

**GANDOCA BEACH SEA TURTLE  
CONSERVATION PROJECT**

**INSTITUTIONAL POLICY DOCUMENT**

**ASOCIACION WIDECAST**

2008

## INTRODUCTION

This Institutional Policy Document has come about in response to the need to solve a series of problems which have presented themselves and which require immediate attention. Comments made by past volunteers in their project evaluations have enabled us to see where we need to act first and where sanctions should be most drastic. "where there is a need to apply sanctions".

One of the most common volunteer comments is that this is a conservation project, but too often some of us seem focused on other things. We need to remain focused and avoid falling into certain practices which can affect the image of the project and everyone involved, including those individuals who work very hard to protect the sea turtles of Gandoca.

Volunteers are a very important part of our project; without them the work could not continue. The great majority of the comments made by volunteers over the years have been positive. But a significant portion of the comments are negative and have caused us to reflect on whether we are carrying out the work as conscientiously as we should.

Among the more common negative comments are:

- The local personnel don't take the work seriously, as shown when they don't arrive on time, when they sleep more hours than necessary, or when they focus all their attention on potential girlfriends.
- Illegal or unhealthful drugs are used, sometimes at times and in places linked to the project.
- There is a good deal of consumption of alcoholic beverages, and some individuals have gone on patrol in an intoxicated state.
- There are inappropriate interpersonal relationships.
- There is a lack of respect between coworkers.

There have also been complaints about the lack of security within the project. Some individuals have been the victims of thievery. Others have been harassed, including sexually. Some individuals have felt threatened,

physically or morally. Inappropriate vocabulary is used. These and other commentaries can affect the image of our project.

Beyond any doubt there are many failings in the project; with this manual we hope to facilitate prompt and definitive solutions. The intent is not to parcel out the blame but to look for solutions and to encourage everyone to dedicate themselves to the success of our work.

In the recently completed turtle season we were in danger of losing contracts with some of the organizations which send volunteers, simply because the volunteers were not satisfied with our performance. We hope that the next season will be different and that with the aid of this document our performance will be better and will occasion the admiration of our visitors.

## II. CONSUMPTION OF ILLEGAL AND UNHEALTHFUL SUBSTANCES

In a project such as ours, where individuals from different cultures and with different lifestyles live together, and especially when the majority are young people, the consumption of illegal or unhealthful substances can present problems. Sometimes this occurs as a consequence of habits acquired before arrival; at other times it arises from simple curiosity about the unknown or the prohibited. As the following sections of this document will show, the position of our project will vary according to the type of substance, and the time and place of use.

### A. Cigarettes

Smoking of tobacco becomes a problem when individuals ignore regulations about the times and places where smoking is permitted. Some smokers find

it difficult to understand these regulations. We have heard as excuses that individuals need to smoke in order to stay awake, to repel mosquitoes and, of course, because it is difficult to quit, even for a few hours.

There are two places where institutional policy totally prohibits smoking. The first is in enclosed areas comprising the installations of Asociacion WIDECAST. This regulation has been established because cigarette smoke affects not only the person who smokes but also every nearby non-smoker. There is also the danger, in old wooden buildings, of causing a fire, with obvious safety and economic concerns.

The other place where smoking is prohibited is on the beach during nocturnal patrols. There are 3 reasons for this prohibition:

- Any nearby light, even the tiny light of a cigarette, can affect the behavior of the turtles.
- The nicotine in tobacco can act as a poison affecting adult turtles, hatchlings and eggs.
- The light of a cigarette can signal our location and movements on the beach, thus making it easier for poachers to rob nests or commit other illegal acts.

The measures we are taking to control this situation are the following:

- Smoking is totally prohibited within the installations of Asociacion WIDECAST, including the house/office, the kitchen facility and the tents.
- Smoking is prohibited in the nurseries at all hours.
- Smoking on the beach is prohibited at night during patrol hours.

