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Judge Upholds Decision to Suspend Construction Huge Dam in Guerrero

by LADB Staff

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A federal judge has upheld a decision to prevent the state-run electric utility (Comision Federal de Electricidad, CFE) from continuing work on the controversial La Parota hydroelectric dam in Guerrero state because the project would cause irreversible damage to Cacahuatpec and other nearby communities and would greatly damage the local environment. The milestone ruling could set a precedent that would allow local communities, collective farms, and nongovernmental organizations to more easily challenge large development projects.

The project, intended to boost the supply of electricity to Acapulco and nearby communities, had received support from the government of former President Vicente Fox and the administration of Guerrero Gov. Zeferino Torreblanca (see SourceMex, 2005-09-14). Judge Livia Lizbeth Larrumbe Radilla's decision follows a district court ruling in October 2006, which ordered the government to temporarily halt work on La Parota (see SourceMex, 2006-10-04).

In August, Judge Larrumbe upheld the 2006 decision and followed up in September with a definitive order for the government to suspend all work on the dam. Larrumbe's decision prevents six other federal entities, in addition to the CFE, from taking any action to move the project forward, including the Office of the Presidency, the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, the Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT), and the Comision Nacional del Agua (CNA).

Residents, environmental groups cheer decision

The latest ruling was a major victory for representatives of the Consejo de Ejidatarios y Comuneros Opositores a La Parota (CECOP) and several environmental organizations, which have been fighting the dam since the project was conceived in 2003. The ambitious project would construct a huge dam on the Rio Papagayo with the capacity to generate 900 megawatts.

Opponents argue that the dam would displace more than 25,000 residents, result in flooding about 17,000 hectares, and severely damage the local ecosystem. "We were accused of wanting to hurt our country by blocking new jobs and new projects," said Gustavo Alanis, director of the Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental (CEMDA). "Nothing could be further from the truth. All we are asking is that any projects comply with Mexican law and that they respect human rights and the environment."

In addition to opposition from CECOP, CEMDA, and several other organizations, La Parota became a focal point during the issues-oriented campaign by the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) during the 2006 presidential election (see SourceMex, 2006-01-18 and 2006-10-04).

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