



# **REPORT TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY – HUMAN INVASIONS AND PRESSURE ON THE HEART OF THE MAYA FOREST AND OTHER TRANSBOUNDARY AREAS IN LATIN AMERICA**





## 1. Human invasions: an escalating threat to national parks in Latin America

National parks across Latin America are facing a growing crisis: the spread of **illegal human settlements** within core conservation zones, driven by **illegal logging, drug trafficking, extensive cattle ranching, slash-and-burn agriculture, illegal mining, wildlife trafficking, and unauthorized land occupation**.

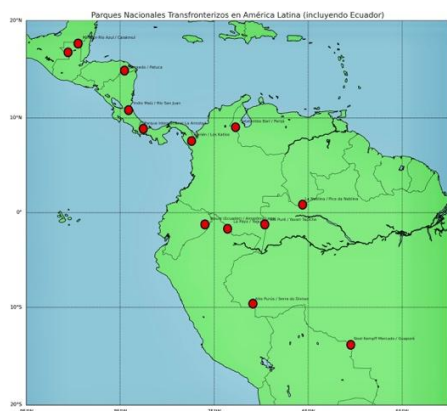
The consequences are severe: **ecosystem fragmentation, habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, hydrological disruptions, increased forest fires, and the erosion of environmental governance**.

The following **critical transboundary protected areas** illustrate the scale of this threat:

| Protected Area  | Countries Involved                |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Mirador-Río Azul National Park & Biotopo Dos Lagunas – Calakmul Biosphere Reserve | Guatemala – Mexico                |
| Sierra Lacandona – Montes Azules  | Guatemala – Mexico                |
| Indio Maíz Biological Reserve – San Juan Wildlife Refuge                          | Nicaragua – Costa Rica            |
| La Amistad International Park (PILA)  | Costa Rica – Panama               |
| Darién National Park – Los Katíos National Park                                   | Panama – Colombia                 |
| Catatumbo National Park   | Colombia – Venezuela              |
| La Paya National Park   | Colombia – Ecuador – Peru         |
| Tumucumaque Mountains National Park   | Brazil – French Guiana – Suriname |
| Sierra del Divisor National Park  | Peru – Brazil                     |
| Alto Purús National Park  | Peru – Brazil                     |
| Noel Kempff Mercado National Park   | Bolivia – Brazil                  |

These areas represent **some of the last remaining blocks of primary tropical forest and continental biological corridors essential for climate change mitigation, ecological connectivity, and the protection of endangered species**.

**It is worth mentioning that almost all transboundary protected areas are facing this issue of human invasions.**







## THREAT OF INVASIONS IN MIRADOR-RÍO AZUL NATIONAL PARK AND NAACHTUN-DOS LAGUNAS BIOTOPE

### 2. The Heart of the Maya Forest: a unique natural and cultural heritage

At the core of Mesoamerica lies **the largest continuous stretch of primary tropical forest in the region: the Heart of the Maya Forest**. This corridor spans:

- **Mexico:** Balam Kú, Balam Kin, and the majestic Calakmul.
- **Belize:** Río Bravo and the Belize Maya Forest Trust.
- **Guatemala:** Mirador-Río Azul National Park and Biotopo Dos Lagunas.

This green heart hosts extraordinary biodiversity: **jaguars, Baird's tapirs, towering ancient trees, and world-renowned Maya archaeological sites**. It is a vital carbon sink, a cultural treasure, and a cornerstone for global climate resilience.





### 3. A model of trilateral cooperation under increasing pressure

For over **18 years**, government agencies, civil society, and international partners have joined forces to safeguard this region through **trilateral cooperation among Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize**. Key achievements include:

- **Joint patrols and aerial surveillance**
- **Long-term biodiversity monitoring** (one of the most extensive camera trap programs in the region)
- **Forest fire prevention and control**
- **Community development and environmental education**

These accomplishments have been possible thanks to partners such as **Global Conservation, British Landmark Foundation, GIZ, KfW, USAID, WCS, FUNDAECO, and Amigos de Balam Kú**. However, **the limited and voluntary efforts of park rangers can no longer counter the rapid and large-scale threats they face**.

