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Protecting Coastal Desert Wilderness in Valle de los Cirios, Mexico

Applying Organization	WILDCOAST	Application Date	5/15/2026
Applying Contact	Monica Franco	Status	Submitted
Record Type	Member Collective	Created By	Monica Franco, 5/15/2026, 7:22 PM
		Create Account	<input type="checkbox"/>

Project Overview

Project Name	Protecting Coastal Desert Wilderness in Valle de los Cirios, Mexico	Requested Amount	\$50,000.00
Project/Campaign Name	Protecting Coastal Desert Wilderness in Valle de los Cirios, Mexico		
Type of Project	Acquisition	Project Multiple Locations	Baja California
Project Location (State or Territory)	Other	Longitude	- 114°55'35.43"W
Latitude	- 29°20'29.15"N		

Organization Details

Organization Name	WILDCOAST	Primary address for organization	2010 Jimmy Durante Boulevard Del Mar, California 92014 United States
Contact Name	Monica Franco	Contact Title	Mexico Senior Director
Contact Email Address	monica@costasalvaje.org		
Annual Operating Budget	\$5,000,000.00	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	30	Main Phone	+52 646 152 1518
Total Membership	0	Organization Website/Social Media Feed	http://www.wildcoast.org
BIPOC-led	Yes	C-Suite Staff	WILDCOAST and COSTASALVAJE operate through a binational structure, but the project is led by the Mexico-based team (16 full-time staffers), with decision-making authority over land acquisition, legal processes and local conservation activities.

Grant Details

Awarded Amount		Awarded Date	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		Secondary Project Type	
Term Start Date		Term End Date	

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

WILDCOAST is a binational conservation organization founded in 2000 that works to conserve coastal and marine ecosystems and address climate change through natural solutions. It has helped conserve over 37 million acres of coastal desert habitats and wetlands, sea turtle and gray whale habitat, mangroves and corals.

In Mexico, WILDCOAST operates through COSTASALVAJE, its Mexico-based nonprofit partner organization that has 16 full-time staff members, all Mexican nationals, with women representing the majority of leadership positions. Together, WILDCOAST and COSTASALVAJE operate as an integrated binational organization combining local conservation leadership and implementation in Mexico with U.S.-based organizational support, fundraising, and institutional oversight. Since launching its Wildlands Program in 2008, the organization has established the 44,468-acre Valle de los Cirios Coastal Reserve, one of the largest private conservation reserves on the west coast of North America.

Location Details

The proposed area is located within the Pacific coastal desert of Valle de los Cirios, Mexico, part of the globally significant Baja California Central Desert ecoregion, which spans approximately 19.2 million acres. Valle de los Cirios encompasses roughly 6.23 million acres, representing nearly one-third of the entire ecoregion and one of the largest intact coastal desert landscapes in North America.

This unique landscape is shaped by the cooling influence of the California Current, which moderates temperatures and generates recurrent coastal fog events that sustain highly specialized desert plant communities despite extremely low annual rainfall. The area contains two remarkable vegetation communities: coastal rosetophyllous scrub and fog-dependent sarcocaulous scrub.

These habitats support exceptional biodiversity and high levels of endemism, including iconic species such as the boojum tree (*Fouquieria columnaris*), desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), puma (*Puma concolor*), American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), kit fox (desert fox), and the Mexican long-nosed bat (*Choeronycteris mexicana*). In addition, a recent nesting record of the Snowy Plover (*Anarhynchus nivosus*) was documented on one of our beaches under conservation this year, highlighting the importance of these sites as critical habitat for sensitive coastal species. Our coastal conservation lands are also strategically located along the Eastern Pacific gray whale migratory corridor and within the Pacific Flyway, one of the most important migratory bird routes in the Americas. These coastal habitats provide essential stopover, nesting, foraging, and connectivity areas for marine migratory species throughout the region, including the Gray Whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*) and the Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*).

The fog-dependent vegetation communities are among the most distinctive ecosystems of the Baja California Peninsula and provide critical habitat, ecological connectivity, and climate resilience across the region. The region remains one of the last undeveloped stretches of Pacific coastal desert in North America, where rugged mountains, intact watersheds, and remote coastline still function as a connected wild landscape. This project will contribute to the long-term protection of this region, helping safeguard biodiversity, wildlife corridors, and intact ecological processes from future

Final Success

This project will permanently protect 852 acres of Pacific coastal desert habitat and 1.7 miles of undeveloped coastline within Valle de los Cirios, expanding a connected network of protected conservation lands to 45,323 acres and 33.2 miles along the Pacific coast of Baja California.