The person failing to comply with these measures will be reprimanded a maximum of 3 times. On the fourth occasion he or she will be asked to leave the project immediately. In the case of volunteers this will imply forfeiture of any right to a refund. In the case of employees, salary will be terminated.

## B. Alcoholic Beverages:

This has become one of our more serious problems with the greatest potential effect on security and work performance. After several years of recurring problems, it has become necessary to strictly regulate the consumption of alcohol.

The most common problems arising when volunteers or staff members have been drinking are:

- Late arrivals, because the person involved forgets his or her obligations or falls asleep. In the worst cases, individuals have simply not shown up for work.
- Inefficient work, with low quality due to the effects of alcohol. Under these circumstances, data collected can be doubtful and other work can be poorly executed. This incurs the risk that the turtle will suffer unnecessary stress, which in turn can lead to premature egg laying. In the nurseries, a person who has been drinking may fall asleep when he or she should be alert.
- Reduced security, because a person under the effects of alcohol is not totally conscious of his or her activities. This can affect the safety of the individual in question and the rest of the team through occasioning imprudent action. For example, in crossing a stream a loss of equilibrium can cause a fall, with the possibility of being swept out to sea. A fall on the beach can also be dangerous, given the large amount of wood and other debris typically found there.
- Mood changes under the influence of alcohol can lead to conflicts between team members. In some individuals this also leads to aggressive behavior, rough "play" and use of inappropriate vocabulary.
- Communication between cultures, and using "second" languages is difficult enough when sober. The possibility of serious misunderstandings increases under the influence of alcohol in a work situation.

Some volunteers have commented that this project does not appear to be serious about the fact that we are working for a common end, which is conservation. When volunteers observe that problems related to the consumption of alcoholic beverages occur regularly, they lose faith in the work. Some have decided to leave the project for this reason. Others have made negative recommendations to potential future volunteers or even to funders.

The means taken to solve this problem are:

- Each volunteer or employee will be informed that the consumption of alcoholic beverages is totally prohibited before and during the workday.
- A personal, verbal reprimand will be issued with the first infraction.
- On the second occasion, the matter will be brought to public attention, with names and dates - if possible during the weekly meeting.
- On the third occasion, the individual(s) will be asked to leave the project immediately. In the case of volunteers, any right to a refund will be forfeited. In the case of employees, salary will be terminated.

### C. Illegal drugs

It should be perfectly clear that the consumption of illegal drugs is totally prohibited, in accordance with Costa Rican law. Nevertheless, this is a problem, which occurs regularly in our project, not only on the part of volunteers, but also some staff members. The consumption of illegal drugs, apart from creating problems for the person involved, can also become a serious problem for the project without a firm no-drugs policy.

People's character and attitudes are inevitably affected by the use of illegal drugs. As in the case of alcohol, the work of a person under the influence of drugs is inefficient and directly affects the performance level of the

project. The possibility of an accident is always present, with consequent risks to the safety of the person using drugs and his or her companions.

Given the legal and judicial problems, which can arise, the use of illegal drugs is intolerable within the project. Drug use can lead to loss of volunteers or donors, which in turn affects our ability to protect the turtles.

The measures taken to solve this problem are:

- Advise all volunteers and employees that the use of drugs, in addition to endangering their personal health, can affect the quality of work and puts us at risk of becoming involved in legal problems.
- No one should attempt to hide their knowledge if such a problem is occurring.

The sanctions for disregarding these regulations are:

- With the first occurrence, a personal, verbal warning to the volunteer(s) or employee(s) involved, making it clear that a second offense will result in suspension from the project.
- A second offense will result in immediate removal from the project. In the case of volunteers all rights to refunds will be forfeited. In the case of staff, salary will be terminated.

In addition, we reserve the possibility of taking some sort of legal action against individuals breaking these rules.

#### Marijuana:

Very common in the area, easy to obtain and actively pursued by some volunteers in the past. It is strictly prohibited that any employee of the project facilitates the purchase of marijuana or gives out information on how or where to acquire it, or in any way participates in trafficking. Failure to comply with this rule can result in removal from the project.

