

COSTA RICA'S REFORESTATION

Costa Rica doubled its forest cover over a thirty year period.

In the 1940s, 75% of Costa Rica was cloaked in lush rainforests. Then the loggers arrived, chainsaws in hand, and cleared the land to grow crops and raise livestock. Nearly half of forest cover was destroyed by 1987.

Soon after this all-time low, the government took a series of radical actions to convert the country back into a natural paradise. In 1996, it became illegal to chop down forest without approval from authorities and the following year it introduced PES (Payment for Environmental Services). Today almost 60% of the land is once again forest.

INCREDIBLE BIODIVERSITY

PES has helped reverse the damage by paying landowners to conserve forests and plant trees. The program has been successful in protecting biodiversity and mitigating climate change, as forests store carbon and provide critical habitats for wildlife.

Costa Rica is home to an incredible array of biodiversity, with over 500,000 species, making up 4% of the world's total species. The country has a vast network of protected areas, covering 26% of its land area, and is committed to preserving its natural heritage.

One example of the country's commitment to protecting its natural heritage is the Osa Peninsula, which is home to one of the country's most diverse and ecologically important areas. The peninsula contains 2.5% of the world's biodiversity, including 13 endangered species.

Costa Rica's sustainability efforts are anchored in the belief that economic growth should not come at the expense of the environment or the well-being of its citizens.

In recognition of its decades-long commitment to ambitious policies to combat climate change and protect the planet's natural resources, Costa Rica was awarded the United Nations Environment Programme's Champions of the Earth award for policy leadership in 2019.

In 2021, the country was the first winner of the Earthshot Prize, an initiative driven by the UK's Prince William that seeks to highlight successful cases of conservation. It was chosen due to the success of the PES system in recovering the nation's forests, and awarded a prize of US\$1.3 million.

In acknowledgement of the prize, Earthshot observed: "In the 1990s, the vast forests of Costa Rica were devastated, half their former size. But the people of Costa Rica and their Ministry for Environment had a plan to save them."

FROM PLEDGES TO SOLID POLICIES

Costa Rica has long punched above its weight as a global green pioneer with a strong social conscience, but now the Central American nation is preparing to cross the ultimate environmental frontier with a detailed plan to decarbonize its economy by 2050.

Many countries have promised to do the same. Reducing emissions is a key commitment of signatories to the Paris Climate Agreement, but Costa Rica is one of the first to turn pledges into solid policies and to frame the shift in terms of economic and social benefit. The country runs on 99.5 % clean and renewable electric energy.

NO ARMY SINCE 1949

In 1949, Costa Rica became the first country in the world to abolish the army. They are investing the resources not used to maintain an army, into better social development.