

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Twelfth meeting of the Plants Committee
Leiden (The Netherlands), 13-17 May 2002

Follow-up of CoP11 Decisions

GUAIAECUM SANCTUM

1. This document has been prepared by TRAFFIC North America.

Update on the status of *Guaiacum* research in Mexico

Background

At the 11th meeting of the Conference of Parties to CITES, the United States proposed *Guaiacum sanctum* be transferred from CITES Appendix II to I but withdrew the proposal following concerns from Mexico, a range state, regarding the completeness of information available to support an uplisting. A preliminary report on the status of *Guaiacum* species prepared by graduate students from the United States was submitted for discussion at the 10th meeting of the CITES Plants Committee. This report prompted a more detailed review of the taxonomic and distributional status of *Guaiacum* in Mexico based on a comparative analysis of herbarium specimens, which was submitted to the 11th meeting of the Plants Committee for discussion. Observers from Mexico expressed a need for clarification of the threats to and population status of *Guaiacum* in that country to determine whether and to what extent any *Guaiacum* species are at-risk from anthropogenic activities.

The Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad (CONABIO), Mexico's CITES Scientific Authority, drafted a funding proposal outlining the scope of work and budget for the *Guaiacum* population study. TRAFFIC North America pledged to seek some financial support for CONABIO's proposed work. TRAFFIC reviewed CONABIO's draft proposal, providing substantive comments and requesting a revised version for further consideration. Mexico was unable to provide TRAFFIC North America with another draft of the proposal for several months, during which TRAFFIC's budget was reduced, precluding TRAFFIC from making a financial contribution to *Guaiacum* research in Mexico.

Status of *Guaiacum* Field Work

In March 2002, the U.S. Forest Service informed CONABIO that the agency could contribute USD 10,000 towards Mexico's *Guaiacum* research. CONABIO provided an updated proposal to the U.S. Forest Service, TRAFFIC North America and the U.S. CITES Scientific Authority (Fish

and Wildlife Service) for review and comment. The proposal aims to study the effects of anthropogenic disturbance, including agricultural practices and harvest, on *Guaicum sanctum*, *G. coulteri* and *G. unijugum* in Mexico and to clarify the population status and ecology of these species in the wild. The work would be carried out by researchers from Departamento de Ecología y Sistemática Terrestres, División de Conservación de la Biodiversidad at El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR).

While the proposal presents a thorough methodology for empirical study of *Guaicum* populations, the reviewers of the proposal were of the opinion that the proposed research falls short of addressing the original question of whether and to what extent harvest impacts natural populations of *G. sanctum*. Moreover, the proposed research, including literature and herbaria reviews, ecological assessments, mapping and population analyses of all three species, would exceed the USD 30,000 budget and 12-month time table for the project.

The reviewers suggest that researchers redirect most of their efforts to eliciting information from companies that harvest *Guaicum* in an effort to inventory stockpiles, identify species harvested and determine where specimens were harvested. Subsequent mapping of these data, cross-referenced with herbarium information and supplemented with visits to the field to confirm the location of harvest and its associated habitat type, should provide a reasonable indication of harvest levels, sites and impacts. Preparing an analysis based on available harvest data may be scientifically inferior to empirical data gathered from the field. However, such an analysis may be a practical, cost-effective alternative to detailed field research that would necessitate a larger budget and more time than are currently specified in the proposal.