Annotated List of Wetlands of International Importance

El Salvador

8 Ramsar Site(s) covering 228,699 ha

Area Natural Protegida Laguna del Jocotal
Site number: 970 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: San Miguel

Area Natural Protegida Laguna del Jocotal. 22/01/99; San Miguel; 4,479 ha; 13°19'50"N 088°14'54"W.
The site is formed by two permanent freshwater lagoons, Laguna del Jocotal and Laguna San Juan. It is one of the best examples of freshwater flooded wetlands in the Central America Pacific that in addition to its huge biodiversity, plays an important role in flooding control and climate regulation. It stands out by its richness and diversity of migratory and resident waterbirds. It is characterized by the presence of patches of Bravaisia integerrima, commonly known as "freshwater mangrove". The system supports several threatened species, like Plectrohla guatemalensis (Critically Endangered, IUCN Red List) and Puma yagouaroundi (CITES, appendix 1), among other species locally endangered. It is partially a National Protected Area. The area of the site has been extended in 2012 from 1,571 to 4,479 hectares. Ramsar site no. 970. Most recent RIS information: 2012.

Complejo Bahía de Jiquilisco
Site number: 1,586 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Usulutan
Area: 63,500 ha | Coordinates: 13°13'N 88°31'59"W | Designation dates: 31-10-2005

Complejo Bahía de jiquilisco. 31/10/05; Usulutan; 63,500 ha; 13°13'N 088°32'W. The Jiquilisco Bay Complex constitutes the largest extension of brackish water and saltwater forest in El Salvador, including numerous estuaries and canals, sand dunes and beaches, various isles of different sizes, a freshwater lagoon complex and seasonally saturated forests connected to the mangroves, of which at least 6 types are present. The site constitutes the habitat of the large majority of coastal waterbirds in the country and nesting site of species such as Rynchops niger, Sterna antillarum, Charadrius wilsonia and Haematopus palliatus. The surrounding beaches are also nesting sites for the green turtle (Chelonia agassizi), Hawksbill turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata), olive ridley (Lepidochelys olivacea) and leatherback turtle (Dermochelys coriacea), all of them threatened due to the overexploitation of their eggs. The site performs a very important function in the prevention of natural catastrophes by stabilizing the soil and preventing erosion. The most important economic activities involve fishing, shellfish extraction, aquiculture, salt extraction, cattle ranching and coconut plantations. There is some tourism in the area. Ramsar site no. 1586. Photos. Most recent RIS information: 2005.
Complejo Barra de Santiago
Site number: 2,207 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Ahuachapán and Sonsonate
Area: 11,519 ha | Coordinates: 13°42'24"N 90°00'59"W | Designation dates: 16-01-2014
View Site details in RSIS

Complejo Barra de Santiago. 16/01/14; Ahuachapán, Sonsonate; 11,519 ha; 13°42'24"N 90°00'59"W. The Site contains an area representative of the mangroves of the dry Northern Pacific ecoregion of Central America and a palm tree (Brahea salvadorensis) swamp representative of an ecosystem specific to the Mesoamerican dry tropical forest ecoregion. It supports numerous threatened or endangered species. Among these are four species of marine turtles (Eretmochelys imbricata, Lepidochelys olivacea, Dermochelys coriacea and Chelonia mydas) and other species severely threatened by their commercial trade value, such as the yellow-naped parrot (Amazona auropalliata). The mangroves also support about 75% of the commercially important coastal fauna in El Salvador. Many of these species, such as the shrimp of the Penaeidae family, depend on the mangroves as feeding, spawning and nursery areas. The Site is important for local communities as they depend on artisanal fishing for their livelihoods. It is threatened by unregulated urbanization, overgrazing, the growth of sugar cane and the increasing demand of wood for construction, as these have caused deforestation, changes in the hydrology of the area and pollution. Ramsar Site No. 2207. Most recent RIS information: 2013.

Complejo Güija
Site number: 1,924 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Santa Ana
Area: 10,180 ha | Coordinates: 14°16'59"N 89°28'59"W | Designation dates: 16-12-2010
View Site details in RSIS

Complejo Güija. 16/12/10; Santa Ana; 10,180 ha; 14°16'N 089°29'W. This Ramsar Site includes the Protected Natural Area San Diego y San Felipe Las Barras, a lagoon complex and its surrounding flooded areas. A part of the Güija complex is also representative of the Central America Dry Tropical Forest ecosystem, which is considered threatened by World Wildlife Fund (WWF). This ecosystem sustains IUCN Red List endangered species like the thorny iguana (Ctenosaura flavidorsalis) and species listed in appendices I and II of CITES as Amazonia albifrons, Puma yagoaroundi and A. auropalliata. The Site also records 59,000 water birds including migratory species such as Anas discors, Anas clypeata and Dendrocygna bicolor, and a high fish diversity that includes 14 native species from El Salvador. These natural resources support fishing at both commercial and subsistence levels as well as other main productive activities such as agriculture and tourism. Invasive species like water hyacinth (Eichornia crassipes) in some lagoons, the expansion of agricultural land, intentional burning, and water pollution due to the lack of sanitation system in the surrounding communities constitute the main threats for the Güija Complex. A management plan for fisheries resources in the lagoon complex and a management plan for the protected natural area are currently being implemented for conservation actions within this Ramsar Site. Ramsar Site No. 1924. Most recent information: 2010.
Complejo Jaltepeque
Site number: 1,935  |  Country: El Salvador  |  Administrative region: La Paz y San Vicente
Area: 49,454 ha  |  Coordinates: 13°22'N 89°03'W  |  Designation dates: 02-02-2011
View Site details in RSIS