### 4. Escalating invasions in core conservation zones

Since **2023**, there has been a sharp increase in **illegal settlements within core areas**, including:

- **Nuevo Caa Naan (Mexico):** a settlement established within Balam Kú Reserve, just 2 km from the Guatemalan border.
- **La Reforma (Guatemala):** road openings, housing construction, and illegal agriculture inside the Maya Biosphere Reserve.
- **The Candelaria Triangle (Guatemala) – Balam Kú border (Mexico):** identified as a key invasion route.

These operations are linked to **transnational criminal networks** involved in drug trafficking, illegal timber extraction, land speculation, and rural violence. Despite joint patrols with the Guatemalan Army and DIPRONA, **pressure on Mirador-Río Azul National Park and Biotopo Dos Lagunas is increasing**.

Since **early 2024**, joint patrols by park rangers from **CONAP, CECON, and FUNDAECO** have detected clear signs of illegal land parceling in the northern area of the **Mirador-Río Azul National Park and the Dos Lagunas Biotopo**, including breaches and trees marked for division. Thanks to swift action—supported by **DIPRONA** and the **National Army**—these initial threats were dismantled and a key individual involved in the operation was captured





## Current Situation

Just **17 kilometers to the west**, in the **Triángulo de Candelaria (Guatemala)** and in the **Balamkú Reserve**, part of the **Calakmul Biosphere (Mexico)**, there are already established illegal invasions. These settlements exert direct pressure on the Mirador Park and pose a constant threat of expansion into its territory.

These groups have attempted to establish presence through **illegal breaches, markings, and temporary camps**. This year, **at least two new threats have been recorded**, with confirmed presence in monitored zones—**although the army has refused to accompany patrols in this instance**.





## MONITORING AND THREAT REPORT 2024–2025

### Situational Analysis 2025

This is an operation involving **organized structures from Guatemala and Mexico** (narco groups, government authorities, and others) seeking to **colonize the northern part of the Maya Biosphere Reserve**. Their intention is to advance from the **Triángulo de Candelaria** toward **Mirador-Río Azul National Park and the Dos Lagunas Biotope**.

In 2024, CONAP, CECON and FUNDAECO **successfully halted their advance** with the support of the **army and the National Civil Police (PNC)**. However, in 2025, **new individuals linked to the invasion have been detected**, this time **without military support**, indicating a renewed attempt to occupy the area.

The current threats come **directly from the Mexican side**, specifically from **areas near Balam Kú and the Triángulo de Candelaria**, located **less than 17 kilometers from the northwestern corner of Mirador National Park**. This **transboundary corridor** has been documented as an **entry route for invasions**, which **requires urgent and coordinated action** with Mexican authorities.

**Early in 2024**, during a routine patrol conducted by park rangers in the northern sector of the Mirador archaeological site and south of Calakmul, along the Guatemala–Mexico border, we discovered clear signs and tree markings indicating that individuals had entered the area to claim land for future illegal settlements. Thanks to the **swift and coordinated response** of park rangers, the National Civil Police (PNC), and the Guatemalan Army, these invasions were **successfully prevented**. We removed the markings and installed multiple signs to reinforce the boundaries and legal status of the National Park.

In just two and a half months, **seven high-impact patrols** were carried out to protect the integrity of this critical area. Yet, at the beginning of 2025, new attempts were detected, with additional markings indicating plans for further incursions. Once again, after **six intensive patrols** in less than two months, we stopped these invasions before they became settlements.

