

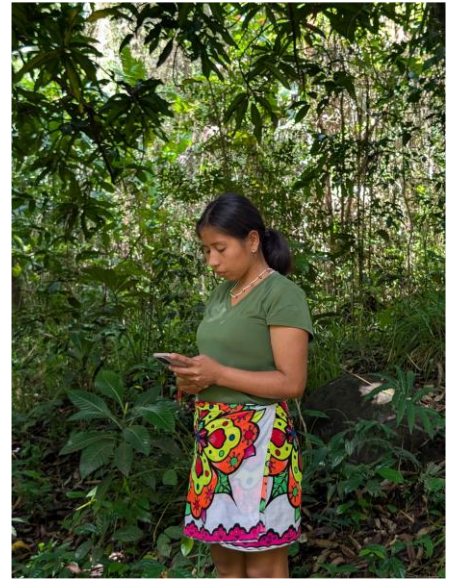
March 2026

2025 Update: Indigenous-led conservation in the Maje Mountains

Field partner: Native Future

We wanted to thank you again for your support for this project and let you know what was accomplished in 2025 — a lot as it turned out. It was a good year for environmental justice and Wounaan land rights.

Background: The Wounaan are pushing back against the invasion and deforestation within their 35,000-hectare Indigenous territories. Satellite surveillance aids on-the-ground Wounaan rangers in stopping illegal land clearing. The Wounaan are developing bird-centered ecotourism focused on North American wintering songbirds and shorebirds (notably, whimbrels) and over 100 resident breeding species.



Cumulative progress:

- ◆ **24 individuals have been penalized or prosecuted** for environmental damages to Wounaan territories since the monitoring program began.
- ◆ **\$121,647 USD in fines have been levied** against those who committed illegal deforestation of almost 200 hectares of forest.
- ◆ Protection and enforcement have a strong deterrent effect and must be continued.

2025 Progress:

- ◆ **Optimizing protection efforts:**
 - Native Future contracted a GIS technician to improve the territorial alert mapping to include fire monitoring.
 - Five regional working group meetings were held with territorial monitoring staff and the Ministry of Environment to work on early warning systems, environmental complaint reporting, forest fire fighting and vegetation classification.
 - Two Wounaan community members participated in a tree climbing and seed collection training session carried out by US Forest Service.
 - USFS IP experts carried out forest fire fighting reinforcement training with 39 Wounaan fire fighters (6 female; 33 male) in Rio Platanares. They also led training with Panama's national fire-fighting and included community fire fighters.
- ◆ Wounaan **tree planting** technicians selected three Mountain Almond (*Dipteryx oleifera*) trees and collected 2,600 seeds from them, which were provided to 26 families in the community of Rio Hondo. In the preceding five years, they have planted at least 20,000 native trees in their forests and farms.

◆ **Progress on Tourism:**

- The Digital Transformation of Indigenous-Led Ecotourism and Conservation Project was completed with funds from the International Development Bank, and the Wounaan are now welcoming eco-tourists.
- Three trails were developed (land-based and aquatic) with biocultural interpretive materials in three languages (English, Spanish and Wounaan meu).
- The communities joined the National Indigenous Tourism Chamber of Commerce
- A consultant is developing a marketing plan and business connections in Panama, and local guides are attending English classes.
- Whitehawk Birding (a birding tour company) led the first Wounaan Bird Count Conservation Tour.

Looking forward

Today, the Wounaan are increasingly recognized by the government of Panama as legitimate partners in the protection of Panama's natural assets. Native Future helps the Wounaan with land titling, which is long process. Biome will continue to support Wounaan protection efforts and monitor their progress on ecotourism (where we provided early input).

Thank you for your support for this project! Please let us know if you have questions or would like to discuss this project or receive further information.

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