### Other illegal drugs

With all the more reason other types of illegal drugs, such as cocaine or its derivatives (crack) are strictly forbidden. If we become aware that any individual is accustomed to use such substances they will be asked to leave the project and reported to the police.

## III. HUMAN RELATIONS

It is to be expected that in a project such as ours, in which a large number of individuals from different cultures, with different norms of behavior, participate all kinds of relationships will develop between individuals which might otherwise not occur. Some relationships will involve sincere friendship or simple camaraderie. But we are also aware that other types of interpersonal relationships, which might be categorized as amorous, will occur.

With respect to this latter type of relationships, we should be clear what will be the position of the project. Therefore we have segregated the categories of relationships as follows and explained what will be our position in each case. The project will not invest time in resolving conflicts, which arise from amorous relationships.

### A. Volunteer-local

This category refers to possible relationships between a volunteer and a local person who has no direct relation to the project. The volunteer runs the risk of emotional stress but also of robbery or physical aggression on the part of the local person, and vice versa. Volunteers, in particular, should bear in mind that they are not likely to be as good a judge of character outside their own culture as in it, and that some of the risks incurred may be



to other volunteers, project staff or property. Although this type of problem occurs very rarely, it is important to state our position:

- The project does not encourage this type of relations, especially when the volunteer leaves the camp area, where there is adequate privacy and security. Therefore we will point out to the volunteer what could be the consequences of a relationship, especially if, as is likely, we know the local person. If a volunteer persists in maintaining such a relationship, we will make it very clear that the project will take no responsibility in the case of the break-up of the relationship.

## B. Volunteer-volunteer

This refers to relations between volunteers. Often people arrive as couples to participate in our project; on other occasions they meet in the context of the project and become romantically involved. The project will maintain a tolerant attitude toward this type of relationship so long as the individuals involved behave responsibly and in such a way that it does not affect the performance of our work or the image of the project. In the case of scholarship volunteers, they will be considered as staff and treated the same as local and administrative personnel. (See below.)

## C. Volunteer-staff

This is the situation, which most concerns us, given that we need to protect the image of the project and that the staff form the most direct contact with the volunteers. The effectiveness of the project is reduced when volunteers or staff do not carry out their obligations punctually. Over the years we have observed a series of problems in this type of relationship, among them unfaithfulness and manipulation within the couple. These problems have obligated us to invest valuable project time in resolving

interpersonal conflicts. At the same time they have occasioned the reduced efficiency, or even the departure of valuable participants in the project.

Our policy with respect to this type of relationship will be the least permissive possible; we do not encourage this type of relationship. Where it occurs, it will be made clear that it should be approached with a great deal of maturity and seriousness. All involved will be reminded that the first time a problem comes to our attention one or both persons involved will be asked to leave the project.

We need to erase the bad image of "gringa hustling" which the project has had recently and demonstrate more enthusiasm and dedication to the work. In this manner we will gain the admiration and trust of the volunteers, who are, in the final analysis, those who spread word of our project.

Volunteers will not be permitted in the staff quarters, and respect will be shown to all persons.

As mentioned above, in one way or the other romantic problems have caused us to invest valuable project time resolving conflicts between individuals who apparently do not know how to manage a healthy and mature relationship. Furthermore, when these problems are present, it generally creates an atmosphere of unease within the project, which in turn gives rise to gossip which affects the image of our project. Given these facts, we reiterate that the least problem of this nature with which we are required to deal may be considered grounds for expulsion from the project. All problems within couples should be resolved by the couple and with the greatest discretion.

Our project respects sexuality but is concerned for the sexual behavior of each individual. All sexual activities, which could affect the image of the project or offend the morals of those participating in the project, are strictly prohibited. " It would not be possible to completely eliminate sexual relations between individuals in our project, but we can insist on compliance with the following regulations:

1. Sexual relations should be carried out only by established couples who know how to manage their romantic lives with discretion in a mature and healthy way. We recommend "safe sex" and the use of

condoms to prevent transmission of disease or unwanted pregnancies.