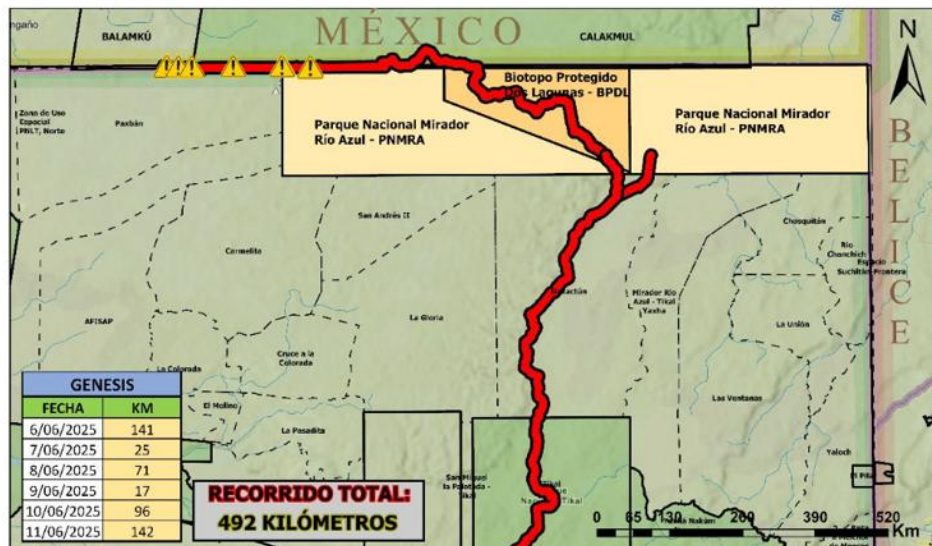
These actions demonstrate that **consistent presence and rapid intervention are essential** to safeguarding the park. However, the threat remains severe—and it is expected to intensify during the upcoming dry seasons. **Without continuous and reinforced protection, these globally significant ecosystems and archaeological treasures face irreversible loss.**

The Mirador-Río Azul National Park and the Dos Lagunas Biotope and biosphere Calakmul form the heart of the Maya Forest—**El Corazón de la Selva Maya**—one of the largest remaining tropical forests in the Americas, home to endangered species such as the jaguar and Baird’s tapir, as well as unique archaeological sites of global importance. **If we fail to act now, we risk losing not only critical biodiversity but also irreplaceable cultural heritage.**





## Parque Nacional Mirador - Río Azul , Biotopo Naachtún - Dos Lagunas





**We urgently call on the international community, conservation partners, and donors to join us in this fight—and to demand that the governments of Guatemala and Mexico guarantee the protection and conservation of the biodiversity of the Corazón de la Selva Maya.**

Your support will fund essential patrols, provide equipment and fuel for rangers, and strengthen monitoring systems to prevent future invasions. Together, we can ensure that this extraordinary natural and cultural landscape remains protected for future generations.

**The time to act is now—before it is too late.**







## Summary Patrol report 2024 / 2025.

| No | Date     | Activity Name                                | Key Findings / Results   |
|----|----------|--|--|
| 1  | 14/01/24 | Borderline monitoring by El Jabalí group     | Detected vehicle tracks; unauthorized tree cutting; patrol extended to milestone 91.                       |
| 2  | 19/02/24 | Operational patrol with DIPRONA              | Found two camps: pheasant remains, curassow head, and 9mm ammo; monitoring and measures taken.             |
| 3  | 19/03/24 | First impact patrol                          | Illegal clearing (316 m path); markings 'Chon' and 'Layo'; 3 dead peccaries; individual detained.          |
| 4  | 21/03/24 | Verification patrol                          | Checked invasion markings; situation under control; no signs of threats detected.                          |
| 5  | 23/03/24 | Second impact patrol                         | Removed illegal markings; cleared fire risk; 6 old campfires found; signs replaced.                        |
| 6  | 30/03/24 | Third impact patrol & support in Paxbán      | Illegal activity evidence in Paxbán and San Dimas; no new incidents in Naachtún; overnight monitoring.     |
| 7  | 13/04/24 | Signage and surveillance patrol              | Installed strategic signs; collaboration with CONAP, CECON, FUNDAECO to increase awareness.                |
| 8  | 10/05/25 | Monitoring patrol (borderline threats)       | Destroyed signs, fire outbreaks, hunting evidence; possible invasion attempt detected.                     |
| 9  | 15/05/25 | Combined patrol                              | Illegal markings, campfires, ammunition, hunting signs; replaced destroyed sign; recent illegal use.       |
| 10 | 24/05/25 | Judicial inspection patrol                   | Routine patrol with court order; no human presence detected; ongoing monitoring continues.                 |
| 11 | 31/05/25 | Routine patrol – hunting & logging findings  | Hunting remains, boot prints, illegal logging; two breaches detected near NW boundary.                     |
| 12 | 08/06/25 | Extensive patrol – hunting & invasion points | More than 10 invasion points; hunting remains, fire outbreaks, aircraft sighting; illegal signs destroyed. |
| 13 | 04/07/25 | Monitoring patrol by El Jabalí & El Mirador  | No recent human activity detected along borderline.  |