Impact on Climate and Biodiversity

fragmentation and development pressures.

The successful management of these recently-acquired parcels will strengthen climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and landscape connectivity within the Pacific coastal desert of Valle de los Cirios by expanding a permanently protected network of conservation lands along the Pacific coast of Baja California.

The project will strengthen climate resilience by protecting large, intact ecosystems that retain their natural ecological functions and adaptive capacity in the face of climate change. The region's coastal desert ecosystems are strongly influenced by the California Current and recurrent coastal fog events that provide critical moisture and moderate extreme temperatures despite very low rainfall. Conserving these intact landscapes helps maintain fog-dependent vegetation communities, natural hydrological processes, climate refugia, and ecological conditions that allow species and ecosystems to adapt to changing environmental conditions over time. Protection from future fragmentation and coastal development pressures will also help preserve ecosystem stability and resilience across the broader landscape.

The project will also protect important biodiversity values, including habitat for native and endemic species, and highly specialized desert plant communities unique to the Baja California Peninsula. The acquired properties include intact coastal desert habitat, ephemeral drainage systems, and coastal watershed areas that support habitat diversity and ecological processes across the desert-coastal interface. In addition to their ecological importance, one of the parcels contains rare petrified tree remains, adding significant paleontological and natural heritage value to the long-term protection of the site.

Finally, the acquisition is increasing connectivity between existing protected conservation lands by expanding a continuous coastal conservation corridor within Valle de los Cirios. Maintaining connected landscapes is essential for wildlife movement, genetic exchange, and long-term ecosystem health, particularly as species adapt to climate-related shifts in habitat and environmental conditions. By securing these privately owned parcels under permanent conservation management, the project will help prevent future habitat fragmentation and strengthen long-term ecological connectivity across the region.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

The project will help preserve access to an intact Pacific coastal desert

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

COSTASALVAJE recently completed the acquisition of the two coastal parcels

landscape that supports low-impact outdoor recreation, including camping, surfing, trail and dirt-road bicycling, hiking, wildlife observation, photography, and backcountry coastal exploration within the Valle de los Cirios region. The area is known for its remote and undeveloped character, renowned surf breaks, and its location along a well-established bicycle touring route across the Baja California Peninsula, offering visitors the opportunity to experience one of the last intact coastal desert wilderness landscapes remaining in North America.

By protecting these privately owned coastal parcels from future subdivision, road expansion, and high-impact coastal development, the project will help maintain the scenic, ecological, and recreational integrity of the region while preventing habitat fragmentation. These threats are particularly significant given the long history of proposed tourism and marina development projects along the Pacific coast of Baja California.

Although the region remains sparsely populated and highly remote, Valle de los Cirios Coastal Reserve supports conservation-compatible visitation and outdoor recreation opportunities that foster long-term appreciation for the region's unique biodiversity, coastal ecosystems, and natural heritage.

Existing management efforts established by COSTASALVAJE, including community ranger patrols, visitor guidance, and signage, help ensure that recreational use remains compatible with biodiversity conservation goals.

By expanding a growing network of permanently protected conservation lands managed under a long-term stewardship plan, the project will help preserve responsible public access to undeveloped coastline and wilderness recreation opportunities for future generations.

totaling 852 acres and 1.7 miles of Pacific coastline. Purchase agreements were successfully finalized in April 2026 following almost one year of negotiations with landowners, due diligence assessments, legal review processes, and execution of land purchase contracts.

Current project activities are focused on completing the remaining legal and administrative post-acquisition processes necessary to fully secure the properties under long-term conservation management. These include final deed registration, cadastral updates, title regularization procedures, government record updates, and completion of required legal filings associated with the transfer and conservation status of the properties.

Recent administrative changes in the region, including the creation of a new municipal jurisdiction where the properties are located, have introduced additional procedural requirements and extended timelines for due process after the purchase. Minor documentation inconsistencies identified during the closing process have also required additional administrative review. While these challenges are manageable and common in complex land transactions in remote regions, they may continue to extend portions of the final legal closeout process and add associated costs. Based on our experience during acquisition, we anticipate similar timing considerations as we complete the remaining post-acquisition processes, which are expected to continue through summer 2026.