Complejo Jaltepeque. 02/02/2011; La Paz y San Vicente; 49,454 ha; 13°22'N 89°03'W. The Jaltepeque Complex is the second biggest brackish water area and intertidal forested wetland in El Salvador. The site includes a permanent shallow water marine ecosystem and other coastal wetlands such as estuaries, sandy beaches, salt flats, and coastal brackish and freshwater lagoons as well as permanent and stationary rivers and streams. Its diverse habitats provide nesting refuge for turtles like Chelonia mydas and Dermochelys coriacea, listed as endangered and critically endangered on the IUCN Red List, and other vulnerable species such as the turtle Lepidochelys olivacea and crocodiles (Crocodylus acutus). The mangrove area in the site is a main resting area for aquatic migratory birds, where 64 species such as Larus spp, Thalasseus spp, and Charadrius spp have been reported. This Ramsar Site sustains fundamental local economic activities such as fishing, subsistence and industrial aquaculture, livestock, agriculture and tourism. It also provides a barrier against natural phenomena and enables aquifer recharge. The main threats to the Ramsar Site include the loss of forest due to the expansion of agricultural and livestock land, inappropriate fishing techniques, illegal hunting and water pollution generated by sewage coming for nearby communities and pesticide use. The Jaltepeque Complex also includes the Astillero Natural Protected Area (NPA) and is currently on the process of designating the Escuintla, Isla La Calzada y Tasajera as NPAs. The management plan for the Ramsar Site is under review, nevertheless conservation activities are currently done by local stakeholders. Ramsar Site no. 1935. Most recent RIS information: 2011.

Complejo Los Cobanos
Site number: 2,419  |  Country: El Salvador  |  Administrative region: Sonsonate
Area: 21,312 ha  |  Coordinates: 13°31'42"N 89°45'28"W  |  Designation dates: 02-02-2019
View Site details in RSIS

The complex is particularly important as it features the only coral reef formation between Mexico and Costa Rica. The Ramsar Site, which has also been designated as a protected natural area, consists of a rocky beach of volcanic origin, mangroves, coral reefs and open waters. At the Site, threatened ecosystems such as mangroves provide shelter and habitat for endangered species such as the brown sea cucumber (Isostichopus fuscus), and vulnerable species such as the leatherback sea turtle (Dermochelys coriacea) and the giant seahorse (Hippocampus ingens). Los Cobanos is also a nesting site for the critically endangered hawksbill turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata). It is the only place in El Salvador where the reef-forming lobe coral (Porites lobata) is found. The Site controls floods while also retaining sediments and toxic materials carried mainly by nearby rivers. The mangrove forest serves as a windbreak barrier and as a carbon sink. Among the main threats to the Site is the presence of unauthorized human settlements.

Embalse Cerrón Grande
Site number: 1,592  |  Country: El Salvador  |  Administrative region: Chalatenango, San Salvador, Cuscatlán, Cabañas
Area: 60,698 ha  |  Coordinates: 14°03'N 89°04'W  |  Designation dates: 22-11-2005
View Site details in RSIS

Embalse Cerrón Grande. 22/11/05; Chalatenango, San Salvador, Cuscatlán, Cabañas; 60,698 ha; 14° 03' N 89° 04' W. Artificial water reservoir that constitutes the largest freshwater body in the country. The reservoir provides relevant environmental products and services such as fisheries production and hydropower generation, water filtration and flood control. The site serves as a place of refuge, breeding and nesting ground for several thousand waterbirds, both resident and migratory, and hosts the largest duck populations in the country. Apart from having the largest freshwater fish diversity in El Salvador, it hosts 12 of the 14 native fish species known in the country. Other threatened species in the site include paca (Agouti paca), cougar (Puma concolor), ocelot (Leopardus pardalis) and the Red Brocket Deer (Mazama americana). Water pollution and eutrophication, deforestation, erosion, and the presence of water hyacinth (Eichhornia crassipes) constitute the greatest threats to the wetland. Ramsar site no. 1592. Most recent RIS information: 2005.
Laguna de Olomega. Designation date: 02/02/10; 7,557 ha; 13°19'N 088°04'W. Located in the Central American Dry Forest ecoregion, the Olomega Lake is the largest body of freshwater in eastern El Salvador. The site also covers the surrounding vegetation, such as the herb-dominated marshes and a patch of seasonally saturated forest, known as La Chiricana and one of the last relics of this community type in the country. Within it the mangle dulce (Bravaisia integérrima), a very rare species in El Salvador, is abundant. The site harbors threatened species, e.g., Muscovy Duck (Cairina moschata), Glossy Ibis (Plegadis falcinellus), Limpkin (Aramus guarauna) and the treefrog (Plectrohyla guatemalensis), and is a feeding and staging area for several migratory bird species (e.g., Lesser Scaup (Aythya affinis), Blue-winged Teal (Anas discors), etc). The site plays a major role in flood control, water purification and groundwater replenishment that will be later used, by wells, by the local population (ca. 9,000 inhabitants). The main threats are water pollution, deforestation, cattle farming, overfishing and exotic invasive species, such as Water Hyacinth (Eichornia crassipes). Laguna de Olomega and the nearby El Jocotal (Ramsar site N° 970) are located within the same watershed. Ramsar site no. 1899. Most recent RIS information: 2009.