

Central America: Nicaragua



NICARAGUAN MOSQUITIA

*Conservation in the Heart of the
Meso-American Biological Corridor*

conservation profile

action areas Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, Mosquitia

targets tropical moist forest, tropical pre-montane forest, hydrological network, mahogany, spanish cedar, high quality rain forest, Miskito pine savannah, harpy eagles, wood thrushes, cerulean warblers, Canada warblers

stresses habitat conversion and fragmentation, illegal extraction of wood, unsustainable agriculture practices (slash and burn), forest fires, sedimentation, excessive hunting, illegal traffic of fauna species

strategies establish a community monitoring and investigation system for the development of sustainable forest practices, train indigenous leaders to carry out essential steps to obtain legal recognition of their lands, implement an environmental education program, strengthen the volunteer forest guard program, build capacity for community organizations

results equipped and trained forest guards from four territories, established community monitoring and investigation system in one indigenous territory, strengthened Bosawas indigenous associations in areas to enable them to obtain legal recognition of their lands

partners Center of Environmental Rights and Development Promotion (CEDAPRODE), Bosawas Technical Secretariat of the Ministry of Natural Resources (SETAB/MARENA), Saint Louis Zoo



Bocay River, Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, Nicaragua © Barry Tessman

Central America's largest country, Nicaragua, is the location of a 1.8 million-acre (728,460-hectare) conservation priority: The Bosawas Biosphere Reserve. In the heart of the Honduran and Nicaraguan Mosquitia Bosawas hosts home to 215 bird species over the course of the year. North American birds including wood thrushes, cerulean warblers and Canada warblers winter in Nicaragua among the harpy eagles and green macaws that live there year-round.

Once the site of political unrest and war in the 1970's and 1980's, Nicaragua has returned to a level of relative stability with a democrati-

cally elected government. Today, food products account for more than half of Nicaragua's exports. Consequently more land has been cleared for agricultural purposes than in any of its Central American neighbors, resulting in deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution and other related threats to natural areas.

The Miskito and Mayangna are the two indigenous groups that make Bosawas their home. A population of 13,000 lives in some of the most remote areas in Nicaragua surrounded by mahogany, Spanish cedar, and over 270 plant species. Their livelihoods and the resources they depend on are



Miskito Indians, Bosawas, Nicaragua © Barry Tessman

threatened by migrants attracted to the region for its rich reserves of land for crops and cattle.

Protecting Bosawas is a high priority for the Conservancy and its Nicaraguan partners because it is a keystone in the Meso-America Biological Corridor, which runs the length of Central America. Protecting the corridor prevents the fragmentation of the species rich landscapes that support the lifecycles of thousands of plants and animals. The protected tropical lowland forests of Honduras and Nicaragua are known as "el corazón del corredor," or the heart of the corridor.

Guarding the Future

Illegal agricultural settlement in Bosawas by non-indigenous farmers has not only disturbed the landscape, but also residents of the six indigenous territories on the reserve. In response the Conservancy has built the trust of local communities by soliciting input from their leadership to devise a plan for protecting lands within the reserve. The result is a guard program that initially provided 6 individuals with the basic training and equipment to monitor their territories including two-way radios, uniforms and guard stations. The program expanded quickly — in a five-

year period during the 1990's the number of forest guards exploded from the initial 6 to 187 volunteer guards. The guard program serves as a model for the greater Mosquitia, which builds on the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve into Honduras.

Defining Bosawas

Bosawas takes its name from the combination of three significant geographic features in the region: the Bocay River, the Saslaya Mountain and the Waspuk River. The Nature Conservancy and its partners in Nicaragua helped local people define the boundary lines of the six indigenous territories in the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve. This demarcation reduced the ability for colonizing farmers to lay claim to these lands for agricultural production. In the areas that have been demarcated and are patrolled by guards, the advance of the agricultural frontier has slowed dramatically. The Conservancy will continue to assist indigenous communities in gaining the official land title to their territories as a more formal and critical next step.

Staying Self-Sufficient

One of the Conservancy's top priorities for the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve is the development and imple-

mentation of a community-based biological monitoring program coordinated by St. Louis Zoo. Initially launched by St. Louis Zoo post-doctoral fellow Paule Gros, this effort to gather and monitor data on mammal and bird densities, community meat consumption and hunting is now part of the Conservancy's Parks in Peril project. Local people will continue to be trained in data collection methods in order to evaluate and regulate the pressures placed on natural resources there where they live. Expected results include a better knowledge about populations of mammals hunted for game.

contact information

The Nature Conservancy
Central America Division
4245 North Fairfax Dr.
Suite 100
Arlington, Virginia 22203
tel +1 [703] 841.5300
fax +1 [703] 524.0296
nature.org