Following acquisition, the newly protected parcels are being incorporated into COSTASALVAJE's long-term conservation stewardship program within the Valle de los Cirios Coastal Reserve. This includes biological monitoring, ranger patrol expansion, signage, visitor management, habitat protection measures, and long-term adaptive management activities designed to maintain ecological integrity and prevent future fragmentation and development pressures across the landscape. Full integration into stewardship and management activities will continue through late 2026.

Additionally, our long-term conservation strategy (10+ years) ensures that the acquired lands remain effectively protected through continuous on-the-ground management. COSTASALVAJE maintains an established presence in the region, including trained park rangers who conduct regular surveillance and monitoring patrols to deter illegal activities and ensure compliance with conservation objectives. These efforts will be expanded to cover the newly acquired properties.

We will implement a biological monitoring program focused on nationally threatened species recorded in the area, allowing us to track population trends, evaluate habitat conditions, and guide adaptive management actions in collaboration with local experts and community partners.

Potential challenges include future coastal development pressures, unauthorized access, and the long-term need for sustained conservation funding. To address these challenges, COSTASALVAJE will continue allocating institutional resources and securing complementary funding to support long-term stewardship and conservation actions. Through this integrated approach, the project will ensure the permanent conservation of these coastal desert ecosystems well beyond the initial 10-year horizon.

Engagement from the outdoor recreation and business community could significantly strengthen long-term conservation and stewardship efforts within the Valle de los Cirios Coastal Reserve.

Responsible partnerships with outdoor recreation businesses could help support management efforts that ensure recreational use remains compatible with biodiversity conservation goals. Several Baja California-based recreation operators already guide visitors through the region and utilize existing camping areas and access routes.

There are also opportunities for collaboration with companies interested in supporting conservation initiatives through philanthropic contributions, and visitor-supported conservation funding models connected to responsible nature-based recreation and long-term protection of intact coastal ecosystems. COSTASALVAJE has previously collaborated with outdoor recreation and tourism operators that have supported its conservation projects.

1. Permanent protection and long-term conservation management secured for 852 acres of Pacific coastal desert habitat and 1.7 miles of undeveloped coastline within the Valle de los Cirios Coastal Reserve.

2. Expansion of a connected protected landscape to 45,323 acres and 33.2 miles, strengthening ecological connectivity and habitat continuity for native and endemic desert species.

3. Reduced risk of future habitat fragmentation, subdivision, and high-impact coastal development across a critical section of the Pacific coastal desert corridor in Baja California.

4. Long-term stewardship and conservation management established across the newly protected properties

Key Decision Makers Not applicable. This project does not involve public land policy engagement.

Working With Business Community

Elevate Voices Although the Valle de los Cirios coastal region is extremely remote and sparsely populated, COSTASALVAJE has maintained a long-term conservation presence in the area for more than 15 years and has built trusted relationships with local landowners, ejido San José de las Palomas members, and nearby communities through consistent stewardship and conservation management efforts. The project supports local conservation engagement through the employment of a community park ranger who assists with site surveillance and biological monitoring, visitor registry, and stewardship activities in the reserve. Through ongoing conservation management, local stakeholders and

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

ejido members have seen that lands acquired by COSTASALVAJE remain permanently protected and managed for conservation purposes, helping build long-term trust and for ongoing land acquisitions efforts.

The project also contributes to local conservation capacity-building through partnerships with Baja California universities. Each year, undergraduate students participate in social service and professional internship programs that provide training and hands-on experience in biological monitoring, conservation management, stewardship, and field research within the reserve.

through biological monitoring, ranger patrol coverage, habitat protection measures, and visitor management.
5. Increased local conservation capacity through continued engagement of community-based stewardship staff and university student training programs focused on conservation management and field monitoring.

TCA Funding Plan

TCA's support will help ensure that the successful acquisition of these properties results in long-term, fully secured conservation outcomes within the Valle de los Cirios Coastal Reserve. Funding will support remaining acquisition-associated costs, including legal, administrative, and post-acquisition processes necessary to finalize the permanent protection of the two recently

. This support will also help initiate the first stage of integrating the newly protected properties into COSTASALVAJE's long-term stewardship program through installation of signage and incorporation into existing biological monitoring and surveillance efforts within the reserve. Ultimately, TCA's investment will help secure the permanent protection and active conservation management of one of the last intact Pacific coastal desert landscapes remaining in North America.

Confidential Items

We consent to sharing the general content of this proposal.

Other Relevant Application Details

