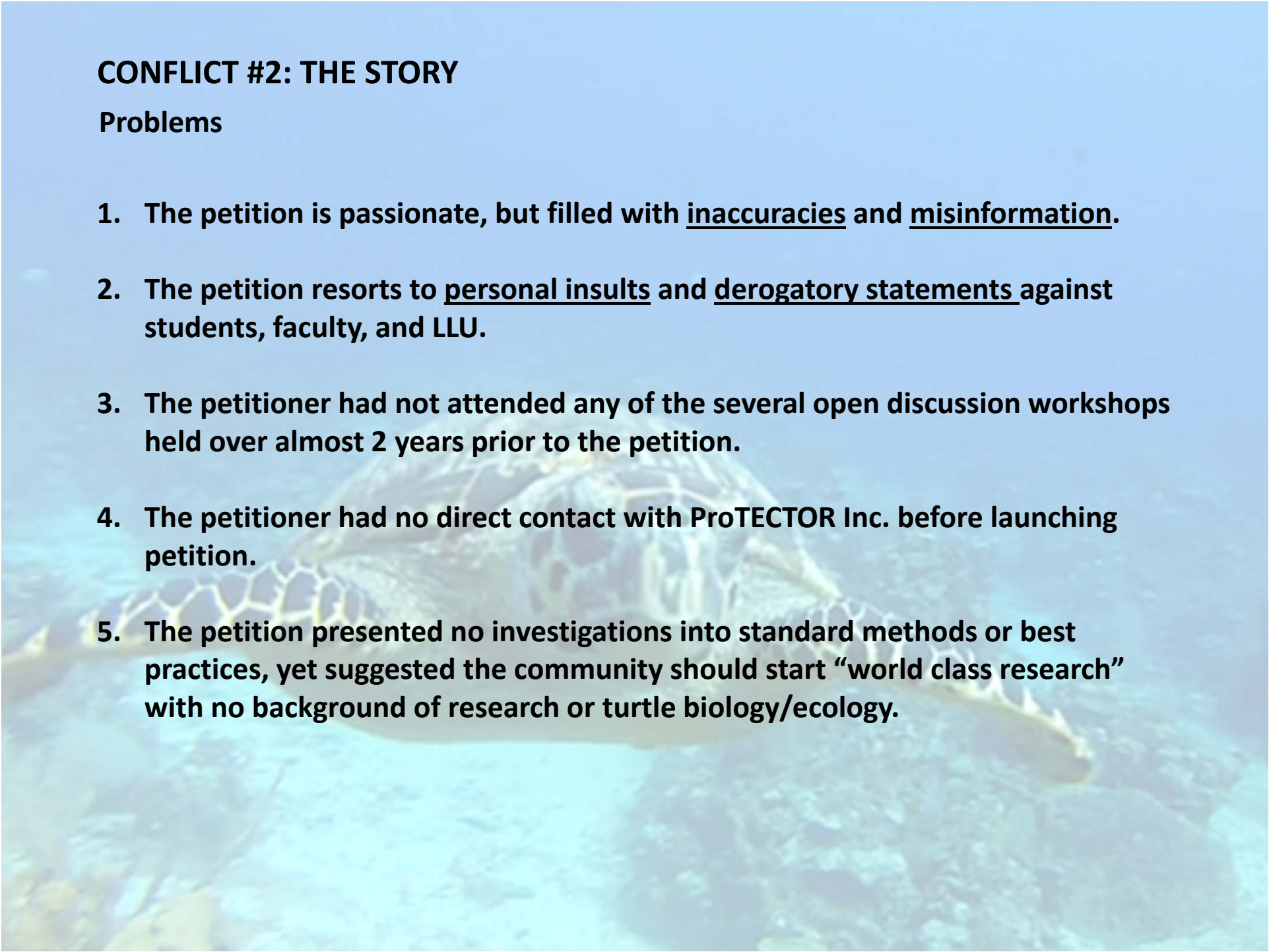
**Conservation through observation!**





## **CONFLICT #2: THE STORY**

### **Problems**

- 1. The petition is passionate, but filled with inaccuracies and misinformation.**
  - 2. The petition resorts to personal insults and derogatory statements against students, faculty, and LLU.**
  - 3. The petitioner had not attended any of the several open discussion workshops held over almost 2 years prior to the petition.**
  - 4. The petitioner had no direct contact with ProTECTOR Inc. before launching petition.**
  - 5. The petition presented no investigations into standard methods or best practices, yet suggested the community should start “world class research” with no background of research or turtle biology/ecology.**
- 
- A large sea turtle is swimming in clear, shallow blue water. The turtle's head and front flippers are visible, and it appears to be moving towards the right side of the frame. The background shows a sandy ocean floor with some coral or rocks.

