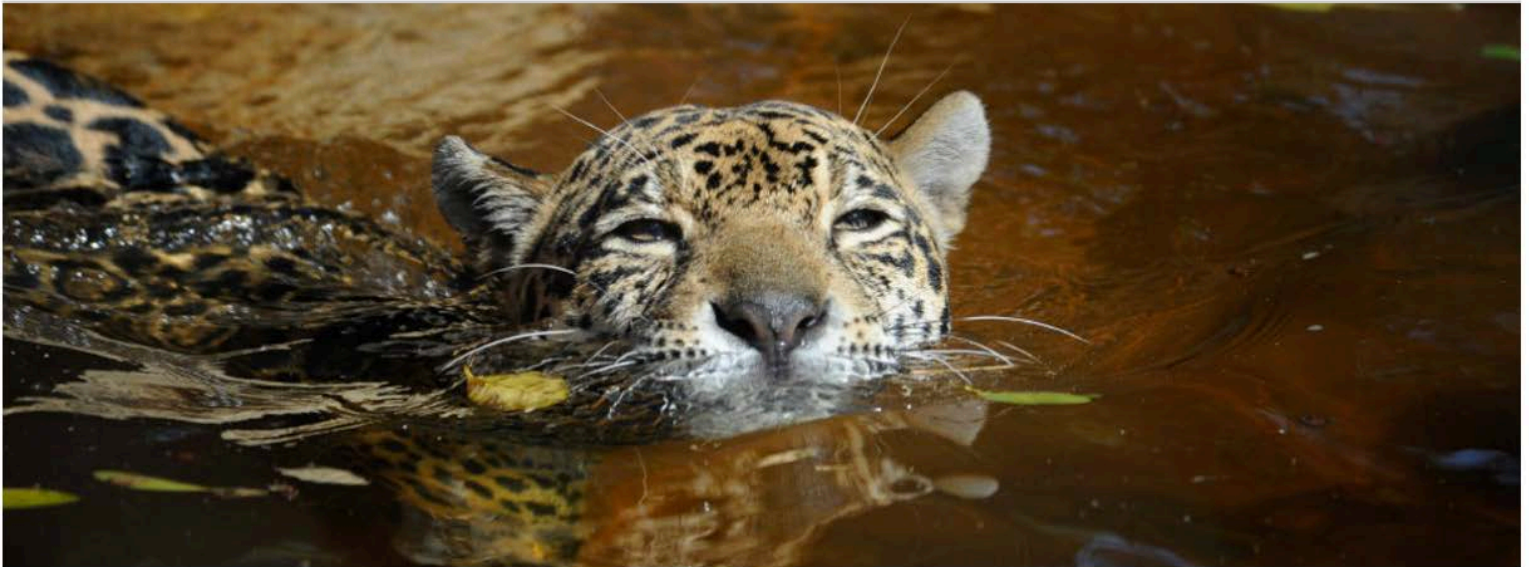


Honduras aims to save vital wildlife corridor from deforestation

by Mongabay.com on 13 November 2018



- *Honduras has pledged to remove livestock from the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage site that's home to jaguars, tapirs and macaws.*
- *The reserve is found in the Moskitia region's rainforests, around 30 percent of which have been cleared in the past 15 years, largely due to cattle and livestock ranching.*

- *Conservation groups hailed the move as one that would benefit both Honduras and the world because of the region's biodiversity and carbon stocks.*

Honduras has committed to protecting part of the tropical rainforests found in the Moskitia region, a move that conservation groups say will protect the region's rich wildlife, carbon stocks and indigenous groups from recent incursions by ranchers.

"The Moskitia is Central America's second largest rainforest, one of the last wild places in the region, and contains expansive areas of primary forest," Chris Jordan, who heads the Central America and Tropical Andes program for the NGO Global Wildlife Conservation, said in a statement, "Putting a stop to deforestation in the Moskitia will change the course of history for Honduras."



A river flowing through the Moskitia region. Image by John Polisar/WCS.

President Juan Orlando Hernández announced the program "SOS Honduras" on Nov. 8, aimed at ridding the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve in the Moskitia of cattle and livestock ranching. The U.S.-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) says illegal ranching has caused 90 percent of the deforestation in the 21,000-square-kilometer (8,100-square-mile) Moskitia. Also beset with wildlife trafficking and the looting of its archaeological sites, the Moskitia has lost 30 percent of its forests in the past 15 years, WCS's research shows.

"As a state, we have taken actions to protect Río Plátano, but the problem is so serious and delicate that it is necessary to redouble efforts to guarantee that it remains one of the most important protected areas of Honduras and at the same time a UNESCO World Heritage site," the Institute of Forest Conservation, a government agency, said according to the statement.



Cattle ranching has caused much of the deforestation in the Moskitia region. Image by Jeremy Radachowsky/WCS.

Jaguars (*Panthera onca*), giant anteaters (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) and the endangered Baird's tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*) inhabit the region, along with scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*), Honduras's national bird. Moskitia is also home to the Miskito, Pech, Tawahka and Garífuna indigenous groups. Recently, scientists have been studying a site in Moskitia that some believe may be La Ciudad Blanca, or the White City, an ancient population center that seems to have been lost to the rainforest some 600 years ago. "Rainforests like the Moskitia contain billions of years of biological knowledge of which we only understand a small amount," Steve Elkins, a filmmaker who led an expedition to find the White City in 2012, said in the statement. "It is like a giant book of which we can only read the first few pages."



Scarlet macaws, residents of the Moskitia region and Honduras's national bird. Image by Julie Larsen Maher.

But the implications of its protection could extend to all of us because of its importance as a repository for biodiversity and carbon, according to Jeremy Radachowsky, who directs WCS's Mesoamerica and Western Caribbean programs.

"President Hernández's announcement to rescue the Moskitia forest is groundbreaking," Radachowsky said. "However, we now all have to come together to support the Honduran government in this noble effort for the benefit of Honduras and the world."

Banner image of a jaguar by Julie Larsen Maher.

CITATION

García, M., Jordan, C., O'Farril, G., Poot, C., Meyer, N., Estrada, N., Leonardo, R., Naranjo, E., Simons, Á., Herrera, A., Urgilés, C., Schank, C., Boshoff, L. & Ruiz-Galeano, M. 2016.

Tapirus bairdii. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2016: e.T21471A45173340.