

# Laguna de Términos

## Mexico

**T**his report addresses the case of Laguna de Términos, Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche. Oil activity in the area has been present in recent decades. Since its decree in 1996 as Natural Protected Area Laguna de Términos, three onshore oil wells, seven development wells and four gas pipelines have been constructed, as well as the Xilacalango gas gathering station and a gas pipeline to the Atasta compressor station.



Figure 1. Location of Laguna de Términos.  
Source: LINGO Map

Despite its enormous biodiversity, the main source of contamination in the area is Pemex's hydrocarbon extraction activities, which have had serious repercussions according to the local population.

Of the more than 5,000 livestock in Atasta, 10% have been lost due to leaks that have poisoned water for animals and crops. There have also been airborne emissions into the atmosphere which are affecting the health of the nearby population.

## Importance of the Natural Protected Area

Laguna de Términos is considered the largest estuarine lagoon system (that flows into the sea) in Mexico. It is part of the state of Campeche and the municipalities it encompasses are: Carmen, Palizada, Escárcega and Champotón in the state of Campeche.

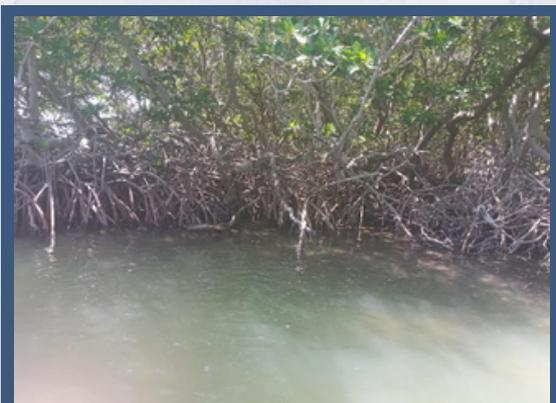


Fig. 2. Spider monkey  
Photo. Beatriz Olivera

It has an area of approximately 2,007 km<sup>2</sup>. In 1994 it was declared a federally recognized natural protected area (Área Natural Protegida) under the category of Flora and Fauna Protection Area (Área de Protección de Flora y Fauna) and in 2004 it was recognized as a RAMSAR site.

The main objective of this designation is the conservation and rational use of aquatic ecosystems to maintain the vital water cycle because the environmental services provided by this area are fundamental for social and environmental well-being.

Its marsh and wetland systems constitute the most important coastal ecological unit in Mesoamerica due its natural productivity and biodiversity (Government of Mexico, 2019). Mangroves are one of the most widely distributed ecosystems within the ANP, mainly near the coastal zone and around the lagoon systems.



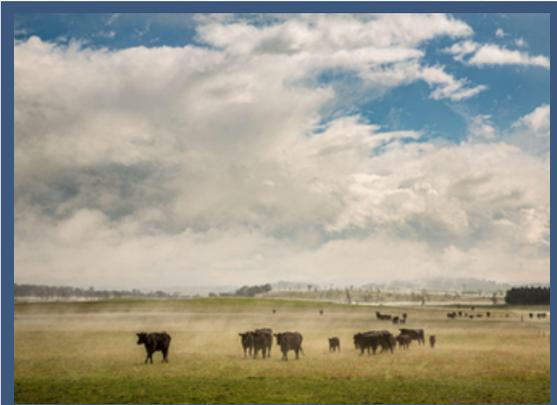
Mangrove area.  
Photo. Beatriz Olivera

The species that exist are red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*), black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*) and white mangrove (*Laguncularia racemosa*), all of which are listed as endangered.

Species such as the golden eagle, herons, pelicans, dolphins, crocodiles, jaguars, parrots, manatees, howler monkeys and deer predominate.

## *Threats from the oil industry*

Since 1994 when Laguna de Términos was decreed a protected area, it was only possible to modify existing facilities to expand its security. Despite this, three onshore oil wells, seven development wells and four pipelines have been constructed, as well as the Xicalango gas gathering station and a gas pipeline to the Atasta compression station since then. The exploration and extraction of hydrocarbons has as such continued despite the protective regulation. Consequently, exploration and extraction of hydrocarbons has continued despite the regulation under the assumptions of national security and other issues.



Cattle grazing  
Photo. Matt Palmer

Despite the area's enormous biodiversity, the main source of contamination in Laguna de Términos and the neighbouring Atasta Lagoon is the extraction of hydrocarbons by Pemex, which according to the local population has had serious impacts. Of the more than 5,000 livestock in Atasta, 10% have been lost due to leaks that have poisoned water for animals and crops. There have also been airborne emissions into the atmosphere that are affecting the health of the nearby population.

The situation has generated a series of conflicts between the local population and Pemex. By continuing new exploration and construction for hydrocarbon extraction, Pemex has not recognized the protection of this space as an ANP and RAMSAR site.

Meanwhile, the local population is being limited in their productive activities so as not to damage the ecological balance, and no support is being given to those who have been affected by the damage caused by Pemex.

It must be recognized that not all the contamination in the area is due to hydrocarbons, as there are also impacts generated by human settlements in the area; garbage in the area, sewage and waste of various types produced by urban areas, as well as the few productive activities that generate various forms of contamination.

In theory, the management programs of the ANPs define a zoning of these areas to control the way in which all activities are developed within these spaces, including population growth, work, research areas etc. In the case of the Laguna de Términos area, the management program established that it would have a space for oil extraction, which could not grow or create new prospects. This was not respected, because in addition to the activities of PEMEX, concessions were also granted to private companies in 2014 for marine prospecting in parts of the ANP, which violates the principles of the aforementioned protection. It should be noted that this has had harmful effects for the population and the ecosystem.

*The Leave it in the Ground Initiative (LINGO) is a German-based non-profit, working on accelerating the transition to a world with 100% renewable energy.*

Moreover, the following legal framework is in place to regulate the ANPs: The General Law of Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection (LGEEPA), with its regulations on ANPs, the RAMSAR Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as some specific NOMS. However, even though the LGEEPA and other regulations go have the same objective and aim to establish important limitations to activities intended to be carried out within the ANPs, the reality is that these are threatened and even a good part of them are invaded by extractive activities, which clearly goes against the function and nature of these spaces.

## *More information*

- [Gobierno de México \(2019\). Laguna de Términos establece UMA de manglar para enfrentar el cambio climático.](#)
- [Conanp \(2021\). Laguna de Términos. Fichas SIMEC.](#)