## CONFLICT #2 (THE PETITION) : THE SOLUTIONS

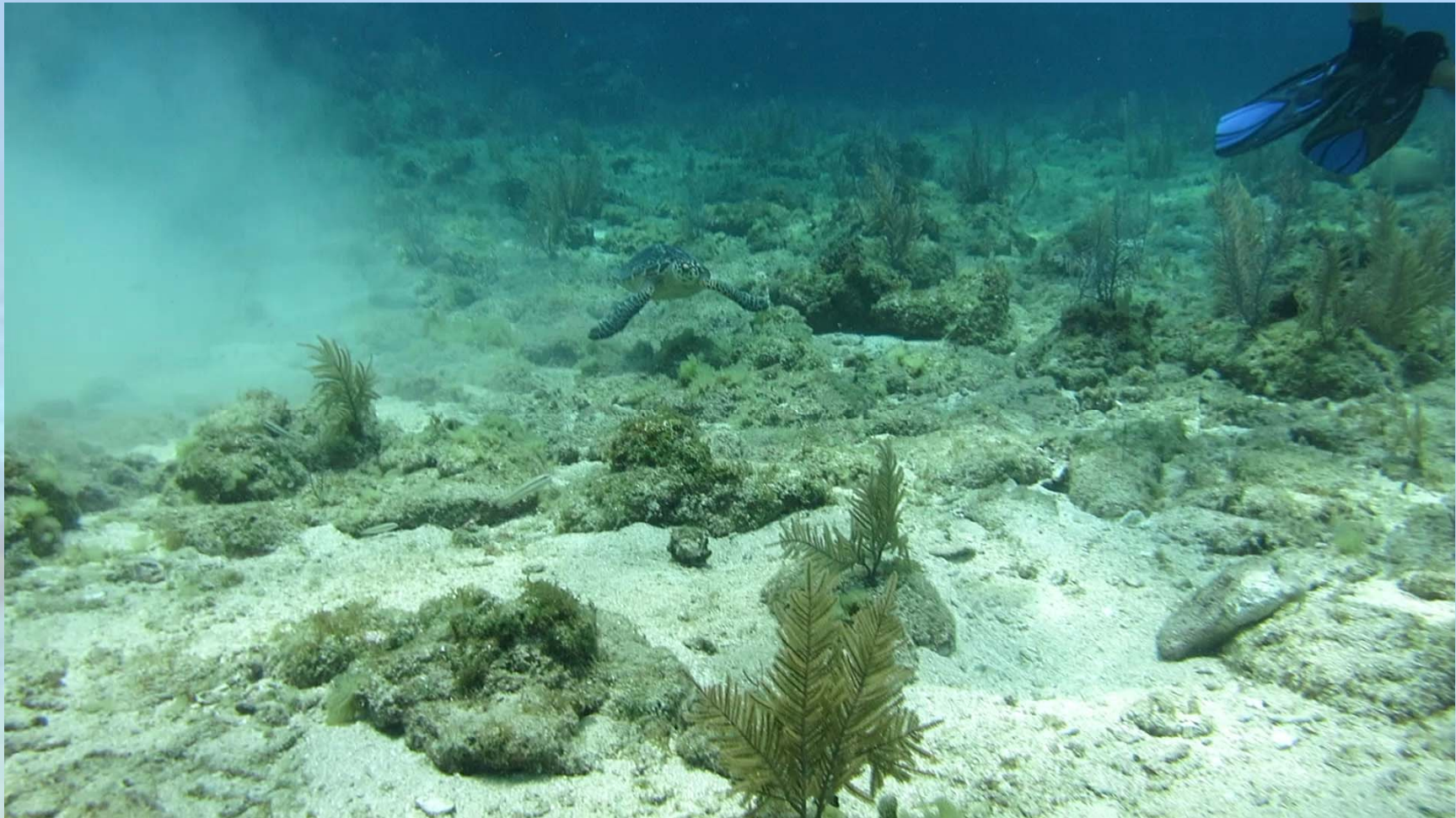
- Developed a “Fact File” of similar research with similar methods. Best practices, standardized methods, permits, evidence from other studies of turtle behaviors elsewhere, letters from other conservationists and dive operators in other countries.
- Placed “Fact File” on ProTECTOR Inc. website for access and transparency. Freely available for others to access and use in similar situations.
- Distributed information among community members/dive shops; workshops.
- \*Met personally with petitioner (Marco) and discussed approaches to research.





## CONFLICT #2 (THE PETITION) : THE SOLUTIONS

- Provided real-time evidence that fears of turtles leaving the area due to “invasive research” were unfounded.





## CONFLICT #2 (THE PETITION) : THE SOLUTIONS

- We continued to offer open workshops about methods.



- Worked to form partnerships with some community businesses.
- Received permit approval and autonomy from ICF. All opposition to the research to be handled by ICF.

## **CONFLICTS #1 & #2: THE SOLUTIONS**

- **In both cases, special attention taken to:**
    - 1. Discuss benefits of research with community and government agencies.**
    - 2. Develop understanding of both community and government concerns through respectful dialogue and cultural sensitivity.**
    - 3. Provide factual evidence in a positive light.**
    - 4. Provide further opportunities for training, education, discussion in form of workshops.**
    - 5. Strengthen existing partnerships (with Fisheries, SAG, UNAH, local community members).**
    - 6. Develop new partnerships (ICF, dive operators, DiBio, SERNA, local community members).**
    - 7. Share lessons learned with research community (ISTS presentations).**
- 
- A large sea turtle is swimming in clear, blue water. The turtle's head and front flippers are visible, and it appears to be moving towards the right. The background shows a sandy ocean floor with some coral or rocks.



