
mangrove ENVIRONMENT-CHINA: Protecting Mangrove Forests from Man

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Apr-0* *** Title: ENVIRONMENT-CHINA: Protecting Mangrove Forests from Man-Made Threats By Wu Qi BEIJING, Apr 10 (IPS) - China has long been aware of the value of saving its mangroves, but it is still waging an uphill battle to protect mangrove forests from man-made threats. In September 1996, as a typhoon battered south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, it smashed a fleet of 50 fishing boats moored in an unprotected coastal enclave off Hepu. But not far away, 30 other boats were unscathed by the barrage. The difference was a 87-hectare belt of mangroves. With their roots binding sands below, trunks breaking crashing waves and branches breaking the wind above, mangroves are one of nature's best physical defenses to protect tropical and subtropical coastlines. Biologically too, mangroves play a vital role, filtering pollutants blamed for causing so-called 'red tides' and providing rare habitats for eels, crabs and other shellfish. To date, botanists in China have identified 24 out of the more than 40 kinds of mangrove known to exist around the world. China's specimens are concentrated in its subtropics, in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Guangdong, Hainan and Fujian provinces. Despite the benefits they bring, natural mangrove coverage in China has dramatically declined over the past three decades. "It's the result of uncontrolled logging, land-reclamation, port construction and real-estate development," says Cao Guojiang, an official from China's State Forestry Administration (SFA). Oil spills and offshore drilling have also polluted mangrove forests. Over 70 percent of China's coastal water off its 18,000-km coastline falls below national standards set for the cleanliness of seawater, adds Cao. Not surprisingly, China's mangrove coverage has plummeted, from 50,000 hectares in the 1950s to 15,000 hectares at present

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