

# Strengthening Forest Fire Brigades, Facilitating Opportunities for National Exchange and Analysis, Costa Rica

**Countries where project is active:** Costa Rica.

**Eco-Index categories that best describe this project:**

Fire prevention  
Parks and protected areas  
Communications

**Date this survey was updated:**

January 2005 [Project has been concluded.]

**Responsible organization(s):**

Fundación de Parques Nacionales (FPN), Costa Rica; Ministerio del Ambiente y Energía (MINAE), Costa Rica.

**Project director(s):**

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**Project summary:**

The forest fire brigades in Costa Rica carry out significant environmental protection against the threat of fire, mainly in protected wildlands and biological corridors. The National Parks Foundation (Fundación de Parques Nacionales - FPN) in coordination with the National System of Conservation Areas (Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación - SINAC) of the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE) and the National Forest Fire Commission (Comisión Nacional sobre Incendios Forestales - CONIFOR), together with the [Small Grants Program](#) of the United Nations Development Programme and the National Insurance Institute (Instituto Nacional de Seguros - INS) has been supporting brigade activities through training, financial assistance, and institutional support. However, the brigades are confronting some difficulties that weaken their capacity for action and efficiency. This project has organized a series of workshops for forest fire brigade groups to strengthen them and facilitate an opportunity for national exchange and analysis to determine the common needs and problems that affect their work, and identify feasible proposals based on their experiences and expectations.

**Project objectives:**

- Analyze the problems and needs of the fire brigades.
- Establish coordination mechanisms.
- Identify actions to strengthen brigade management.
- Share experiences.
- Make contributions to the evaluation and updating of the national fire management strategy for Costa Rica, 2000 - 2005.
- Establish strategic guidelines for the formulation of a brigade forest fire action plan in Costa Rica.

**Date project began:**

July 2004

**Expected duration (or date project was concluded):**

December, 2004 [Project has been concluded.]

**Principal funder(s):**

Programa de Pequeñas Donaciones (PPD), Costa Rica - Fondo para el Medio Ambiente Mundial ([site](#)); Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación (SINAC), Costa Rica.

**Current annual project budget:**

\$12,200  
¢ 5.307.525 colones

**Principal accomplishments to date:**

- Four regional workshops were held in Cañas, Nicoya, Lepanto, and Dota. A total of 90 people participated of which 86.67% were men and 13.33% were women; 62.2% were community firefighters, 10.0% were institutional firefighters, 6.7% were private business firefighters, and 21.1% were MINAE officials.
- Proceedings for each of the four regional workshops and a summary of the results from the four workshops were prepared.
- The first national meeting for volunteer brigade groups was held in Liberia in the Guanacaste province. A total of 64 people participated, of which 67.2% were volunteer brigade members and the other 32.8% were SINAC officials, representatives from CONIFOR, private enterprise, and cooperative entities.
- Developed the final proceedings, results, and a strategic guidelines document from this national meeting.
- The 2005-2008 action plan for the forest fire brigades has been developed with the involvement of the volunteer groups as well as CONIFOR and the National Technical Commission (Comisión Técnica Nacional - COTENA).

**Anticipated accomplishments for the next year:**

- As part of the oversight and evaluation phase, regional proceedings, and the action plan must be produced.

**Project monitoring and evaluation methodology:**

Revise and validate the national action plan for the strengthening of volunteer groups and the work plans of CONIFOR and COTENA.

Establish outreach and awareness-raising mechanisms for the institutional hierarchies that effectively make support possible for project implementation and the planning instruments developed.

Incorporate coordination, execution, and accompaniment actions into the operations plans of CONIFOR and COTENA that will facilitate the execution of the national action plan by the brigade groups.

### **Lessons learned from at least one year's work on this project:**

- Volunteer motivation may be due to their environmental, social, or economic interests, interest in fostering human relationships, participating in teamwork, or educational and information sharing opportunities.
- An organizational structure must be created that combines, identifies, and strengthens the work of the volunteer groups.
- Experience exchange is important to broaden knowledge, manage different fire situations, and strengthen management capacity and conflict resolution.
- Basic accident policy coverage should be improved by the National Insurance Institute.
- The topics of the training programs that are offered should be analyzed, modified, and expanded so that the preparation of forest firefighters can be professionalized and certified in the future.
- The capacity of volunteer groups must be strengthened with respect to their legal formalization, project and funding proposal development, fundraising, and administration.
- Youth and women must be incorporated into the volunteer groups, with clearly defined tasks and suitable training, offering opportunities for the development of their capabilities.
- Identify and implement actions for authorities (COTENA and CONIFOR), that will facilitate and accompany the effective participation of volunteer groups.
- Work protocols, formal requirements, commitments of the groups, documents, personal safety equipment, and supervision mechanisms must be developed. The acquisition of safety equipment and the coordination of frequent medical care must be strengthened.
- The need to participate in prevention and outreach tasks must be instilled in the communities, not just for forest fire matters, but also for actions related to the protection and management of natural resources.

### **Other Web sites that have further information about this project:**

Information not available.

### **Project conclusions:**

- This was the first time that a national consultation was developed that provided needed information about the problems and limitations of volunteer groups. Needs, thematic areas, actions for strengthening management, and the contributions that are made for natural resource protection were defined.
- This project was an exchange of experiences, problems, needs, and management between volunteers and officials from public institutions, private business, and cooperation entities.
- Regional and national documentation of the process was developed.
- A national action plan was formulated and validated by the volunteer brigade groups themselves, who are knowledgeable about their problems, requirements, and needs.
- The need for regional and national entities related to forest fires to become more actively involved was established.
- A diagnostic of the volunteer work force in Costa Rica was developed.
- We have an action plan for strengthening the brigade groups and the work plans of CONIFOR and COTENA. These work plans coordinate actions and develop strategies that will help increase capacity in the volunteer work force.

- We have the volunteers' commitment and interest in protecting and managing the nation's natural resources.
- A series of measures related to the development of national, regional, and local structures for the organization and formation of the volunteer groups must be established; requirements for the incorporation of interested parties, work protocols, records, training programs and professional preparation, periodic resource inventories, and other action arenas must also be defined.

**Information obtained at:**

- <http://www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=853>