NRDC’s BioGems Initiative protects endangered wild regions and species throughout the Americas. In Latin America, NRDC has worked to preserve unspoiled ecosystems and threatened wildlife from Mexico’s Baja Peninsula to Chile’s Patagonia, working in partnership with communities and organizations to eliminate threats and to find environmentally sustainable alternatives.

Baja California, Mexico
To the east of the Baja Peninsula, the Gulf of California, which Jacques Cousteau called “the aquarium of the world,” provides shelter for hundreds of species of fish, sea turtles and marine mammals. NRDC is working with Mexican partners to protect Baja’s fragile marine life from a variety of threats.

Laguna San Ignacio: After one of the largest environmental campaigns in history NRDC and our partners succeeded in protecting Laguna San Ignacio—the last pristine nursery for the California gray whale—from Mitsubishi’s plans to build a massive salt works. NRDC continues to work with the local communities to gain conservation easements and other types of protections to prevent the resurrection of the salt works or other industrial projects that would threaten this critical habitat.

Cabo Pulmo: Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park is home to the healthiest and most important coral reef of the Baja Peninsula, home to humpback whales, dolphins, whale sharks, Pacific manta rays and five species of sea turtles, as well as more than 200 species of fish. Now a Spanish real estate company is proposing a massive 9,500 acre resort complex next to the park. Since October 2010, NRDC has been working with a local coalition to stop this industrial tourism development and to promote sustainable tourism alternatives.

Upper Gulf of California: The Upper Gulf is home to the last population of the vaquita marina—the world’s smallest and most endangered marine mammal. Years of overfishing, uncontrolled trawling, and the use of gillnets in the region reduced the vaquita population to approximately 150 to 200. NRDC is working on several fronts to prevent the extinction of the vaquita. Through a successful campaign to raise awareness in the seafood marketplace—especially with Ocean Garden Products, one of the main purchasers—and by working constructively...
with the Mexican government, NRDC is working with our partners to ensure the effective implementation of policies regulating gillnet fishers and shrimp trawlers and the development of sustainable long-term solutions.

Costa Rica
Home to approximately 4 percent of known plant and animal species on the planet, Costa Rica is a powerhouse of biodiversity. NRDC first worked in Costa Rica in 2001 by helping a local coalition defeat an offshore oil drilling project proposed by Harken Energy, which would have caused irreparable damage to the Talamanca coast. After this successful campaign, NRDC began working with partners to identify ways Costa Rica could move away from oil and meet its goal of carbon neutrality through work on energy efficiency and development of clean transportation solutions. Within Costa Rica, NRDC and our partners are working in the Osa Peninsula—home to half of the country’s estimated 500,000 plant and animal species—to develop environmentally sustainable solutions that help local communities take an active part in conservation.

Patagonia, Chile
International and Chilean companies have set their sights on Chilean Patagonia’s pristine wilderness, looking to exploit its wild rivers and intact temperate forests—all home to a remarkable variety native wildlife, including pumas, condors, Andean flamingos, guanacos, and the huemul, an endangered Andean deer. For the last few years, NRDC has been working with a broad coalition of Chilean partners to fight a proposal for a massive hydroelectric complex called HidroAysén, which would endanger Patagonia and open it up for industrial development. NRDC is using advocacy and research to show that Chile does not need risky and damaging industrial hydropower projects in Patagonia. By promoting new energy policies that foster robust growth of alternatives such as renewables and energy efficiency, NRDC is creating a vision of Chile’s energy future that will preserve Patagonia—truly one of the last untouched places on the planet.

NRDC and BioGems
In 2001, NRDC launched the BioGems Initiative to support our multifaceted campaigns to preserve threatened wild places throughout the Americas. NRDC BioGems span the continent from America’s Arctic to Chile’s Patagonia. We have over half a million BioGems Defenders, ready to take action to protect our BioGems. Since 2001, they have sent over 14 million messages to governments, companies and decision makers asking for the protection of the Americas’ precious natural resources.