2. In no way should romantic relations affect the performance of project work. Sexual activities will not be permitted during working hours - for example during patrols or in the nurseries.
3. Sexual activities will not be permitted within the project installations, including the office/residence, the kitchen, the tents or camping areas, the showers or commons areas.
4. Sexual relations will not be permitted in the houses of local families offering lodging to volunteers. We need to respect the internal rules of each family.
5. If it is proved that any individual is not following these guidelines, that person can be suspended or expelled from the project.
6. Actions such as sexual aggression, exhibitionism, etc. will be considered justification for removal from the project, and we reserve the right to report such actions to the police.

### III. ETHICAL AND MORAL CONCERNS

We find it difficult to accept that situations occur between colleagues and friends, which create ethical and moral problems. However, our project, perhaps owing to the diversity of cultures, social classes, educational levels and economic situations represented among the participants, has not escaped this type of problems. To prevent the recurrence of these situations, we have developed the following regulations for specific cases:

#### A. Theft

To control this problem we have taken the initiative to provide lockers for all personnel who live in the WIDECASST house. We hope that this will be

sufficient to prevent theft, which should never occur between individuals who live together at a work site.

- If it is proven that any individual is responsible for, or has participated in theft, that individual will be fired or removed from the project and reported to the police.
- Everyone should be responsible for the security of their own belongings, those of the project and those of volunteers on the WIDECAST property.
- Persons not working on the project will not be permitted to stay on the WIDECAST property.

## B. Rumors/Gossip

Whatever indication of gossip or malicious rumors on the part of project staff or volunteers will be dealt with immediately and directly. The person initiating the rumor or gossip will be confronted by the parties involved. Our policy will be that if you don't have anything good to say about someone, better to say nothing. If it is necessary to comment on the behavior or work of any person in the project, this should be done through channels, to the responsible party or the project directors.

## C. Vocabulary

We should watch our vocabulary at all times. Offensive or aggressive verbal treatment between staff and/or volunteers will not be permitted or accepted.

Men should be especially careful in expressing themselves to or about women. Men should always treat our female counterparts with respect and not use vulgar or obscene terms in referring to or speaking with them.

It will be everybody's responsibility to ensure that everyone uses proper language.

#### D. Physical aggression

We will not permit rough play with the hands, since this type of activity can degenerate into conflicts and fights. By the same token, "tough guy" attitudes will not be permitted on the part of staff or volunteers. If this type of problem occurs, it will be called to the attention of the offender up to two times. A third infraction will imply immediate expulsion from the project. In the case of a volunteer, any right to a refund will be forfeited. In the case of a staff member, salary will be terminated.

### IV. RESPONSIBILITY

In this project, as in any activity, success in realizing our objectives occurs when we are responsible in discharging our obligations. We should not forget certain important aspects of responsibility, including the following:

#### A. Punctuality

Arriving on time demonstrates seriousness and responsibility. This gives a good image to our project and wins admiration for all who work on it. It is indispensable that we be punctual when arriving to carry out project tasks.

Our primordial objective is the protection of the turtles, which nest on Gandoca Beach. Thus, if we behave irresponsibly, whether by arriving late for work or leaving early, we can lose information, which might otherwise have been obtained from a turtle, or even put a turtle or its eggs at risk.

We should also consider our working companions, who naturally want to leave on time to rest. If someone arrives late, it may require those who arrived on time to leave late.

## B. Education

Something which has characterized some of the individuals who have worked with us has been their lack of education and the coarseness which they express themselves in some situations. Bad table manners have been observed. Some individuals emit offensive sounds, such as farts and burps. Others demonstrate an inappropriate, aggressive or condescending sense of humor. These problems also occur in other situations such as on patrols or when relaxing in the commons area.

