



Central America

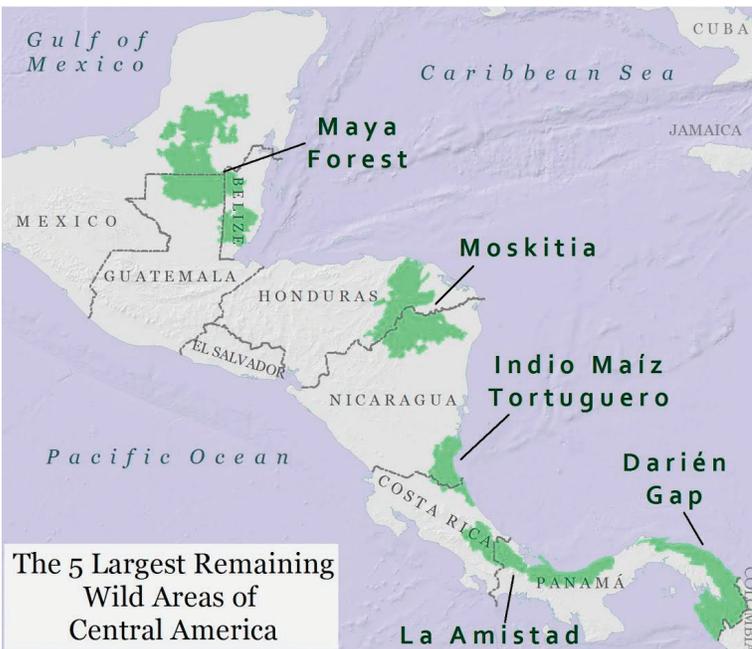
Safeguarding Wildlife, Inspiring Resilient Solutions

A camera trap snaps a photo of the elusive jaguar, one of the most iconic species in Central America. Credit: Emmanuel Rondeau

Central America possesses one of the richest concentrations of species and ecosystem diversity on Earth, including spectacular wildlife such as jaguars, tapirs, monkeys, quetzals and scarlet macaws. Central America's forests serve as irreplaceable flyways for migratory birds, provide important watershed and ecosystem services, and help reduce the severity of climate change impacts.

One of the most biologically rich areas in the world, Central America's wildlife and ecosystems are also among the most threatened. Forest cover is shrinking in every country and wildlife strongholds are under tremendous pressure.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supports conservation of the largest remaining intact forest ecosystems. They flow across borders and because existing protected areas are fragmented, the Central America Program uses a landscape approach to conserve the region's rich natural and cultural heritage.



Priority Landscapes

Maya Forest: Located on 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 Central America, 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 Central American wilderness with the vast forests of South America. The Darién is home to the bush dog and harpy eagle.

With only 0.5 percent of the world's land surface, Central America is home to more than 7 percent of the planet's biodiversity.



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

Credit: Chris Packham / WCS Guatemala

Threats to Wildlife in Central America

Central American 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 Central America, 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 for the Central America Program

- Support improved management of protected areas by strengthening **wildlife law enforcement** effectiveness and improving forest governance.
- Support **community-based** conservation, including investment in sustainable livelihoods, community wildlife and forest management, and community patrols. Specific emphasis on strengthening indigenous management of key ecosystems.
- Strengthen the ability of **local** institutions, decision makers, and civil society to implement and sustain conservation programs.
- Inspire conservation of wild places and wildlife through education and **public engagement**.
- Foster **networks** to facilitate regional learning and collaboration across landscapes to tackle pressing and complex conservation challenges.

USFWS Support to Central America in 2014-2016

Fiscal Year	Amount Awarded	Amount Leveraged	Number of Countries Receiving Support	Number of Projects
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

The Central America Program has demonstrated success recently with the following initiatives:

- **Belize and Guatemala:** Reducing the expansion of the agricultural frontier into Chiquibul National Park and also wildlife trafficking by supporting bi-national cooperation to strengthen monitoring and law enforcement capacity of park rangers, conducting public education and outreach, and developing sustainable livelihood pilot projects in hotspot border communities.
- **Costa Rica:** Creating green jobs for rural communities of the Osa Peninsula that reduce threats to wildlife in Corcovado National Park from illegal hunting, logging, and mining activities.
- **Guatemala:** Reducing human-jaguar conflict in the Maya Biosphere Buffer Zone through outreach and training programs for local ranchers on improved livestock management practices.
- **Nicaragua:** Reactivating an indigenous, community-based ranger program to reduce illegal cattle ranching and poaching in the forests of the Indio-Maiz Biosphere Reserve.



Community members work with nutritious Maya nuts from the Ramón Tree as part of a sustainable livelihood project.

Credit: Orcondeco Asociación Civil

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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