

Sustaining the Economy and the Environment

Herencia Colombia PFP

Oscar Raigozo, Local farmer and PNN Chingaza team member Buffer zone PNN Chingaza, Cundinamarca, Colombia © Filmico Colombia/WWF-US

From the soaring peaks of the Andes to the rich green depths of the Amazon, Colombia is home to some of the most biodiverse places on Earth. Indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombian communities, and local stewards have cared for these ecosystems for generations.

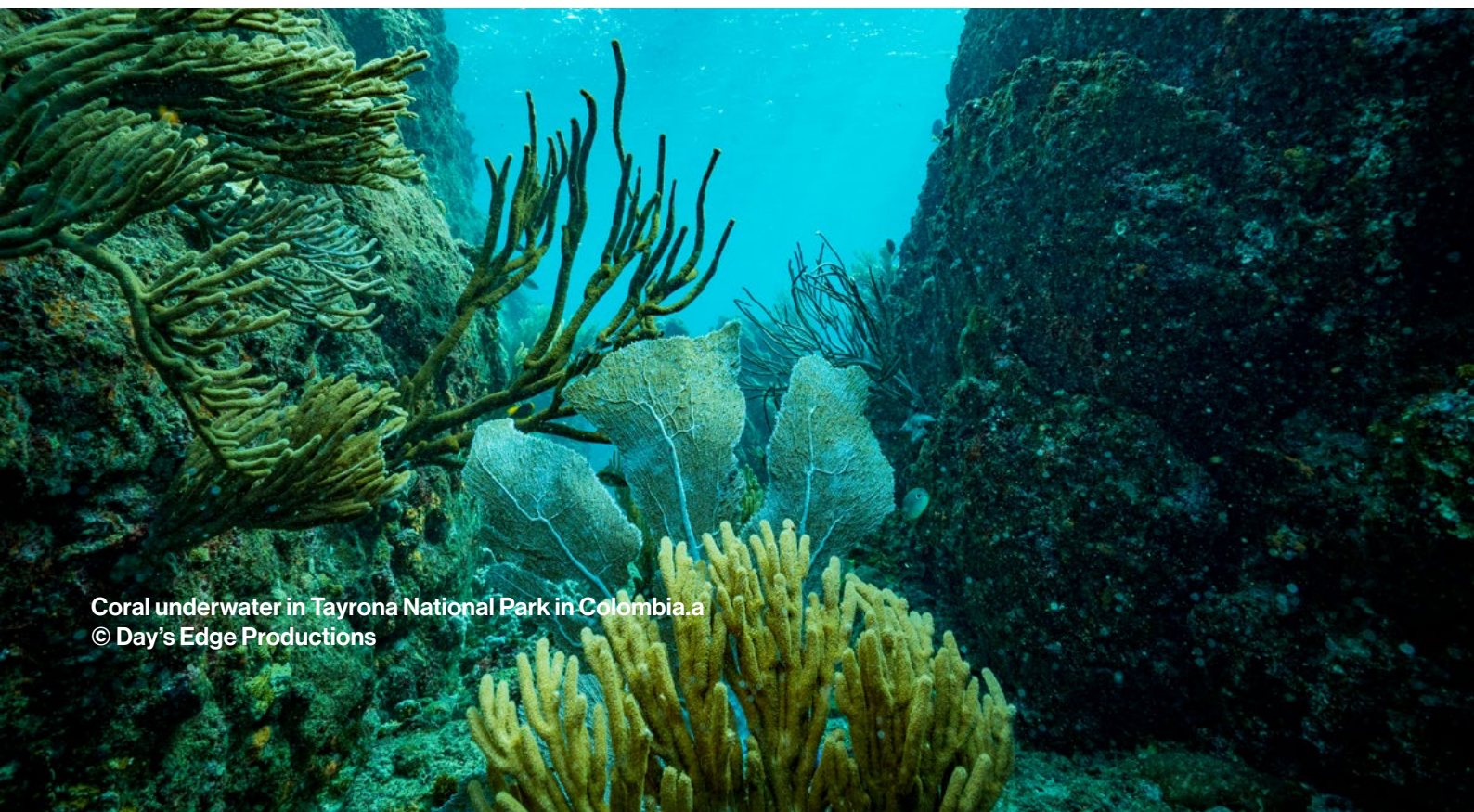
Launched in June 2022 by Colombia's government, WWF, and a broad spectrum of public and private partners, Herencia Colombia (Heritage Colombia, or HECO) carries that legacy forward. HECO aims to secure the effective and lasting conservation of nearly 32 million hectares (ha) of terrestrial and marine areas across more than 100 existing, new, and expanded protected areas and corridors, including at least 3 million ha of new terrestrial areas and 15 to 17 million ha of new marine protected areas.

