The world's largest subnational network dedicated to protecting forests, reducing emissions, and enhancing livelihoods across the tropics just got a lot bigger. Following a vote at our 16th Annual Meeting in Caquetá, Colombia from May 18 – 22, 2026, the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force (GCF Task Force) grew from 45 to 54 member jurisdictions. We welcomed nine new members from Colombia (Amazonas, Guainía, Guaviare, Putumayo, Valle del Cauca, and Vaupés), México (Michoacán), and Perú (La Libertad and Tumbes). This expansion increased the collective power of the GCF Task Force to carry out its mission through direct, territorial action.



The GCF Task Force welcomed nine new member jurisdictions. Photo by Government of Caquetá, Colombia.

The theme of our 16th Annual Meeting, ***New Forest Economy for Climate Action: Territorial Development and Innovation***, underscores the GCF Task Force's conviction that subnational governments in partnership with Indigenous peoples and local communities are uniquely positioned to co-create effective solutions tailored to their realities. The meeting brought together nearly 500 participants, including 19 governors and vice-governors, leadership from Colombia's National Federation of Departments and RAP Pacífico, authorities from state environmental secretariats, Indigenous and local community leaders, and international partners. Together, we participated in insightful plenary discussions, substantive bilateral meetings, meaningful field visits, and productive working sessions to advance a New Forest Economy, one that protects intact forests, restores degraded lands, and promotes sustainable commodity production and livelihoods.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

We forged exciting new partnerships, including one with the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). Organized crime has become a major driver of the climate crisis – environmental crimes have been rising at a rate of 2–3 times the rate of the global economy, and as prices for precious metals hit all-time highs earlier this year, illegal mining has proliferated across the tropics. As such, GI-TOC and the GCF Task Force signed a Letter of Intent aimed at sharing data, research, and technical assistance to combat forest crime together.

As our network expanded, we also signed a cooperation agreement with Action for Forest and RAP Pacífico (The Administrative and Planning Region for Cauca, Chocó, Nariño, and Valle del Cauca) to integrate Colombia's Pacific departments into the larger Colombian membership. The Governor of Caquetá, Luis Francisco Ruíz Aguilar, also led the signing of the Colombian Governors' Declaration of Cooperation through the GCF Task Force. The Declaration was signed by all Colombian members and observers, Norwegian and EU Embassies, Instituto SINCHI, The Nature Conservancy, Rainforest Alliance, COCOMACIA, Fundación para la Conservación y el Desarrollo Sostenible (FCDS) and other partners to demonstrate the political commitment to advance the New Forest Economy in Colombia.



GCF Task Force and GI-TOC Letter of Intent signing.

REGIONAL UPDATES – Innovation Funding & Capacity Building

Each of our regions gave updates on the incredible work they are leading on:

- financing for protected areas, including a $7M USD Darwin Initiative Award in Bolivia (Pando, Santa Cruz, and Tarija) and the $12.6M USD Herencia Maya

protected area financing plan in Yucatán, México;
- REDD+ and capacity building (Brazil);
- regenerative agriculture, sustainable transportation infrastructure planning, and forest governance plans (Colombia);
- territorial climate planning, forest restoration, and natural resource management (Côte d'Ivoire);
- Indigenous- and subnational government-led conservation funding (Ecuador);
- capacity building around carbon markets and sustainable commodities (Indonesia);
- JREDD+, sustainable commodities, and regenerative agriculture (México);
- nature-based solutions and climate resilient development (Nigeria);
- bioeconomy, deforestation-free commodities, and Indigenous land titling (Perú); and
- carbon markets and knowledge exchanges (USA).

A LETTER FROM ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

We also had two surprises: a letter from our founder, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, congratulating Caquetá and the GCF Task Force for their ongoing leadership, growth, and demonstration of the importance of subnational action; and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) announced their partnership with Amazonas, Brazil to protect 8M hectares. In addition, the Science Panel for the Amazon launched a new white paper, "From Knowledge to Action: Strengthening the Science–Policy Interface for the Future of the Amazon." For a full list of announcements, see here.



Jason Gray, GCF Task Force Project Director, presenting Governor of Caquetá, Luis Francisco Ruiz Aguilar, with a letter from Arnold Schwarzenegger.



Science Panel for the Amazon white paper launch. Photo by the Government of Caquetá, Colombia.

FIELD VISITS & WORKING SESSIONS

Annual meeting participants also engaged in one of eight deeply impactful field visits to better understand challenges and opportunities related to:

- Creating more sustainable supply chains for established commodities such as cacao, coffee, and cattle.
- Innovating markets for new and/or value-added Amazonian products such as honey from native stingless bees and copoazú, a close relative of cacao.
- Developing large-scale management plans for natural infrastructure and socioecological tourism.
- Integrating local communities, women and signatories of the 2016 Colombian peace agreement.
- Implementing restoration and agroforestry initiatives.

- Advancing cooperative partnerships and co-management activities between governments, local communities, and research institutions.



Field visit to Agua Bonita Territorial Training and Reintegration Space. Photo by the Government of Caquetá, Colombia.



Field visit to Copoazú Association of Belén de los Anquídes.

Finally, we strengthened our knowledge sharing and capacity building during 10 technical working sessions that focused on the building blocks of the New Forest Economy. Overall themes included: Establishing a Thriving Bioeconomy, Sustaining Natural Infrastructure, Restoration and Resilience, Sustainable Commodities, and Enabling Conditions for the New Forest Economy. Further details can be found in our meeting agenda, and a summary report on the results of these sessions will follow in the coming months.



Photo by Government of Caquetá, Colombia.

POLITICAL TURNOVER and LOOKING FORWARD

As global politics have become increasingly unstable and national leadership frequently shifts across the political spectrum, continuity at the subnational level is of the utmost importance. By working with long-term civil servants and building strong jurisdictional approaches, the GCF Task Force aims to ensure continuity across changing administrations, thereby helping to mitigate the risks associated with political turnover. This has proved to be crucial this year, with nearly 30 of our 54 members having gubernatorial elections in 2026. In the face of potential political upheaval and the threat of a “Super El Ñino” and all it brings, the GCF Task Force stands as a steady but growing presence that will continue to combat climate change through subnational leadership and actions that protect forests and the people that depend on them.