To avoid these problems we should be very responsible for our actions and behave in a cultured manner. We should avoid jokes in bad taste and respect the norms of courtesy at all times. Each of us should be an example for the rest of the team; calling the problem to the attention of any individual who does not comply with these norms is the obligation of all.

## C. Respect

A general opinion about the project staff is that they do not earn the respect of the volunteers, and rather give the example of disrespectful attitudes (hand play, abuse of trust, bad vocabulary, etc.). Respect should be a mutual expectation between all who work in our project as well as with the rest of the community. Respect is important when we are working together on the beach or in the nurseries and especially toward a patrol leader and his or her decisions.

## D. Appearance and personal hygiene:

While it is certain that our local personnel have a very original manner of dress, this does not always receive the best comments from volunteers and visitors to the project.

It is understandable that in the typically hot weather of Gandoca, and as a consequence of their natural adaptation to the environment, local young men often do not wear shirts, but this is not always looked on favorably by outsiders. The matter is aggravated by the fact that often young men do not wear underwear and like to expose the upper part of their buttocks. This generates comments, which can damage the image of the project.

We will insist on shirts and prohibit the wearing of shorts "at half mast." No one will be permitted to enter the kitchen without a shirt.

Daily attention to personal cleanliness and hygiene is indispensable for both staff and volunteers. Any individual who persists in being dirty or smells bad will be sent to bathe. This is necessary out of respect for our companions with whom we live during the turtle season.

## V. CLEANLINESS AND ORDER

It is necessary at all times to protect the image of our project - what better manner than by maintaining cleanliness and order in the working and living areas. To that end, we offer the following regulations.

### A. Camp area and Hatcheries

Cleanliness and order in communal areas should be a general rule. We are aware that the staff is responsible for the work of cleaning the camp and commons areas, but this should also be considered a responsibility of volunteers and visitors. Routine cleaning of the area should be carried out on a regular basis.

In the kitchen, order should be maintained at all times and everyone should help the person in charge of the kitchen in this regard. Each individual is responsible for washing the dishes that he or she uses to eat or cook. This is especially important at night when it has become customary to leave everything scattered about and unwashed. It will be prohibited to remove food from the storage area to cook at night. All that will be available will be coffee, chocolate, tea and perhaps cookies.

In the nurseries each person during his or her shift should maintain order and cleanliness. The individual in charge of the nurseries should see to it that this rule is followed.

Ours is a conservation project; therefore it is particularly important to see to it that garbage is put in its place. We need to continue the use of the containers for sorting garbage and refrain from discarding garbage and trash on the grounds, the beach or in the nurseries.

## B. Equipment

The cleaning of work equipment, along with daily inspections to make sure nothing is missing and everything is in working order is the specific responsibility of a designated scholarship volunteer. Even so, each patrol leader should make certain that his or her gear is clean and accounted for before each night of work on the beach. We should not have to accept the loss of items for lack of care.

The bicycles, as part of the project equipment, should be used prudently and only by the staff. They should be maintained in good condition, and necessary repairs made immediately. They should be maintained in the camp area, clean, lubricated and protected from the rain.

The water pump should always be maintained in good condition; its failure implies unavailability of drinking water. It should be protected from the rain and maintained with gas and oil as required.



In general, tools are for the exclusive use of the staff and should always be maintained in the same place. If anyone needs a tool, they should request it and return it to the same place when finished. It is the responsibility of everyone to see to it that tools are in good condition.

c. “Everyone works together”

The attitude of everyone should be to comply with all the duties and obligations of the project. If another person needs help, everyone should be available to help. In the event that someone cannot fulfill his or her obligations by virtue of being ill, or because he or she has been called to another job, everyone should be available to cover this individual's work.

Our attitude from now on will be to comply with this “Institutional Policy” document. Everyone will be bound by these regulations and whoever fails to comply with them should be ready to accept the consequences, as indicated in this document.