# [***Costa Rica stands out as a regional leader in the rescue of mangrove forests***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:66Y3-W6B1-JCG7-84VX-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Costa Rica becomes the first country in Central America and the second in Latin America to restore ***mangrove*** ecosystems by rehabilitating, at scale, the hydrological conditions of the area.

With the help of Conservation International, Costa Rica becomes the first country in Central America and the second in Latin America and the world to restore ***mangrove*** ecosystems by rehabilitating, at scale, the hydrological conditions of the area to allow species to repopulate at a natural rate, creating new economic opportunities for local communities and resource sustainability for the country.

The project, led by Conservation International, in conjunction with the National Wetlands Program of the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC/MINAE), in collaboration with the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE), and thanks to the support of the Pure Land Foundation, develops actions to rehabilitate the proper tidal inlet in sites within the ***mangroves*** of the Estero Puntarenas Wetland and Cipancí National Wildlife Refuge, which were deteriorated or completely transformed into crops.

With the entry of the tides through the channels made, the soil will eventually recover the humidity and salinity necessary for the seedlings of the different ***mangrove*** species to settle and naturally recover these areas.

"***Mangroves*** are the heroes among the trees, providing a number of vital ecosystem services to society in general and more so to the surrounding coastal communities, yet these forests are often overlooked. For example, they are a protective barrier against storm surges and storms, they filter water coming from the land to the sea, and among their roots more than 80% of species of commercial interest are protected and fed at some point in their lives. In addition, they are ***blue carbon*** ecosystems, which by their nature can store up to five times more carbon than mature tropical forests" emphasizes Ana Gloria Guzman, director of Conservation

International Costa Rica.

The project is ambitious, based and consolidated on science and research, combining engineering, commitment and work with communities and collaboration with institutions and government. It is positioned as a pilot to be replicated along the coasts of the country and the world. It began with the analysis of historical aerial photographs of the original ***mangroves***, with the objective of identifying the original riverbeds, which were altered for the growth of sugar cane crops, the establishment of salt and shrimp production activities, as well as natural causes. For the rehabilitation, topographic studies were also carried out, as well as studies of the chemical conditions of the soil and the health of the ***mangrove*** ecosystem in the area.

As of November 2022, around 20,000m of canals have been constructed within the open areas and 1,300m of estuaries have been cleaned and enlarged, including the cleaning of slopes, removal of obstacles in the constructed channels, opening of new channels, as well as cleaning of existing channels. The project incorporates nearby communities in the area such as El Establo, Pitahaya, Níspero and San Buenaventura, including their knowledge about the area, about how this ecosystem used to be before it was modified, and about the conditions that can facilitate its recovery.

As Danilo Torres Gómez, CATIE forestry engineer, points out, ***mangrove*** restoration is a gradual process: "First, a baseline study is carried out to learn about the conditions of a nearby reference ***mangrove***, to understand the historical context and carry out carbon sampling, because the project focuses on carbon. At the same time, we are studying the surrounding communities, looking for entities that collaborate with the daily work (opening, canals, cleaning of the sites...) and who, possibly in the future, will help with maintenance and monitoring".

"The communities near the ***mangrove*** forests are those who benefit most directly from their services, but also those who suffer the immediate consequences of the loss of these ecosystems. That is why the project seeks to work hand in hand with the local people, so that they become the true protectors of the ***mangrove*** forests and can develop sustainable activities thanks to the conservation and recovery of these ecosystems," Guzmán adds.

According to the National Wetlands Policy and other current policies, the country has the responsibility to restore ***mangrove*** ecosystems. As recently defined, the country has the potential to restore 14,336 hectares of ***mangroves*** along the Pacific coast of the country, of which 1,500 hectares are in the Gulf of Nicoya. This project has rehabilitated more than 300 hectares in the Estero Puntarenas Wetland and Cipancí National Refuge, and represents a first, but key, phase of support for the country to reach its national goals.

In order to continue strengthening the country's efforts, Conservation International seeks to design and support the implementation of a ***Blue Carbon*** Community Development Model. This model, as a variant of the Payment for Ecosystem Services Program - an initiative that was pioneered in its time and has generated wide international recognition for Costa Rica - will allow progress towards achieving the goals in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) assumed by the country as part of the Paris Agreement.

"Costa Rica already monitors ***mangroves***, we have an ecological baseline and we can estimate carbon sequestration. With this we can determine restoration priorities, which is fundamental to be able to report our contributions to the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory" highlights Jacklyn Rivera, Coordinator of the National Wetlands Program of the National System of Conservation Areas.

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