

Mesoamerica 2020

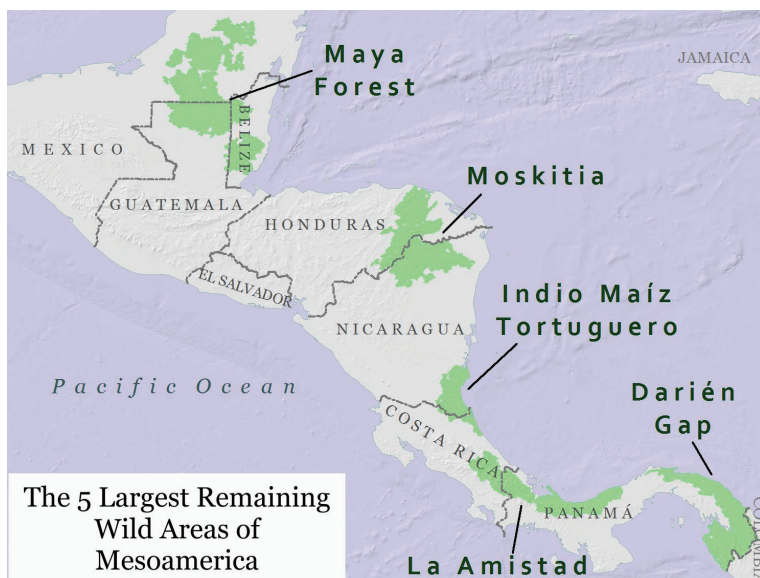
Partner-driven landscape conservation

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Ranging from central Mexico to the Panama Canal, Mesoamerica possesses one of the richest concentrations of species and ecosystem diversity on Earth. With only 0.5% of the world's land surface, Mesoamerica is home to more than 7 percent of the planet's biodiversity, including spectacular species such as jaguars, tapirs, howler monkeys, quetzals, and scarlet macaws.

Mesoamerica's wildlife and ecosystems are threatened. Nearly half of the region's natural habitats have been converted to agriculture or urban areas. High deforestation rates continue. But there is still hope for the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor.

In June 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) teamed up with the Organization of American States (OAS) to launch the Mesoamerica 2020 partnership. The goal is to ensure the conservation of the largest remaining landscapes in the region while improving quality of life for people. These landscapes are important not only to protect wildlife and critical ecosystems, but also to protect water and food security, livelihoods, and sustainable economic growth.



The 5 Largest Remaining Wild Areas of Mesoamerica

Priority Landscapes for Mesoamerica 2020 Partnership

Maya Forest: Stretching across the borders of Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, this largest forest block contains thousands of archeological treasures as well as a diverse array of plant and animal species, including jaguars, pumas, tapirs, peccaries and the critically endangered Central American river turtle.

Moskitia: As the second largest forest block in Mesoamerica, Moskitia is located in both Honduras and Nicaragua and is home to jaguars, macaws, giant anteaters, quetzals, and more than 100,000 human inhabitants, including several indigenous groups.

Indio Maíz-Tortuguero: This group of reserves and indigenous territories includes some of the most intact forest remaining in Nicaragua, as well as Costa Rica's Tortuguero National Park. The Indio Maíz-Tortuguero forest contains a mosaic of upland forests, swamps, mangroves, and beaches famous for their sea turtle nesting sites.

La Amistad: La Amistad International Park straddles Costa Rica and Panama and is a World Heritage Site. It is located in a rugged mountainous region that stands as a model for transboundary conservation and multiple-use forest management by local communities.

Darién Gap: This long stretch of undeveloped wetlands and forest connects the Mesoamerican wilderness with the vast forests of South America. The Darién is home to the bush dog and harpy eagle.

Mesoamerica 2020 establishes partnerships with key stakeholders and promotes regional cooperation in order to support effective on-the-ground conservation and human well-being.



Scarlet macaws are among the colorful and biodiverse species found in Mesoamerica, but are threatened by poaching for the illegal wildlife trade.

Credit: Chris Packham / WCS Guatemala

Threats to Wildlife in Mesoamerica

Mesoamerican wildlife is imperiled because of the following threats:

Agricultural Encroachment

Habitat loss and degradation from unchecked agricultural activities, including livestock grazing and African oil palm plantations, are some of the biggest threats to wildlife.

Uncontrolled Cattle Ranching

Cattle ranching is the primary driver of deforestation in Mesoamerica, and is especially destructive when large-scale grazing occurs illegally within national protected areas. Often it is initiated by people with power and influence who can take state and community land without consequences.

Human-Wildlife Conflict

As forests shrink and the cattle ranching frontier expands, large carnivores, such as jaguars, increasingly come into contact with people. Jaguars and pumas will often kill livestock, and ranchers who view them as a threat to their security or to their livelihoods often retaliate. Jaguars have been eradicated from over 40% of their historical range.

Poaching and Wildlife Trafficking

Illegal hunting and wildlife and timber trafficking have compounded the impacts of habitat loss and degradation, devastating many of the larger, wide-ranging species from all but the most intact remaining protected areas. For example, scarlet macaws have lost 75 percent of their range across Central America and continue to be threatened by the pet trade.

Strategic Objectives

- Promote healthy dialogue between government, the private sector, and civil society to find resilient solutions for both natural ecosystems and human well-being.
- Align policies and actions between entities charged with promoting food security, agriculture and ranching, economic development and trade, social welfare, conservation of environment, protected areas, and wildlife.
- Foster networks to facilitate regional learning and collaboration across sites to tackle pressing and complex conservation challenges.
- Secure concrete, measurable protections for priority landscapes in Mesoamerica by 2020.

USFWS Support to Central America in 2014-2016

| <i>Fiscal Year</i> | <i>Amount Awarded</i> | <i>Amount Leveraged</i> | <i>Number of Countries Receiving Support</i> | <i>Number of Projects</i> |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| 2016 | \$599,999 | \$472,415 | 6 | 9 * |
| 2015 | \$687,372 | \$767,436 | 7 | 13 |
| 2014 | \$538,853 | \$671,809 | 7 | 12 |

* Continuing funding provided to 2 previous projects.

Achievements & Highlights

- USFWS and OAS partnered with CATIE to host a Mesoamerica regional stakeholder meeting in Costa Rica bringing together 91 participants from over 10 countries to promote use of best practices and identify opportunities and training needs.
- USFWS partnered with the Technical Secretariat of the Mesoamerican Strategy for Sustainability (EMSA) and the National Coordinators of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC) to identify priorities and areas of collaboration to strengthen conservation of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor.



Farmers show some of the cacao they have grown as part of an alternative livelihood project.

Credit: Ya'axché Conservation Trust

- Based on input from Mesoamerican governments and civil society partners, USFWS launched a small grants program focused on Central America. Since the program's creation, there has been a five-fold increase in the number of proposals submitted by national Mesoamerican organizations. These projects support jaguar conservation, address wildlife trafficking, reduce agricultural encroachment in key protected areas, strengthen livelihoods for local communities, and boost community capacity to sustain programs in the long-term.
- USFWS initiated a five year partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society to secure measurable progress towards protection of Mesoamerica's five largest, most intact transboundary protected areas by 2020.

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