



Ending deforestation in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula

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2 million hectares of Yucatán Peninsula to be restored by 2030

17% of Mexico's carbon footprint is due to land use change

22% by 2030: Mexico's emission reduction goal

0% by 2030: Yucatán and Mexico's net deforestation goal

WHY WE LOVE THIS STORY The Yucatán Peninsula is on a pathway towards achieving sustainable development by halting deforestation and forest degradation, restoring land, and improving conservation schemes, as well as boosting sustainable economic opportunities that enhance local communities and the well-being of indigenous peoples through ambitious partnerships guided by rigorous planning.

Where are we?

The Yucatán Peninsula in south-eastern Mexico is shared between the states of Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo. It is home to part of the 10 million hectares of diverse forests that form the Mayan Forest ecosystem, the second largest continuous area of tropical vegetation in the Americas and a vital carbon sink for the planet. The Peninsula is also home to Mesoamerica's largest indigenous population, with the Mayan Forest sustaining thousands of indigenous families and farming communities, as well as being one of the jaguar's last refuges.

But this precious natural capital is at risk. The Yucatán Peninsula is losing 80,250 hectares of forest every year due to extensive cattle ranching and agricultural production. This is part of a wider pattern of decline that has seen Mexico lose over 2 million hectares of forest and jungle in the last two decades, fragmenting the landscape and threatening biodiversity and livelihoods.

The loss of forest environmental services leaves the people of the Peninsula more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including severe droughts, forest fires and soil erosion. Concerns about a rapidly expanding agricultural frontier, and the impact on indigenous farming communities (known as "ejidos") led to



government authorities, local communities and indigenous peoples, and private companies, joining forces to build a new pathway for sustainable development growth under the framework of Mexico's REDD+ national and state-level strategies.

Through continuous discussions with state government officials, a set of ambitious goals were agreed upon to achieve net zero deforestation, restore 2 million hectares of land, and ensure that 50% of land is under forest conservation and/or management schemes by 2030.

What's new here?

Unprecedented coordination between different levels and sectors of government, and strong partnerships with intergovernmental, regional



“Silvopastoral” ranching practices increase cattle yields through a mixed grass/shrub/tree ecosystem. The shade lessens stress from the tropical sun and helps cattle gain and keep weight.

and local initiatives, were all made possible by a shared vision for change originating from the people of this unique region. United by the determination to enhance community well-being by halting deforestation and advancing sustainable economic opportunities, and to contribute to Mexico’s carbon emission reduction commitments, the three states have become beacons of sustainable rural development at the forefront of implementing Mexico’s REDD+ Program.

Stopping deforestation and forest degradation on the Yucatán Peninsula will have a global impact as Mexico is among the world’s top carbon emitters, with 17% of its total emissions stemming from agriculture, forestry and land use change – in the Peninsula alone, these sectors release 4-8 million tonnes of CO₂ every year.

Can we replicate this work?

Developing and implementing this pathway to resolving the deeply entrenched, complex challenges faced in the Peninsula requires extensive planning, cost-benefit analysis, consultations with local communities and key stakeholders, and project implementation with specific goals, measures and indicators, coupled with strong inter-municipal coordination and partnerships with organizations, including TNC. The resulting comprehensive actions and new coordination mechanisms enshrined at the state government level, and their integration into the National REDD+ Program, can be a model for other regions in Mexico and beyond.

Individual pillars of the three state-level REDD+ strategies can also be adapted and replicated, including the Regional Commission of Climate Change, Peninsular Committee of Social and Environmental Safeguards, Climate Change Fund, Investment Programs, Intermunicipal coordination scheme and spatial planning model. All of these are useful cost-benefit tools for identifying where to intervene, how to manage natural resources and produce sustainably, and where to concentrate conservation efforts to maximize community outputs and conservation outcomes.

// We now see the purpose of having a management plan. We work on livestock farming and agriculture, but now all areas are well-defined and the majority is forested. //

Isaias Ku Martin, Commissioner of the ejido 20 de Noviembre, Campeche

What’s next?

Mexico is currently the country most advanced in implementing REDD+, thanks largely to pioneering work on the Yucatán Peninsula that helped produce a national Emissions Reduction Initiative (IRE) oriented to achieving carbon reduction payment by results. The management and financial architecture is well established, forming a strong foundation for receiving international, national and private support.

The next phase is all about implementing these management tools and scaling up efforts on the ground, as well as continuing to empower local communities and indigenous peoples, building strong private sector engagement and links to markets, and putting additional intersectoral and aligned public policies and a robust framework in place for monitoring and evaluating progress and impact. The Yucatán is leading the way for REDD+ in Mexico and globally.

Additional benefits

Showing that biodiversity is an asset to be treasured, and that sustainable production can catalyze economic growth and community well-being, is at the heart of this pathway. TNC has been helping to train thousands of people and build shared visions for sustainable rural and forest development. Promoting gender equality by boosting the participation of women and incorporating their knowledge and perspectives has been a central focus, leading to 13 separate lines of action on gender equality in Mexico’s REDD+ Strategy. This includes equal access to finance, gender-inclusive budgeting, and freedom to participate in decision-making.

Key partners

The national and three state-level REDD+ Strategies and the Yucatán Peninsula sustainable pathway are built on multiple layers of alliances. TNC is working with: the three state governments; over 70 local communities; the National Forestry Agency (CONAFOR); the National Agriculture and Rural Development Agency (SADER); Natural Protected Commission (CONANP); over 30 local, regional and international NGOs; academic institutes; and thousands of farmers and producers.

Contact for more information

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