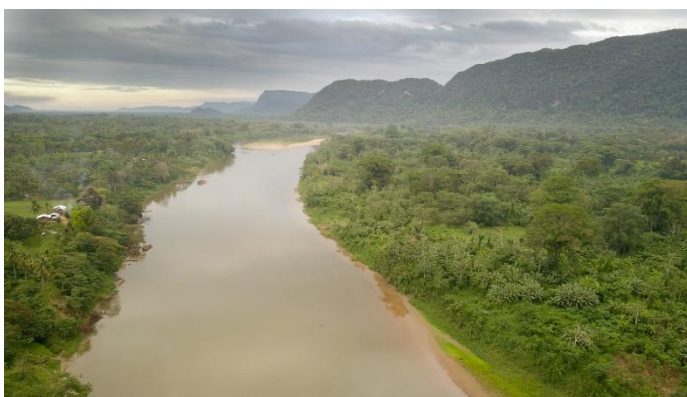


#### Objectives of the project:

This project will work collaboratively with governments, civil society, research partners, and Indigenous Peoples to transform agriculture and food systems and protect intact forested ecosystems in Mesoamerica's Five Forests, in order to adapt to and mitigate climate change, protect biodiversity, and improve livelihoods.



#### Background:

Mesoamerica's last five great intact forests—spanning from Mexico to Colombia—are biodiversity hotspots and strongholds for globally irreplaceable species such as the jaguar, scarlet macaw, and Central American river turtle; they are also vital flyways and wintering grounds for migratory birds. They cover more than 12 million hectares; hold about half the region's forest carbon stocks; and provide water and other life-giving natural resources to 5 million people. Nearly half are managed by Indigenous and local communities. Unfortunately, Mesoamerica's five forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate: three have been reduced by almost 25% in 15 years, with illegal cattle ranching responsible for more than 90% of the deforestation. Additionally, Central America comprises the tropical region most vulnerable to climate change, particularly extreme rains and severe droughts, which diminish food security and livelihoods. Our project will address this by engaging a multi-actor partnership to design and pilot a regional model that will transform agriculture and food systems in Mesoamerica's Five Forests in order to adapt to and mitigate climate change, protect biodiversity, and improve livelihoods.

#### The theory of change to achieve the objectives:

The overall project impacts are to ensure that within Mesoamerica's Five Great Forests, climate change is mitigated/adapted to, biodiversity is protected, and livelihoods are improved. We will achieve this through our project outcome to co-create a new model with a regional multi-actor partnership comprised of governments, civil society, and Indigenous Peoples that will transform agriculture and food systems, support Indigenous conservation solutions and forest-based income streams, protect intact ecosystems, and eliminate illegal cattle ranching in Mesoamerica's Five Forests.

To co-create a new model to transform food systems in this area, we plan to obtain these outputs:

Output 1.1: Adoption of climate-resilient, forest-friendly, culturally appropriate, scalable alternative livelihoods to cattle ranching by Indigenous and local communities of the Five Forests that will improve local economies, reinforce local resilience to climate change, and increase forest cover;

- ✓ Activity 1.1.1: Conduct market analyses and on the ground consultations with communities to identify suitable forest-friendly, culturally appropriate, and economically viable alternatives to cattle ranching for local and Indigenous communities across the Five Forests.
- ✓ Activity 1.1.2: Pilot test and implement innovative, economically viable alternatives to cattle ranching for local and Indigenous communities in Indigenous territories and protected area buffer and multiple use zones

*\*Potential risks include the perception that livelihood diversification might reduce rather than improve rights; incentives from criminal activities (e.g. illegal cattle ranching) outweigh perceived benefits from alternatives; and access and COVID-19 continues to limit travel and in-person engagement. To mitigate these risks, we developed close collaborations with involved communities, will ensure interventions reflect community desires and strengthen rights, access to, and ownership of natural resources, follow the highest international human rights standards, and ensure safe and effective engagement during COVID, following rigorous safety protocols, international best standards, and adjusting to virtual convenings if necessary.*

Output 1.2: Implementation of pilot restoration projects in each of the Five Forests in areas reclaimed from cattle ranching to turn ranch land into productive forests that support local livelihood;

- ✓ Activity 1.2.1: Analyse potential for forest restoration across the Five Forests through geospatial analysis and develop Five Forests Restoration Strategy. Restoration potential will be mapped and evaluated according to biological importance, landscape context, sociocultural context, feasibility and threats
- ✓ Activity 1.2.2: Implement scalable assisted natural regeneration projects resulting in productive forests that support local livelihoods, with emphasis on areas reclaimed from illegally established cattle ranches.

