

Nicaragua: Studies say canal impact to be minimal

November 20 2014

Officials said Thursday that studies have determined a \$40 billion inter-oceanic canal across Nicaragua will have minimal impact on the environment and society, and construction is to begin next month.

Work will start Dec. 22 as planned with a port on the country's southern Pacific coast, said Zhu Xiaoya, an official with China's HKND Group, which was picked to build the canal.

The company called the project both feasible and environmentally sound, and defended the project's commitment to standards of quality and transparency.

"We are ready to begin," Zhu said.

The route was announced in July and teams began surveying it the following month.

Some environmental groups expressed concern about the canal and its fast-track approval, and residents of communities along the route have staged more than a dozen protest marches.

"I think it's very premature to say that everything is fine," said Victor Campos of the Centro Humboldt environmental organization.

"Theoretically the presentation can say many things, but we have to wait and see."

Ecologists worry there could be extensive damage from damming rivers and moving massive amounts of soil. Others have questioned the [canal](#)'s financial soundness.

"We understand (the opposition)," Zhu said, "but we are sure that the rumors about the project will end as it advances and this century-old dream of Nicaraguans is realized."

Officials forecast at least 50,000 jobs directly created by the construction, Canal Commission secretary Paul Oquist said.

The waterway is planned to cover about 173 miles (278 kilometers) between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, including some 65 miles (105 kilometers) through Lake Nicaragua.

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Citation: Nicaragua: Studies say canal impact to be minimal (2014, November 20) retrieved 17 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-11-nicaragua-canal-impact-minimal.html>

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