

# Is nature conservation a drain or contributor to global economy?

By **BusinessMirror**

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Carving out 30 percent of the Earth’s surface for protection can be the wisest economic decision that the world will ever make as the nature sector drives the global economy, experts said.

The High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People (HACNP), with the National Geographic Society’s Campaign for Nature and the Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), recently organized a webinar, titled “Making the case for protecting at least 30 percent of the planet by 2030: the biodiversity, climate, and economics of 30by30,” that was attended by officials and representatives of the Asean member-states.

Campaign for Nature Director Brian O’Donnell gave a preview of the groundbreaking global report, which lays out the economic costs and benefits of protecting 30 percent of the planet by 2030.

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The report on the comprehensive study, led by Anthony Waldron of Oxford University and 100 other experts, was published on July 8.

The zero draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, which was released in January 2020, calls for the protection of 30 percent of the Earth’s surface in 10 years, touted as “30by30.”

“Most people think that protected areas are going to be a drain on the global economy. But this report showed that the nature sector is, in fact, a net contributor, not a drain,” O’Donnell said.

The tourism sector, which includes nature-based tourism, is one of the drivers of global economic growth, outweighing the impacts of other sectors, such as agriculture, timber, or fisheries.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism was growing at 4 percent to 6 percent annually, while agriculture and timber industries have been growing by less than 1 percent and the fisheries sector posting negative growth, O'Donnell explained.

Besides these economic benefits, "30by30" also provides nonmonetary benefits, such as climate change mitigation, flood protection, clean water, and soil conservation.

O'Donnell said according to the report, which ran different scenarios of biodiversity conservation for terrestrial and marine areas, the financial and economic benefits of protecting 30 percent of the planet exceed its costs "by a factor of 5 to 1."

This means that for every dollar cost of nature conservation, the economic benefit is equivalent to \$5.

To meet the proposed target of protection, \$140 billion globally every year should be set aside.

## **Small fraction of global GDP**

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Costa Rica Minister of Environment and Energy Carlos Manuel Rodriguez pointed out that while the figures sounded like a huge sum of money, the amount is a mere 0.16 percent of the global GDP, the combined gross national income of all the countries in the world.

"There is no excuse for us not to mobilize resources to be able to achieve our goal in the next 10 years," said Rodriguez, who has been selected as the next CEO and chairman of the Global Environment Facility.

The governments of Costa Rica and France are leading the HACNP, a grouping of nations championing for the proposed “30by30” global target.

Rodriguez said Costa Rica doubled the size of its forest cover and at the same time tripled its economic growth in 30 years.

“I come from a country that has systematically invested in policy development, institutional solutions that balance nature conservation, human well-being, and economic development,” he said, emphasizing the “short window of opportunity to address the biodiversity collapse.”

Rodriguez underlined the correlation between establishing ecotourism protected areas and efforts to restore degraded landscapes, and the growth of the country’s economy and income per capita.

In Costa Rica’s case, 2.5 million tourists visit the country every year and spend around \$3.5 billion in total, according to Rodriguez.

## **Effective management**

National Geographic Society Explorer in Residence Dr. Enric Sala, meanwhile, pointed the importance of effectively managing protected areas, saying only 5 percent of the world’s terrestrial protected areas and 1 percent of the marine protected areas are considered to be effectively managed.

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“When protected areas have higher budget and number of personnel, and active and effective management, they not only restore biodiversity effectively, they provide benefits including jobs for local people through tourism, fisheries; they bring in more economic revenues,” Sala said.

In her opening remarks, ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim said the online discussion on the science and the rationale behind the proposed target will help

the Asean region determine its own contributions to the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and define its priority actions to ensure the agreed targets are met.

Lim noted that setting aside protected areas still remains as one of the most effective ways to tackle biodiversity decline.

“Although we are crafting the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, we are not reinventing the wheel. The Asean member-states, all of which are parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, have shown considerable commitment to achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, particularly Target 11, which calls for the protection of at least 17 percent of terrestrial and 10 percent of marine areas by 2020,” Lim said.

Professor Zakri Abdul Hamid, founding chairman of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, on the other hand, noted some of the challenges of biodiversity conservation in the Asean region, such as poaching, lack of conservation staff, the need for coordinated efforts in transboundary protected areas, and funding for conservation program. Zakri is also the co-chairman of Secretariat of Malaysia’s Global Science and Innovation Advisory Council.

The post-2020 global biodiversity framework will be adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in its 15th meeting, which was originally scheduled to take place in October in Kunming, China.

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