



## GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

MAY 2008



*Due to capacity building and technical assistance, USAID and its partners in Panama continue to increase their knowledge as well as enhance natural resource management. These activities aid in increasing carbon sequestration, which is essential to mitigating the effects of climate change. Furthermore, USAID's contribution to protecting the Panama Canal Watershed is proving invaluable for not only Panama but for the rest of the world as well.*

### BACKGROUND

Panama plays a special role in relation to U.S. foreign policy goals in the region. It is strategically at the juncture between two continents and two oceans, and is home to the Panama Canal, perhaps the most critical infrastructure in this hemisphere's maritime navigation system. It has a special historical relationship with the United States from its separation from Colombia in 1903 to the reversion of the Panama Canal Zone and U.S. military bases to Panamanian jurisdiction in 2000. Since that time, the relationship has changed, but not its strategic importance. From the U.S. perspective, Panama continues to be inextricably linked to its core national interests in security, democracy and economic development.

The United States Agency for the International Development (USAID) in Panama is committed to maintaining and strengthening the ongoing partnership between the United States and Panama in economic growth, democracy and governance.

### SECTOR-SPECIFIC CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIVITIES

#### REDUCED NET GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM LAND USE SECTOR

In collaboration with the Panama Canal Authority, the Inter-institutional Commission for the Panama Canal, and the National Environmental Authority, the *Conservation of Biodiversity in the Panama Canal Watershed Project* endeavors to improve management of the Panama Canal Watershed (PCW) and its biodiversity. As a result of the relationships with these institutions, substantial progress was made in sustainable resource use, environmental governance, and improved protected areas management. Biodiversity conservation is critical to ensuring that Panama's valuable global, regional, and local resources are available to support vital ecosystems and combat climate change. Activities implemented contribute to reducing the rate of deforestation, and limiting the effects of climate change by improving monitoring systems for protected areas, and promoting sustainable and intensive ranching to allow for forest regeneration. These activities provide tools to increase economic opportunities to communities, and offer resources for Panamanian officials to better manage the forests of the watershed and its buffer zones, which historically have been subjected to slash-and-burn farming and other destructive practices.

**PARTNERS**

USAID's partners in climate change activities in Panama include:

- Inter-institutional Commission for the Panama Canal Watershed
- International Resources Group
- National Environmental Authority
- Panama Canal Authority

Because partners change as new activities arise, this list of partners is not comprehensive.

During the first year of this new phase of the Panama Canal Watershed Program, USAID has contributed to the improved management of over 150,000 hectares of forest as demonstrated in the improvement of the park management index of the two protected areas that are the focus of the project. Project activities also have focused on establishing and implementing a monitoring system for protected areas and visitor management, as well as strengthening environmental governance. Local watershed committees have been organized to serve as advocates for the protection and sustainable management of their natural resources.

With respect to reforestation and forest management, the Project is supporting the development of a new reforestation policy for the Panama Canal Watershed that addresses management of elephant grass, an exotic and invasive species that threatens thousands of hectares covered with forest due to its aggressiveness and resistance to fires. Additionally, the project is providing assistance to Panama's National Environmental Authority to design biological corridors and define land-uses within the corridors to improve the biological viability of the two main protected areas in the Panama Canal Watershed.

With training and technical assistance from USAID/Panama, residents and local NGOs from the Chagres National Park area are developing a 'green' value chain of nurseries to supply trees and plants for reforestation and residential projects.

For more information, visit:  
<http://www.usaid.gov/missions/pa>