



Defend Critical Habitats: Help Save the San Juan River Delta's Unique Wildlife

The extensive San Juan River Delta in coastal Colombia is created by the San Juan River where it pours into the Pacific Ocean at a rate of 660,000 gallons per second—more water than it would take to fill an Olympic pool every second. The terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems that are born of this phenomenon are rich with an extraordinary diversity of species.

The dramatic flow of the river brings a proportionally large load of sediment with it as it travels from its source 236 miles away, draining a watershed of nearly 4 million acres. This river scour creates the perfect conditions for the healthy mangrove forests, estuaries, mudflats, and coastal wetlands of the San Juan River Delta—ideal habitat for threatened sea turtles, sharks and rays, migratory shorebirds, seabirds, endemic and freshwater fish, plants, primates, endemic frogs, jaguars and ocelots.

The river delta region is home to both Afro and Indigenous communities who rely on the abundant natural resources here for their survival and livelihoods. But despite its significance, the area is not protected. Destructive fishing practices, overfishing, coconut palm plantations, encroaching human settlements, logging and potential infrastructure development threaten and disrupt the delta's delicate natural balance.

Rainforest Trust and our partner, Wildlife Conservation Society—Colombia seek \$1,743,919 to support the establishment of the San Juan River Delta Regional Protected Area of 390,000 acres of land and sea to safeguard the entire delta area that includes areas of Chocó rainforest connecting the region to the western Andes mountains.

SAFEGUARD A VITAL RIVER DELTA SPANNING LAND AND SEA

The delta provides crucial reproductive habitat for sharks and rays. The Critically Endangered Scalloped Hammerhead shark, an important top predator, has suffered steep population declines in all oceans, with an estimated global decline of over 80% over the last 75 years or so.

Four species of threatened sea turtles contribute to the balance of marine biodiversity here: Hawksbill Turtle, Loggerhead Turtle, Olive Ridley Turtle, and Leatherback Turtle. Feral and domestic dogs that attack them when they nest on the beach, egg plundering, and incidental catch by destructive fishing practices are top threats.



390,000
ACRES

\$1,743,919
PROJECT COST

\$4.47
COST PER ACRE

55,879,927 mT
CO₂ EQUIVALENTS
STORED

KEY SPECIES:

Hawksbill Turtle (CR),
Scalloped Hammerhead (CR),
Koe-Koe (VU),
Great Curassow (VU),
Zamia chigua (NT)



The high-quality habitat of sandy beaches, mud flats, and mangroves and its diversity of food sources support 120 bird species, including 19 migratory shorebirds and the rare Great Curassow.

Six endemic freshwater fish species have been identified here, some new to science. Threatened amphibians include the Koe-Koe, a poison dart frog endemic to Colombia. The endemic, fern-like cycad, *Zamia chigua*, and other species of plants are being plundered by plant collectors. Jaguars and Ocelots contribute to the balanced ecosystem of the delta's terrestrial regions.



SUPPORT AFRO AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES TO PROTECT NATURE'S RESOURCES

Conservation measures in the new Protected Area will be guided by the resident Afro communities and Wounaan Indigenous communities. They rely on its bounty for fishing, artisanal logging, subsistence hunting, and harvesting non-timber forest products like ark clam mollusks, fruit, and fiber. Both groups will be engaged in planning and managing fishing practices, sustainable harvesting, and waste management strategies. Large-scale mining, fossil fuel and forest concessions will be restricted or prohibited.

Scalloped Hammerhead Shark © Mark Dohert

