

# Experts Draft Plan To Protect Nicaraguan Wildlife



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[Nicaragua](#)'s proposed \$50 billion pioneering canal will connect the Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean through the Caribbean Sea. But many environmentalists and other activists have vocally opposed the project because it will bisect the country, potentially destroy and degrade [one million acres of rainforest and wetlands](#) and endanger indigenous communities. An earlier study found that the canal threatens the [habitat of 22 endangered species](#).

Hong Kong Nicaragua Development Investment Company (HKND) recently announced that the project has been delayed until late 2016 due to [design fine-tuning](#), but the plan is moving forward despite the evidence of its danger.

Researchers from Michigan State University (MSU), the Global Wildlife Conservation and Panthera have created a conservation plan that can help mitigate the canal's impact on wildlife. Now it's time for HKND and the Nicaraguan government to implement the experts' suggestions in the canal's design fine-tuning.

## **“Wide-Ranging Species Like Jaguars and Tapirs Could be Heavily Impacted”**

According to [MSU Today](#), the researchers assert that their conservation plan can save precious habitat from the canal that will quite literally cut the Central American country in half.

Team member Gerald Urquhart, an assistant professor in MSU's Lyman Briggs College, [explains](#) other implications of the canal: “The proposed canal would divide the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor and limit the

movement of terrestrial wildlife. In particular, wide-ranging species like jaguars and tapirs could be heavily impacted.”

The [IUCN Red List](#) classifies the [jaguar](#) as near threatened. As the largest cat of the Americas and the only living representative of the genus *Panthera*, it’s vital that we protect them. They’re already rare in Nicaragua with [fewer than 500 cats left](#). Canal construction aside, declining jaguars are threatened by high deforestation rates, human-jaguar conflicts as they compete with humans for prey (many locals consider them pests, since they hunt livestock for prey) and they’re hunted and trapped for their paws and teeth.



*Photo Credit:* [Eric Kilby](#)

The endangered Baird’s Tapir’s population is suspected of declining over 50 percent in the past 33 years, according to the [IUCN Red List](#). Their naturally low reproductive rates along with rampant habitat destruction and localized hunting are driving their decline. Researchers have also discovered tapirs exposed to infectious diseases and parasites that come from cattle, horses and other livestock.



*Photo Credit: [Eric Kilby](#)*

The researchers mapped out an important area for large mammals, like jaguars, that's in the path of the current canal design — “a relatively thin strip of forest from the eastern edge of what will be known as Lake Atlanta.” According to MSU Today, without this important thin strip of forest, “the animals would be cut off from the larger habitat south of the canal and would struggle to find others for breeding.”

The proposed conservation plan offers a few recommendations that will make life easier for the surrounding wildlife, including moving or adjusting Lake Atlanta (it's a man-made body of water) to reduce flooding and creating forested islands that would act as wildlife refuges.

The researchers warn that “the impact of the canal could be even greater if it leads to further deforestation of the remaining protected areas,” reports MSU Today.

### **Take Action!**

[Sign and share this petition](#) urging the canal's developers and Nicaraguan leadership to listen to these expert suggestions meant to protect wildlife. The true cost of this interoceanic canal isn't \$50 billion — it's the wildlife already hanging by a thread that the world could lose.

*Photo Credit: [Rustom Seegopaul](#)*