

How Panama is tackling climate change and deforestation

National climate action plan - reforest 1 million hectares by 2050

As part of a 2014 pact between the government and business leaders, as well as its national climate action plan, Panama aims to reforest 1 million hectares by 2050, including planting trees on degraded land. Rainforests cover 65% of Panama, but between 2012 to 2019 the country lost around 2% of its forest per year. The equivalent of about 8,000 hectares (19,768 acres) a year, according to government figures. Panama is now taking steps to reforest areas of Panama and decrease illegal logging while keeping in mind, a segment of the rural population "lives off of logging." environment minister Miltiades Concepcion explains: "There's a cultural aspect to this, many people in rural areas live off this (logging) and it's not easy from one day to the next to get deforestation down to zero."

That being said over the past year and a half logging permits granted by the environment ministry were suspended, and satellite and drone surveillance was increased. Along with this citizens began reporting more illegal activity. Next year's deforestation rates will "no doubt" show a decline, explained Concepcion, without elaborating: "We are unsure if any logging permits will be granted in 2021, or if any reforestation has occurred from 2014 until the present day".

Panama and Green Energy

Panama also plans to cut the use of petrol cars by at least 30% over the next decade explained Concepcion. The goal to increase the sale of electric-vehicle for the consumer market while phasing out fossil fuel-powered government cars and shifting to electric buses. About 70% of Panama's electricity is generated from hydropower and less than 10% of the energy used by the private sector comes from wind and solar. Concepcion noted that solar and wind power were virtually non-existent in Panama 15 years ago, adding Panama wants to generate up to 95% of its electricity needs from renewable energy by 2050.

Climate change and the Panama Canal

Over the past few years, Panama has seen the most severe droughts ever to impact the canal's watershed negatively affecting the supply of water from Gatun Lake. At several points, the canal authority was forced to impose temporary maximum depth limits on ships, because there was not enough water. "The effects of climate change are also seen in the fact that sometimes it's necessary to restrict the draft on ships due to little rainfall at certain times of the year," Concepcion said. Last year, the canal had to cut its daily slot reservations due to drought, and impose a "freshwater" charge on ships.

Panama Canal aims to be carbon neutral by 2030

Panama Canal Authorities have launch plans for a pilot program utilizing electric vehicles and alternative fuels to power equipment. The Panama Canal Authority said Monday it has "launched a process to decarbonize its operations" by 2030 through a combination of "operational efforts and national incentives". Those include:

- ü the purchase of four electric vehicles for a pilot program
- ü efforts to transition to alternative fuels for powering tugboats, launches, and facilities.

Officials also said the canal has joined the "50 First Carbon-Neutral Organizations," an initiative by Panama's Ministry of Environment to integrate national efforts to accelerate so-called measurable climate actions. As part of that program, the canal will develop an annual greenhouse gas inventory, as well as an action plan with measurable targets to reduce emissions, officials explained.