

# Costa Rica Facts



## Working with Partners to Strengthen Environmental Leadership in Costa Rica

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NRDC is working with partners in Costa Rica to ensure access to world class best practices and international support and advocacy to meet the country's carbon neutrality and biodiversity conservation goals.

Costa Rica is a leader in power generation from low-carbon sources and has set a goal of carbon neutrality by 2021. Through innovative conservation policies, including payments for environmental services and a strong natural parks system, Costa Rica has remained rich in biodiversity. Its two coasts, lush rainforests, and mountains shelter some 500,000 species of plants and animals—nearly 4 percent of all the species estimated to exist worldwide.

Yet more remains to be done. To achieve carbon neutrality, Costa Rica must increase its efficiency in energy generation and use, as well as reduce greenhouse gas emissions from land transportation. It is also critical to protect biodiversity in areas such as the Osa Peninsula that face destructive pressures from expansion of environmentally unsustainable projects, particularly in the tourism, agribusiness, mining, and energy sectors.

With sound policies to ensure a low-carbon economy and concrete initiatives to protect special natural places such as the Osa Peninsula,

Costa Rica can preserve its position as a world leader in environmental protection and accelerate down its path towards environmentally sustainable development.

NRDC has identified two priorities for its work with partners in Costa Rica:

- Protecting critical species and natural areas with a focus on the Osa Peninsula.
- Developing a clean energy economy based on energy efficiency and an environmentally sustainable transportation system.

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"We will work for a greener and cleaner Costa Rica, for a strong economy, respectful of its natural resources [...] A prosperous and green Costa Rica: the prosperity shared by all; the green protected by all."

PRESIDENT LAURA CHINCHILLA  
INAUGURATION SPEECH, 8 MAY 2010

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**Working with Partners to Strengthen Environmental Leadership in Costa Rica**

**Recognizing the Link Between Conservation and Energy**

In 2001, ADELA, a local coalition in southeastern Costa Rica, contacted NRDC for our help against a Harken Energy offshore oil drilling project. The offshore oil drilling would have caused irreversible damage to Talamanca—one of the most biologically rich areas in the world—and its local communities. Through an impressive campaign, ADELA—with the international support of NRDC’s BioGems Initiative—persuaded the Costa Rican government not to pursue oil exploration in the region.

Following this success, NRDC recognized that unless Costa Rica created a clean energy future, its incredible biodiversity would remain under threat. In 2009, NRDC designated the entire country of Costa Rica as a BioGem—one of just over a dozen places of special ecological importance in the Americas—to strengthen our efforts to protect its wild places and to help the country achieve its goals as a leader in addressing climate change.

**PROTECTING NATURAL AREAS**



Home to half of the plant and animal species found in Costa Rica, the largely pristine Osa Peninsula is one of the most biologically dense places in the world and a primary focus of NRDC’s advocacy in the country.

Unfortunately, the overexploitation of natural resources has been a constant threat to the Osa Peninsula’s ecosystems. In the past, the Osa’s forests were threatened by the expansion of cattle ranching and exotic species plantations. Today, gold and gravel mining, unsustainable fisheries, and the threat of massive tourism infrastructure such as a proposed international airport imperil the region.

**NRDC remains ready to defend against specific threats to the Osa Peninsula and other special natural places in Costa Rica.**

NRDC is working with local partners on demonstration reforestation projects on the ground and on developing a strategy to plan for future conservation and environmentally sustainable development in the Osa. NRDC seeks to help local communities in the Osa take ownership of the conservation needs of the region. Raising awareness of the ecological importance of the Osa nationally in Costa Rica and internationally is a first step, as well as developing an understanding of the value of the ecosystem services provided by a region such as the Osa Peninsula.

NRDC remains ready to defend against specific threats to the Osa Peninsula and other special natural places in Costa Rica. In the face of a proposal before Costa Rican lawmakers to downgrade the status of the Las Baulas National Marine Park—the site of critical leatherback nesting beaches—NRDC, its partners, and BioGems Defenders generated more than 32,000 letters asking lawmakers to abandon the proposal. Our efforts successfully blocked the bill and protected the leatherback turtle and its crucial habitat.

**MEETING CARBON NEUTRALITY GOALS**

**Environmentally Sustainable Transportation**



To achieve carbon neutrality it is essential that Costa Rica reduce emissions from the transportation sector, the source of over

half of the country’s greenhouse gas emissions. To do this, Costa Rica must develop an effective and comprehensive transportation strategy, especially in the greater San Jose metropolitan region.

NRDC is working with local jurisdictions, the national government, and other stakeholders to develop a strategy and process to build the political will needed for transportation sector reform. To reduce congestion, emissions, and vehicle miles travelled, stakeholders must come together and identify a path toward an effective public transportation system, smart growth, and new fuel emissions and vehicle efficiency standards.

**Efficiency in the Electricity Sector**



Boosting efficiency in the generation and consumption of electricity will contribute to Costa Rica’s

goal of carbon neutrality and save consumers money. NRDC is working with governmental and non-governmental partners in Costa Rica and the United States to establish an energy efficiency center in San Jose. The center will pull together examples of best practices from around the world, becoming a source of information, training, and expertise for use in Costa Rica and other countries in the region.

An efficient lighting pilot project in the town of Aquiares that NRDC supported in partnership with the Costa Rican Institute of Electricity (ICE) and the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE) has already created savings of 17 to 22 percent for participants who replaced just three bulbs in their homes.