

Study identifies challenges and opportunities to safeguard one of Mesoamerica's last forest blocks

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The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Yale University have created a plan to preserve one of the last intact forest strongholds for the jaguar and other iconic species in Central America: the Moskitia Forest Corridor. Credit: WCS

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Yale University have created a plan to preserve one of the last intact forest strongholds for the jaguar and other iconic species in Central America: the Moskitia Forest Corridor.

Released today, the report—titled "[Stopping the Tide: A Strategy for Maintaining Forest Connectivity within the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor](#)"—lays out recommendations on how to protect the ecologically vital forest landscape that straddles both Honduras and Nicaragua. One of the primary findings of the report is that conservation efforts should be focused on four "pinch points" where forest connectivity is threatened.

"As one of the largest remaining forest blocks in Central America, this forest corridor is critical to conserve widely ranging species such as jaguars and white-lipped peccaries" said Dr. John Polisar, one of the study's authors and WCS's Jaguar Program Coordinator. "These species are found in Nicaragua's Bosawás Biosphere Reserve, and across river valleys in Honduras such as the recently investigated "Lost City" site in in the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve. Maintaining the pinch points that connect forests and wildlife is a top priority."

[Read a recently published article on a rapid ecological assessment of the "Lost City" site by conservationists in the Moskitia forest of Honduras here].

The "Stopping the Tide" study found that deforestation in the bi-national Moskitia forest corridor due to unregulated cattle ranching and human settlement has rapidly expanded into protected areas to consume forest habitat, placing the Rio Plátano World Heritage site on UNESCO's "in danger" list. The authors noted that low institutional presence has left these protected areas poorly defended against these threats.

The forests of La Moskitia are home to Mayangna, Miskitu, Tawahka, and Pech indigenous communities who seek to maintain the forest and the ecosystem services it provides. The report recommends giving continued attention to the property rights of these indigenous groups and providing assistance in their interests to be effective stewards of the forest and wildlife.

The authors prioritize capacity building for [local communities](#) and protected area personnel that includes the implementation of SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) for patrols to monitor the status of remote forests and facilitate enforcement in areas already impacted by harmful activities.

The report also emphasizes the importance of partnerships with local communities to strengthen environmentally sustainable livelihoods such as cacao farming and timber certification programs. In the few zones where raising livestock is legal, the report recommends implementing approaches to reduce deforestation from cattle ranching, improving livestock health and nutrition in space efficient production that decreases the need for deforestation, with producers committing to maintain forest.

In preparing this report WCS worked with Yale's Environmental Protection Clinic, which pairs graduate students with organizations that address the intersection between law, policy, and environmental threats. "This report highlights the challenges of evaluating gaps and opportunities for conservation in remote areas and is an example of a productive and innovative collaboration between a conservation organization and graduate programs in environmental studies, in particular in identifying priority areas and the actions needed to maintain biodiversity on a large landscape level" said Manus McCaffery, one of the Yale Graduate students who contributed to this [report](#).

"Recent discoveries have highlighted the archaeological and biological importance of the Moskitia forest" said Dr. Jeremy Radachowsky, WCS Director for Mesoamerica and the Caribbean. "However, this exceptional patrimony is in real danger of being degraded and lost within the next few years. Now the urgent challenge is coming together as humanity, joining forces with local communities and Honduran institutions, to ensure that one of Central America's most intact forests and its cultural heritage lasts forever."

WCS has long prioritized the protection of intact [forest](#) landscapes for their confluence of globally significant values such as conserving biodiversity, mitigating climate change, and sustaining imperiled cultures. A recently published paper in *Nature Ecology and Evolution* by WCS and other organizations documents how intact forests benefit wildlife and human populations alike, and how their protection should be a key component of national and global environmental efforts.

More information: James E. M. Watson et al. The exceptional value of intact forest ecosystems, *Nature Ecology & Evolution* (2018). [DOI: 10.1038/s41559-018-0490-x](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-018-0490-x)

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