*\*A potential risk is that COVID-19 continues to limit travel and in-person engagement and has economic impacts. We developed the activities to ensure engagement continues following international best practices, all country requirements, rigorous COVID safety protocols, testing, and distancing guidelines, and will be delivered remotely if necessary.*

Output 1.3: Policies and incentive programs rebalanced by Mesoamerican governments to reduce pressures on forests and support identified alternative livelihoods;

- ✓ Activity 1.3.1: Conduct an analysis of policies and incentive programs affecting the Five Forests (both positive and perverse), and present results to national governments within CCAD.
- ✓ Activity 1.3.2: Support countries to update and deliver on their NDCs clarifying the role of agriculture and forests in achieving NDCs and mainstreaming climate change into the agricultural and forestry sectors for post-COVID economic recovery efforts, with special emphasis on the contributions of Indigenous peoples/territories. We will conduct targeted country-level activities as well work with project co-applicant CCAD, to present regional analyses and maps to the governments, supporting inclusion of the Five Forests within the Regional Environmental Framework Strategy (ERAM) and the AFOLU 2040 strategy.

*\*Potential risks include lack of political will to collaborate on project activities or budgetary and human constraints of the government agencies. We mitigated these risks through the development of this project in close collaboration with CCAD; in alignment with government plans and priorities, structures, and processes; long-term partnerships between consortium members and government agencies; and ensuring sufficient funds are in place.*

Output 1.4: Mesoamerica's governments address the illegal markets and transboundary trafficking of cattle that undermine sustainable, climate-resilient local development and promote high rates of deforestation.

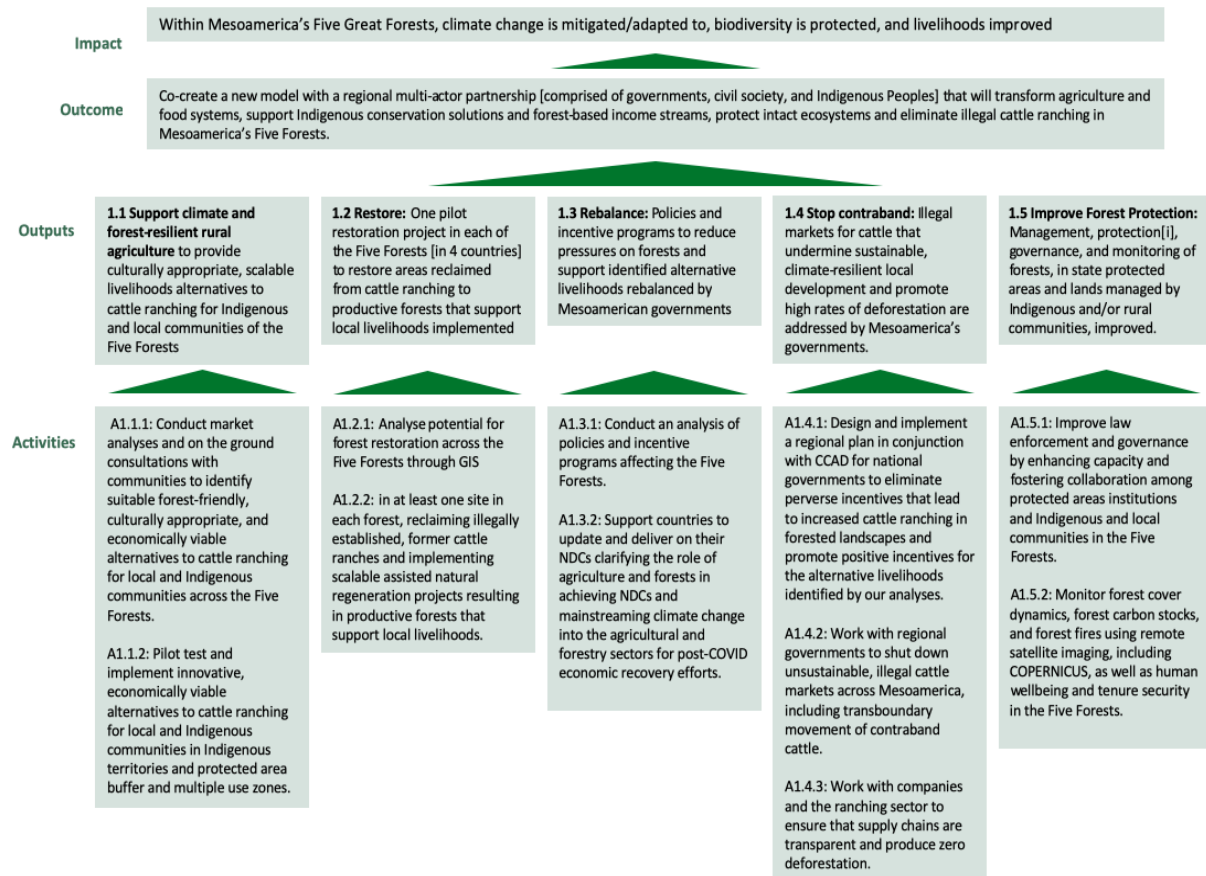
- ✓ Activity 1.4.1: Design and implement a regional plan in conjunction with CCAD for national governments to eliminate perverse incentives that lead to increased cattle ranching in forested landscapes and promote positive incentives for the alternative livelihoods identified by our analyses.