Through collaboration between the government, local communities, and other in-country partners, HECO is creating, expanding, and improving the management of protected areas; establishing wildlife corridors; and fostering sustainable agricultural practices and green businesses that sustain the economy and environment. Since 2022, the government has brought more than 1.4 million ha of terrestrial areas and 17.8 million ha of marine areas under new protection under HECO, and 2025 saw continued strengthening of HECO's work on protected areas.

HECO enhanced the National Natural Parks System of Colombia's (PNNC) surveillance and monitoring capacity in 2025, leading targeted trainings and supporting the agency in substantially advancing strategic program components under the National System of Protected Areas. Research and monitoring programs that follow PNNC institutional guidelines are under development at Malpelo Flora and Fauna Sanctuary - a 4.8 million ha no-take zone - through the implementation of its management plan approved in June 2024.

PNNC also advanced and strengthened management plans for new terrestrial and marine areas designated under HECO. In Serranía de Manacacías National Park, PNNC engaged more than 120 community members to complete the park's management plan and aligned the park's Emergency and Contingency Plan with Colombia's risk management law. The plan addresses wildfire mitigation, conservation of hydrological and biodiversity processes, and community agreements that support early response and the protection of key species. And HECO's management plan for the 3.3 million ha Cordillera Beata was formally approved, establishing a clear zoning framework to balance strict conservation, scientific research, and controlled use.

With HECO's support, PNNC prioritized 42,265 ha for restoration, reduced fire hotspots from 332 to 11, and strengthened Indigenous collaboration through new agreements and projects like the Guajira Biocultural Connection. The Connection aims to integrate Wayuu culture with conservation and sustainable development through housing, ethical tourism, renewable energy, and cultural preservation to address climate and mining impacts.



Coral underwater in Tayrona National Park in Colombia.
© Day's Edge Productions

HECO has also faced challenges in 2025 that required adaptive management. Changes in leadership in the Ministry of Environment underscore the evolving governance context in which HECO operates: the Minister of Environment was replaced twice between February and August and the Vice Minister of Policies and Normalization was replaced in October. In July, the HECO leader stepped down, and PNNC appointed an interim lead, pending a permanent decision by the steering committee.