# CONFLICTS: THE SOLUTIONS

Poster presented at 36<sup>th</sup> ISTS, Lima, Peru, 2016

## RESOLVING CONFLICT ISSUES AMONG SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION RESEARCH, COMMUNITY INTERESTS, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

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### INTRODUCTION

- The idea that research is fundamental to resource management (Buitrago et al., 2008) is one that can result in conflict.
- Conflict between conservation research and community interests may arise from different priorities for animals in the area (Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2015).
- Conflicts may arise between conservation research and government agencies because priorities may be different (Latin, 1993; Buitrago et al., 2008).
- In 2014 and 2015, ProTECTOR Inc. faced conflicts with community dive operators within a marine protected area (MPA) in the Bay Islands, Honduras, resulting from misinformation and misconceptions about standard methods for in-water research (Fig. 1).

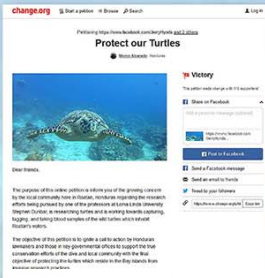


Fig. 1. The original petition started by one of the dive operators to “protect” sea turtles of Roatán from “invasive research” and promote “true conservation efforts.”

- Conflict appeared rooted in fear that research methods would disturb turtles, cause them to leave the area, and cause lost income to the dive industry.
- ProTECTOR Inc. also faced conflicts in obtaining research permits from the Honduras Government’s National Institute for Protected Areas (ICF).
- Delays in issuing research permits resulted from lack of published permit application procedures, lack of understanding basic research methods by agents, and lack of experience evaluating research proposals.
- There is need to resolve conflicts for the benefit of sea turtles and all parties involved.

### METHODS

1. Developing a “Fact File” to address misinformation and misconceptions. An information folder verifying permits, explaining “best-practices” of in-water turtle research, and giving evidence that sea turtles persist after capture from other in-water studies throughout the Caribbean.



Fig. 2. Participants at the 1<sup>st</sup> Roatán Sea Turtle Workshop in May, 2015. The workshop included two evenings of meetings (A), and a flipper tagging and blood sampling field trip. The entire group at the conclusion of the workshop (B).



Fig. 3. Additional workshops for dive operators in July, 2015 (A), and September, 2015 (B & C). These workshops were requested by dive operators, and were open to all dive organizations in the area, although some operators elected not to attend.

2. Providing opportunities to meet with community interest leaders (Figs. 2 & 3). We met with community members to discuss their beliefs and concerns about standard research methods for in-water studies, and provided them with case study benchmarking. We worked with them to propose a preliminary study where 4 turtles would be hand captured, receive standard work-ups and be released, giving dive operators opportunities to verify subsequent sightings and behaviors of these turtles.

3. Meeting with all government agencies to disseminate factual information about the need for dedicated research efforts, the research methods, and the need to streamline and facilitate research permits. We met with the National Fisheries Directorate, the Secretariat of Agriculture and Ranching, the National Institute for Protected Areas, the Department of Biodiversity, the Ministry of Environment, CITES, WWF Honduras, and the National University.

### Acknowledgements

We thank Grazzia Matamoros of WWF Honduras, Eloisa Espinoza from DIGEPESCA, and Karla Cantararo from UNAH for assistance with organizing the government and non-government agencies meeting. Background photo by Marco Alvarado

### RESULTS

#### Community Interests Resolutions

- Production of a Turtle Research “Fact File” (Fig. 4). The website can be used as a resource for other researchers to provide research facts to community interests and government agencies.



Fig. 4. The website at [www.turtleprotector.org](http://www.turtleprotector.org) where the new Fact File about sea turtle research is located. The webpage contains links to published materials and websites that describe sea turtle research from different locations around the globe.

- Change of thought and support of dive operator who initiated original petition.

#### Government Agencies Resolutions

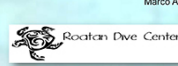
- Clarifying ideas regarding standard research methods used by ProTECTOR Inc. and other organizations.
- Prioritizing research for management of marine turtles and MPAs in Honduras.
- Defining responsibilities of stake-holders for improved management of marine turtles.
- Deciding to standardize and institutionalize research protocols in Honduras.
- DIGEPESCA resolving to renew permits for continued research of sea turtles.

### CONCLUSIONS

- In both conflict cases, special attention was taken to discuss benefits of the research and the low impact it would have on turtles with community and government agencies.
- Developing an understanding of the concerns of both community and government through respectful conversations allowed ProTECTOR Inc. to address each issue and reaffirm its commitment to sea turtles, communities, and the government of Honduras.

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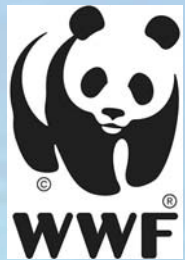


FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO:

ProTECTOR Inc website: [www.turtleprotector.org](http://www.turtleprotector.org)

ProTECTOR Inc. Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/ProTECTOR/199247040225339?ref=hl>



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