- ✓ Activity 1.4.2: Work with governments to shut down unsustainable, illegal cattle markets across Mesoamerica, including transboundary movement of contraband cattle. This will consist of working with ministries of agriculture and border and customs authorities to monitor illegal cattle contraband in Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, review results with government agencies, in order to identify and develop an action plan to shut down illegal transboundary trafficking routes.
- ✓ Activity 1.4.3: Work with companies and the ranching sector to ensure that supply chains are transparent and produce zero deforestation in Belize, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, including: assessing livestock production in Nicaragua's largest forests, building on initial efforts, implementing reduced-carbon ranching technologies, testing for diseases, increased outreach and education, and evaluating success of adopting reduced-impact livestock practices.
- ✓ \*Potential risks could be that the private sector is unwilling to adopt zero deforestation measures because perception of negative profits. We will develop a number of mitigation measures to avoid these risks, including social and environmental policies to enable companies to access markets that demand zero-deforestation beef production.

Output 1.5: Improved protection, management, governance, and monitoring of forests, including surveillance, SMART patrolling, justice, and protection of environmental defenders, in state-protected areas and lands managed by Indigenous and/or rural communities.

- ✓ Activity 1.5.1: Improve law enforcement and governance by enhancing capacity and fostering collaboration among protected areas institutions and Indigenous and local communities in the Five Forests, including capacity building to improve protection, integrating technology, conducting ground and aerial patrols, supporting legal cases of illegal grabbing of Indigenous lands, recuperation of illegal ranches, fire management and enforcement working groups, conservation agreements with communities and Indigenous groups, and small grants to local organisations to extend impacts and benefits and build capacity.
- ✓ Activity 1.5.2: Integral monitoring of land use/land cover, fire, climate, carbon stocks, air quality, threats to conservation, and socioeconomic conditions of beneficiaries of the project, using an innovative system of indicators including remotely sensed data (e.g., Copernicus Earth Observation Programme, among other sources of data), low cost sensors, UAVs, systematic patrols (virtual and in-person), participatory citizen science methods such as the use of SMART during forest patrols, and cell phone and observational monitoring of restoration and alternative livelihoods projects.

*\*Potential risks include protected areas and law enforcement officers do not act against illegal cattle ranching; government officers are rotated as a result of capacity building efforts; or lack of political will to participate. We will have developed the activities in a way to mitigate risk, including fostering diverse relationships with different government agencies to enhance retention of skills and experience built, consistent dialogues with partners, to build trust, provide high quality information, and provided strategic support to facilitate operations, and ensuring the safety of rangers and those involved in protection activities through rigorous training, and capacity building around improved law enforcement and protection.*



### Organization:

The project will deploy a multi-stakeholder approach through the Five Forests Alliance, integrating a diversity of key actors. We have formed a diverse consortium, with capacity to deliver impact at scale, enabling us to work from the grassroots to the regional level with more than 20 community-based organisations across eight countries of the Central American Integration System (SICA), eight governments; regional entities representing governments (CCAD) and Indigenous and forest communities (AMPB). Our consortium includes technical specialists that bring unparalleled expertise in critical issues, such as food security, forest protection, reforestation, fire management, and monitoring.

In collaboration with partners, we will award financial support to local NGOs, including community-based organisations and Indigenous territorial managers through small grants to build the capacity of local NGOs in community-based territorial management, protection, and alternative livelihoods, as well as participatory monitoring and research. The consortium will also work with local universities and research organizations.

We will establish a Project Governance and Steering Committee with the EU delegation, Project Management team (coordinator, M&E specialist, Comms officer, grant manager), WCS Regional Director, and Co-applicant representatives.

Implementing organizations:

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) will serve as the project coordinator, overseeing project leadership and implementation, including managing relationships and subgrants with all partners.

Partners of the project:

- ✓ The Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT); the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD); Re:Wild; Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC); the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB).
- ✓ CIAT will deliver research-based solutions that harness agricultural biodiversity and sustainably transform food systems to improve people's lives in a climate crisis.
- ✓ CCAD will support political engagement and consensus with the member countries of the Central American Integration System (SICA), including the governments of Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama.
- ✓ Re:wild will mobilize its network as well as thematic and global experts in support of this proposal, with particular emphasis on southern Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.
- ✓ AMPB will coordinate engagement with Indigenous and forest communities throughout Mesoamerica's Five Forests, ensuring the appropriate integration of rights and benefits of traditional and local communities.

Other main stakeholders:

National Governmental Institutions including ministries of agriculture, ranching, and environment, and protected areas, customs, and law enforcement agencies, and justice institutions; and Indigenous and forest community-based organisations.

Region:

Central America (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, and El Salvador)

Funding and co-funding:

EU	€ 4,150,000
Total budget	€ 4,150,000

Duration:

48 months (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2025)



UNIÓN EUROPEA