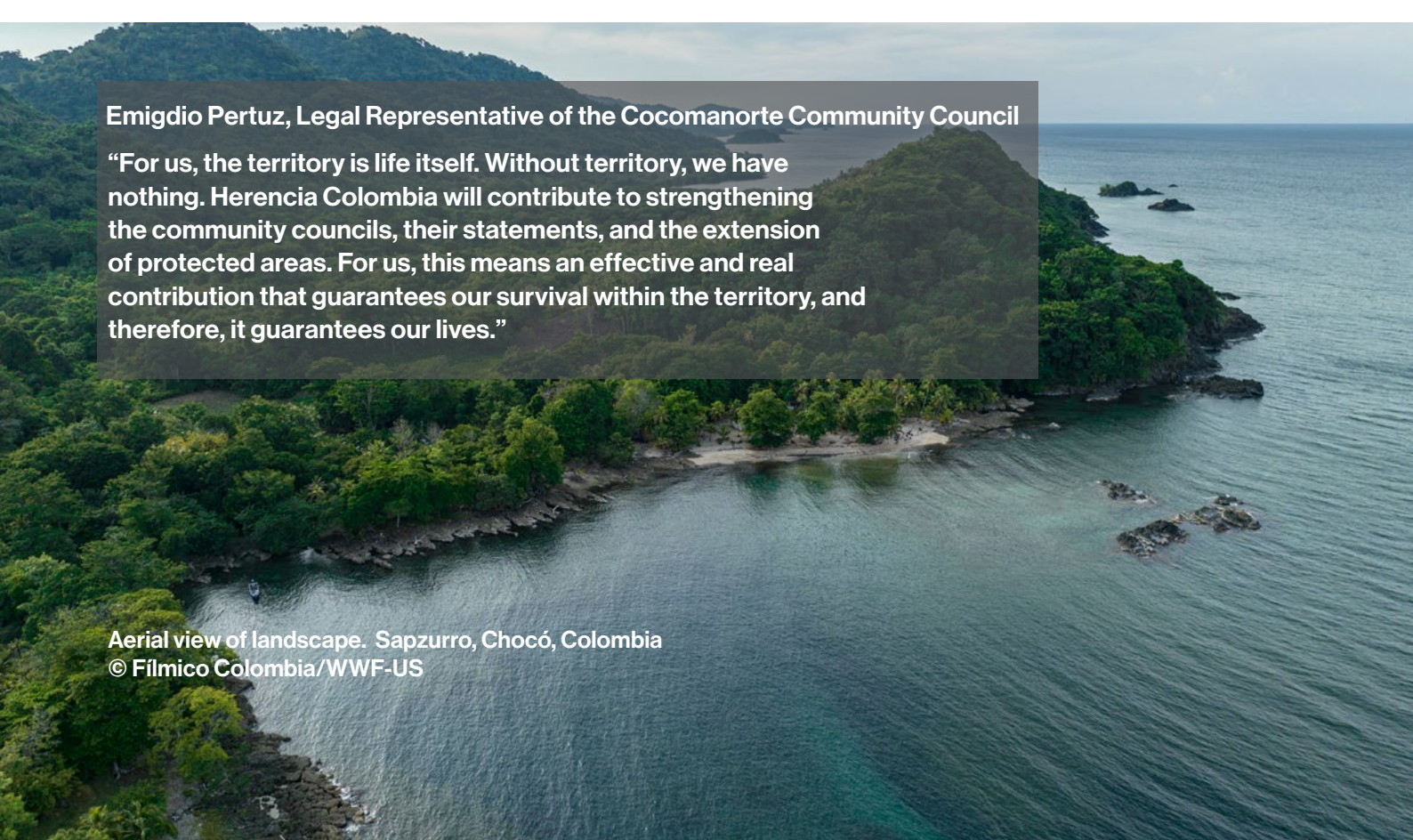
And while the government contributed more than U.S.\$13 million to HECO from 2022 to 2025, the flow of carbon tax funds to HECO activities - a key disbursement condition - has been delayed. The Government has now created the Fund for Life and Biodiversity (Fondo para la Vida y la Biodiversidad) or FVB, to disburse the carbon tax funds through a grant-based funding mechanism rather than a direct allocation. This grant application process has proved lengthy, and PNNC is in regular contact with FVB to help secure approval of the HECO grant application.

These broader challenges presented significant bottlenecks to program implementation, including the HECO Green Climate Fund (GCF) Project, a major contributor to HECO's terrestrial component. Due to the shortfall of government co-financing to the HECO GCF Project, WWF-US - per its contractual obligations with the GCF - notified the GCF of a potential Major Change event and suspended project funding in October 2025.

Based on discussions with the key project partners and donors, including the GCF, the project is expected to be restructured in the latter half of 2026 or early 2027, following the elections in Colombia.

In the interim, efforts are underway to establish and solidify enabling conditions for effective implementation of the GCF project in the next phase and define the key elements to be included in the upcoming GCF restructuring. WWF has secured other interim funding to ensure continuity of essential operations of the project and key conservation activities through March 2026. HECO's marine activities are unaffected by the restructuring and remain on track. While public sector capacity and cash flow constraints are real challenges, HECO's program structure remains sound. PNNC continues to show strong institutional commitment, and the government continues to fund and maintain protected areas.

2025 has underscored that communication, contingency planning, and nimbleness are essential to navigating policy shifts and political transitions. PFPs often unlock transformational policy reforms and foster enduring collaboration and impact. However, long-term implementation depends on sustained commitment across political administrations and institutions, and transitions require strategic planning to ensure program continuity and long-term success.



Emigdio Pertuz, Legal Representative of the Cocomanorte Community Council

“For us, the territory is life itself. Without territory, we have nothing. Herencia Colombia will contribute to strengthening the community councils, their statements, and the extension of protected areas. For us, this means an effective and real contribution that guarantees our survival within the territory, and therefore, it guarantees our lives.”

Aerial view of landscape. Sapzurro, Chocó, Colombia
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