

# Scientists question Nicaraguan canal in newly released report

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Credit: Source: BBC, Graphc: Erik Rodriguez

A group of international scientists have released their findings about a proposed trans-isthmus shipping canal in Nicaragua, raising concerns about environmental impact and lack of information. The scientists'

report is [available for download](#) in English and Spanish.

The mega project would be built by the Nicaraguan government with the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Company (HKND) and would exceed the Panama Canal in both size and capacity. The [environmental assessment](#) report was conducted by Environmental Resources Management (ERM), a consultant firm hired by HKND. The scientists [convened at Florida International University](#) (FIU) in Miami, Fla. in the spring of 2015 to review excerpts of the [environmental impact assessment](#) commissioned as part of the planning process for the canal.

In their report, the scientists determined the ERM assessment does not adequately measure the potential impacts of the project, noting insufficient data collection on [water](#) quality, geology, sediments, species, erosion, and fisheries. The scientists also note the time period in which the study was conducted—two years — is a shorter timeframe than what is needed to adequately evaluate long-term impacts of such a large-scale infrastructure project.

"For a project of this magnitude with so much at stake, it seems that very careful and thorough consideration is a must," said Todd Crowl, workshop participant and director of FIU's Southeast Environmental Research Center. "The time frame was simply too short to fully understand the potential ramifications and likely outcome."

The spring workshop included ecology, conservation and water law experts from FIU and other U.S. and international universities, as well as scientists from the United States Geological Survey, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama, Fauna & Flora International, Wildlife Conservation Society and Paso Pacifico in Nicaragua.

A key concern is available water for the project. Silty sediments would

be dredged in Lake Nicaragua for large shipping channels and water from the lake would be used to operate the canal's locks. Because of Nicaragua's strongly seasonal climate, which is subject to extreme events including drought and hurricanes, the scientists question the projected availability of water supplies. Overall, the scientists address 15 areas of environmental concern in the report, including deforestation, the lack of long-term climate forecasts, and likely impacts on endangered plants and animals.

"Its massive social, economic and environmental impacts will be suffered by Nicaragua and its neighboring countries, and it seems, with the little information available, that those impacts have not been properly assessed," said Henry Briceño, geologist and water quality expert at SERC, who participated in the workshop.

The scientists conclude massive ecological change would likely occur in Nicaragua if construction of the canal proceeds. To date, the 14-volume environmental assessment by ERM has not been released to the public.

Provided by Florida International University

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