

Discovery Bay releases first environmental statement

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Discovery Bay Resort & Marina, a tourism development project between Aguadilla and Aguada, inched closer to reality as the developers and respective mayors presented the initial environmental impact statement to the community Thursday night.

The project has been in the works for some 10 years, according to engineer Emilio Colón, who is in charge of the environmental impact and permitting process.

"It is a very complicated project that requires a lot of planning and studies because it is in a flood plain," said Colón. "We have put in a lot of effort in the analysis of both the land and the project."

At an investment of almost \$300 million, Discovery Bay — located in a 270-acre area between La Victoria Sector in Aguadilla and Espinar Ward in Aguada — will feature a 330-room hotel and casino, 737 residential units, 99,500 square feet of commercial space and a



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Discovery Bay Resort & Marina between Aguadilla and Aguada would provide the only marina in the Porta del Sol region.

marina with 500 floating docks and 500 dry-stack units, as well as the capacity to receive mega yachts. As part of the project, Cordeco Development, which also owns the land, plans two levees to mitigate the flooding prob-

lems in the area caused by the Culebrina River and Madre Vieja Channel, not only for the project but for the surrounding communities.

"We are going to build an earthen levee in La Victoria Sector and a sheet-

pile levee in Espinar Ward, which will control the flooding problems that affect over 3,000 families in those communities," said Colón.

Between both levees, they will excavate to create an inner harbor for the marina, he added.

Both Aguada Mayor Luis Echevarría and Aguadilla Mayor Carlos Méndez, who, along with the developer called for a public meeting Thursday evening to present the initial environmental impact statement, endorse the project. The majority of the surrounding communities are also said to support the project, according to Colón. Even the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, has given conditional support to the project, he added.

Once the statement is presented, Colón expects to receive comments and suggestions within the next 30 days. He foresees no negative comments, since they have carried out complex scientific studies to minimize the environmental impact.

"We believe we have conducted all the studies that are needed," said Colón.

In any case, they are open to make

changes to the project if necessary.

When the final environmental impact statement is issued, expected later this year, the developer can apply for the permits necessary to begin construction.

"We expect the permitting process to be done this year," said Colón. "We believe the project has been developed with such care and analysis that there should not be any problems."

They expect to begin construction of the first phase by the end of this year or early 2009. The first phase includes the construction of the levees and the marina. This should take one or two years. They have yet to determine what the next phase will be, though, the hotel or the residential units, according to Colón. They will be built parallel to the levees project. The completion of the project should take seven to eight years.

The construction phase is expected to generate approximately 538 direct jobs and 660 indirect jobs. Once operational, Discovery Bay Resort & Marina will generate 523 direct jobs and 677 indirect jobs.