

Can Tourism and Conservation Co-Exist in the Caribbean?
Unique Collaboration of Tourism Industry Leaders and Conservation Organizations
Come Together to Devise Caribbean Conservation Action Plan

Washington, D.C./Punta Cana, Dominican Republic (April 24, 2003) – In a first of its kind ‘chief executives meeting,’ key decision-makers influencing Caribbean tourism development will come together to develop a sustainable tourism action plan. Balancing business interests with regional conservation will be the focus of *Making Biodiversity Work For Your Travel Business: Increasing Profitability While Protecting the Environment*, taking place April 24-26, 2003 at the Punta Cana Resort and Club in the Dominican Republic.

Tourism industry leaders will join government officials, conservation organizations, scientists and local representatives to find solutions for the greatest threats facing the Caribbean tourism industry and economy: environmental degradation and species loss. Keynote speakers include: Captain William S. Wright, Sr. Vice President, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd., Hon. Gordon 'Butch' Stewart, Chairman, Sandals Resorts and Air Jamaica, Dr. Jeffrey Sachs and Dr. Thomas Lovejoy, world-renowned experts in environmental economics, and Dr. Sylvia Earle, leading international expert in marine science and conservation.

Co-conveners include the Center for Environmental Leadership in Business (CELB), the Center for Applied Biodiversity Science at Conservation International (CABS), the Center for Environmental Research and Conservation (CERC), the Punta Cana Ecological Foundation and the Punta Cana Resort and Club.

“Tourism can be both a cause of environmental damage as well as a positive force for conservation,” said Jamie Sweeting, Director of Travel and Leisure for CELB, a division of Conservation International. “This event will bring business leaders and conservation experts together to find creative, business-minded solutions to the environmental problems facing the Caribbean.

Regional stakeholders will collaborate on a variety of pressing issues including: protecting the tourism industry from the financial risk associated with environmental degradation; identifying opportunities to protect and profit from the unique ecosystem; creating business value through environmental stewardship; and analyzing case-studies of environmental practices that have optimized investments.

“The tourism industry today faces many challenges, including increasing competition, raising operational costs and increasing customer expectations,” said Frank Rainieri, Founder and President, Punta Cana Resort and

Club. “Business leaders who do not recognize that an aggressive environmental conservation program can help them address all of these obstacles will not be successful in this changing market.”

Tourism is a particularly important industry in several of the global biodiversity hotspots, such as the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. Large-scale tourism involves major infrastructure development, increased demands for water, energy and waste disposal, and an influx of people, ideas, and cultures. The tourism industry has perhaps the strongest incentive to conserve biodiversity, as the future of its business depends on protecting the natural beauty and cultural richness of destinations.

One of the most geographically complex regions of the world, the Caribbean is a biodiversity hotspot. The Earth’s 25 biodiversity hotspots combined make up just 1.4 percent of the planet’s surface, yet harbor over 60 percent of all plant and animal diversity, and are under increasing threats. The Caribbean Basin has some of the greatest concentrations species found nowhere else on Earth. The Caribbean Sea is home to over 1,550 species of corals and fishes, a quarter of which can be found only in the Caribbean. The region’s biodiversity and natural beauty attract millions of visitors a year.

The popularity of this destination, however, has not come without cost. Invasive species have led to the extinction of a number of native plants and animals; more than 60 percent of coral reefs in the region are under threats ranging from fishing and coral harvesting to water quality degradation; and the last remaining pristine lands on these islands are being lost to new resorts and golf courses. Without collaboration to balance consumer demand with environmental protection, much of this unique biodiversity will be lost forever.

Industry executives recognize that they can no longer disregard the importance of biodiversity protection and how it affects the quality of their products. By attending this event, leadership companies in the travel and leisure industry are demonstrating the importance of reducing biodiversity loss and turning conservation into a source of competitive advantage.

Contact:

Jason Anderson

Center for Environmental Leadership in Business

(202) 912-1464/j.anderson@celb.org

About the organization:

The Center for Environmental Leadership in Business was formed in partnership with the Ford Motor Company to engage the private sector worldwide in creating solutions to critical global environmental problems in which industry plays a defining role. The Center promotes business practices that reduce industry’s ecological footprint, contribute to conservation, and create business value for the companies that adopt them. To find out more about the Center for Environmental Leadership in Business, go to www.celb.org.