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maintain high-impact patrols (PNC, Army, and park rangers) at least every 15 days.
- Install a permanent army checkpoint in the northwest corner of the park.
- Increase visibility of the issue on social media, in the press, and other media outlets.
- Request the Guatemalan Army to conduct a monthly aerial overflight of the affected area.
- Ensure sufficient logistical resources to carry out patrols (vehicles, fuel, oil, food).
- Ensure that captured individuals are prosecuted rigorously and not released easily (serious crime).
- Coordinate a high-impact operation along the Dos Lagunas – Naachtún – Laguna Larga route, involving security forces (First Brigade, Public Prosecutor's Office, BEOS, PNC-DIPRONA, DIFEP), with at least 8 vehicles and logistical support. The Air Force must be on alert for any emergency or judicial transfer.
- Hold a binational meeting between the foreign ministries of Mexico and Guatemala to address the issue in a coordinated manner.
- Prioritize urgent actions in the transboundary area near Balam Kú and the Triángulo de Candelaria (Mexico), less than 17 km from the park's corner, where the origin of the new threats has been identified.





- **RECOMMENDED OPERATIONAL LOGISTICS**
- . **Type of patrol:** High-impact and long-range.
- . **Suggested route:** Entry via Dos Lagunas → Naachtún → descent through Laguna Larga.
- . **Proposed participants:**
  - First Brigade
  - BEOS
  - CONAP POCOS
  - Public Ministry (MP)
  - PNC-DIPRONA
  - DIFEP
  - ZUM Unit

*All with their own vehicles, as long as weather conditions allow (no rain).*
- . **Minimum necessary resources:**
  - 8 vehicles
  - Sufficient water, food, and fuel
- . **Security considerations:**
  - The possible presence of drug trafficking in the area must be taken into account, as it poses a risk of attacks.
  - The Air Force must be on alert for emergency evacuation or judicial transport, if necessary.

## 6. Urgent recommendations for the international community and governments

Given the gravity of this situation, we call upon **IUCN, multilateral agencies, European cooperation, and global conservation institutions** to:

- **Exert diplomatic pressure** on Mexico and Guatemala to strengthen institutional presence in protected areas.
- **Provide strategic funding** for permanent patrols, technology (drones, satellite communication), and control infrastructure.
- **Raise global visibility** of the imminent risk facing the Heart of the Maya Forest.
- **Support legal and judicial initiatives** to ensure strict prosecution of environmental crimes.
- **Promote a coordinated trilateral agenda** for the management and protection of shared ecosystems.



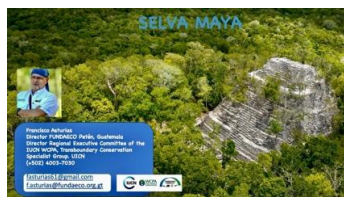
## Conclusion: the window for action is closing fast

The Maya Forest still beats, but **time is running out to save it**. If current invasions are not stopped, the consequences will be irreversible.

We urge the international community not to look away. Acting now means protecting not just a forest, but the **climatic, ecological, and cultural hope of an entire continent**



## DOCUMENTO ELABORADO POR:



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