



Upper Midwest & Costa Rica: A Sister Parks Story

Partnership Highlights

In June 2013, fourteen parks of the Upper Midwest (SACN, MISS, APIS, VOYA, GRPO, ISRO, PIRO, SLBE, EFMO, IATR, NOCO, KEWE, PIPE) along with the Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Network (GLKN) became Sister Parks with seven parks and protected areas of Costa Rica's Osa Conservation Area. The partnership was inspired by the neotropical migratory bird species that the two regions share.

In under three years, sister bird festivals have formed in both countries. In March, communities on the Osa Peninsula gather for a ceremonial farewell as shared birds begin their migration northward. In May, communities along the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway herald their return on International Migratory Bird Day.

The international relationship inspired the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center to include the St. Croix Valley in their Wood Thrush Connectivity project. Geolocators were placed on wood thrush at SACN to learn where in

Central America these birds overwinter. The six birds that were recaptured spent the winter in four different countries: Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

Staff exchanges have also been a hallmark of the relationship. In October 2015, SACN Superintendent Chris Stein represented NPS at Costa Rica's 40th anniversary celebration of Corcovado National Park. In May 2016, four Costa Rican park managers will travel to the Upper Midwest to help celebrate the NPS Centennial before traveling to Estes Park, CO for the World Ranger Congress.

Park staff have appreciated how the effort has connected new audiences to parks and protected areas in both countries. Community partners have played a key role. A new nonprofit, Tropical Wings, has formed to support the Sister Park partnership, and Rotary International has helped SACN host two Costa Rican interns through the International Volunteers-in-Parks program.

Upper left: At a bird festival in Puerto Jimenez, young people say "good bye" to the shared birds as the birds begin their migration north.

Lower left: In May, communities in MN/WI celebrate the arrival of migratory birds. They are holding illustrations of shared birds drawn by their peers in Costa Rica.

Right: A map shows the routes taken by six wood thrush from SACN to their wintering grounds in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua and back again!

