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# SAVING MESOAMERICA'S FIVE GREAT FORESTS

Mesoamerica's last five great intact forests—spanning from Mexico to Colombia—are biodiversity hotspots and strongholds for iconic species such as the jaguar and scarlet macaw, and endangered species only found in the region including Baird's tapir, Geoffroy's spider monkey, and the Central American river turtle; they are also vital flyways and wintering grounds for migratory birds.

Together they cover more than 12 million hectares (three times the size of Switzerland); hold about half the region's forest carbon stocks, helping to curb climate change; provide water and other life-giving natural resources to 5 million people; and harbor several World Heritage sites, including the ruins of ancient civilizations. Nearly half are managed by indigenous and local communities.

## MESOAMERICA'S FIVE GREAT FORESTS



## The Challenge

Mesoamerica's five great forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate: in the last 15 years, three have been reduced by almost one-quarter in size. Illegal cattle ranching is responsible for more than 90% of recent deforestation. Poverty, drug trafficking, organized crime, and the impacts of climate change exacerbate the threats to Mesoamerica's five great forests.

## The Solution

This initiative seeks to turn the tide. Our 2030 goals are to:

- ✔ Protect 10 million hectares of forest
- ✔ Recover and restore 500,000 hectares of forest that has been illegally claimed or cleared
- ✔ Stamp out illegal cattle ranching
- ✔ 0 extinctions of species
- ✔ Improved human well-being, especially for indigenous peoples and forest communities

## Our Strategy

Working in both national protected areas and community and indigenous managed areas, our strategy has four prongs:

### Improve governance

We will help strengthen law enforcement and remove cattle from key protected areas, including indigenous and community managed forests, by increasing capacity, staff, training, equipment and budgets for forest protection, recovery, and restoration.



### Support livelihoods

We will assist indigenous governments and community forest organizations to strengthen their rights, access, and land tenure. We will also bolster sustainable livelihood alternatives to cattle ranching, such as cacao production for local artisanal chocolate and products compatible with forest conservation.



### Address drivers of deforestation

We will tackle the main driver of forest destruction by advancing policies that disincentivize cattle ranching in critical forest areas.



### Reforest and restore

We will restore areas degraded by cattle ranching in order to maintain large contiguous stretches of forest.



# The Five Forests Alliance

To save Mesoamerica’s five great forests, we launched the Five Forests Alliance, a partnership working to mobilize resources and advance one powerful, coordinated strategy for broad and lasting impact.

Members of the Five Forests Alliance are:

- 8 Central American governments—Belize, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, and the Dominican Republic—which are part of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD)
- Indigenous peoples and local communities, including the Mesoamerican Alliance for People and Forests (AMPB)
- Founding partners, Re:Wild and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)
- Project partners: Alliance of Bioersivity International and CIAT, as well as other local and international NGOs
- Funders: European Union, Green Climate Fund (GCF), and others



## Why save intact forests?

### The Earth’s remaining intact forests:

- ✓ Serve as life-giving biodiversity strongholds for two-thirds of all land-based plants and animals
- ✓ Provide vital water supplies and erosion control
- ✓ Absorb approximately one-quarter of annual carbon emissions
- ✓ Support the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people

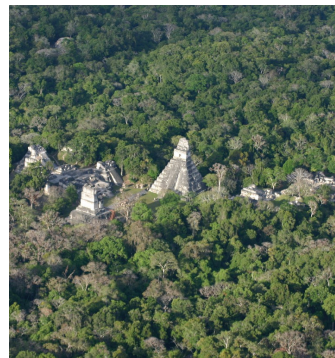
Less than a quarter of the world’s remaining forests are intact—meaning they have not been significantly disturbed by human activities—and they are being lost at twice the rate of forests overall. If we do not take action, half of what we now have will be gone by 2100.

## Jaguars



This iconic top predator faces severe threats from habitat loss and hunting. By protecting Mesoamerica’s Five Great Forests, we will preserve the last strongholds for this magnificent cat.

## Culture and nature



The Five Great Forests are unique in their overlap of natural and cultural heritage, harboring vestiges of ancient civilizations and several World Heritage sites, including Tikal, pictured above.

## Scarlet macaws



The endangered scarlet macaw is vulnerable to habitat loss and trafficking for the pet trade. We are protecting critical nesting areas, combating wildlife trafficking, and rehabilitating fledglings from disturbed nests.

## Indigenous and local communities



Nearly half of the Five Great Forests are governed by Indigenous and local people who have lived and worked sustainably in them for centuries. The Five Forests Alliance is committed to integrating local and indigenous voices as leaders to promote and scale community-based solutions.