

June 4, 2022

Hon. Raul Grijalva  
Congressman District #3 AZ  
President  
Natural Resources Commission  
United States House of Representatives

Hon. Nydia Velázquez  
Congresswoman District #7 NY

Hon. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez  
Congresswoman District #14 NY

Dear Representatives Grijalva, Velázquez, and Ocasio Cortez:

The protection of natural resources is increasingly important worldwide. Climate change presents an essential threat that must be countered with appropriate public policy and action for the conservation of natural resources. Puerto Rico already has in place laws, regulations, and territorial plans necessary to confront this challenge and to effect sustainable economic development in a fair balance with the protection of natural resources.

However, the Government of Puerto Rico and the agencies of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DNER), the Planning Board (JP), and the Office of Management and Permits (OGPe) have abrogated the duties designated to them by law, by failing to comply with and violating their own laws and regulations for environmental protection, thereby permitting the destruction of our coasts, our forests, our mangroves and wetlands: all classes of our natural resources. These agencies have also failed to comply with federal laws for environmental protection.

These agencies have established a questionable, if not illegal, permitting process that favors certain sectors and individuals and fails to comply with the processes established in the public environmental protection policy of Puerto Rico. These defective processes for granting development permits exclude the participation of the communities affected as well as input of impartial knowledge from the scientific and academic sectors. Irregularities in the permitting processes have been repeated throughout the territory of Puerto Rico, resulting in damage and destruction of natural resources. Examples are numerous. Nature reserves such as Bahía de Jobos in Salinas have been affected. In the Cueva de Las Golondrinas in Aguadilla, the habitat of the endangered species the Brown Pelican has been degraded in violation of federal laws. The government of Puerto Rico has allowed illegal construction on beaches, such as for the Sol y Playa Condominium in Rincón. The filling and destruction of wetlands have been allowed, such as of the La Monserrate wetland in Luquillo, and individuals with purchasing power have been allowed to seize beaches and limit the enjoyment of citizens, despite the fact that beaches are, by law, public in Puerto Rico. At Joyuda, Cabo Rojo, the president of the "Junta de Subastas de la Autoridad de Carreteras" obtained an illegal permit from the DNER for the use of a public coastal domain (more than 30 feet of public maritime zone). Also, in the municipality of Mayagüez, the Land Authority is permitting a private project in public lands that will destroy natural water bodies and important natural ecosystems.

Letter on Puerto Rico environmental issues

The signers of this letter respectfully request that the Natural Resources Committee of the US Congress, which Rep. Grivaljas directs, carry out an investigation into the violations of federal laws in the environmental crises on our Island, and refer the findings to the federal authorities with jurisdiction in this matter.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of violations occurring in Puerto Rico and open a conversation on these issues. The time was short to prepare this letter and obtain signatures. We can demonstrate broad support for this inquiry in further communications. Thank you for your attention and we hope to receive a response soon to this request.

Sincerely,



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## Letter on Puerto Rico environmental issues



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