



SACRED MOUNTAIN

Natural Reforestation in Ecuador

- INTERMEDIATE REPORT -

February 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Progress and Achievements

Since the beginning of Phase 2 in early 2024, the Sacred Mountain Reforestation Project has made significant progress despite challenging conditions. Key infrastructure has been completed, including the transport path to the mountain ridge and base camp, which now facilitates material transport and improves accessibility. The base camp has been enhanced with an outdoor kitchen, providing a functional communal space for the team.

In response to an exceptionally dry season and heightened wildfire risks, the team successfully implemented fire breaks, protecting the project area and neighboring ecosystems. When a devastating wildfire spread through Quilanga, our team and local volunteers played a crucial role in containing the flames—an effort that saved hundreds of hectares of land from destruction.

The Green Belt initiative is progressing, with the first phase focused on irrigation infrastructure and essential groundwork. Tree planting is scheduled for the next rainy season (Dec 2025–Mar 2026), ensuring optimal survival rates.

Challenges and Strategic Adaptations

Working in high-altitude terrain has proven more time-consuming and labor-intensive than initially estimated, requiring a 50–67% increase in projected work time. Additionally, securing specialized laborers willing to work under these conditions has been a challenge.

To maintain efficiency and ensure the project's core impact, we have refined our work plan, prioritizing the most urgent and high-impact tasks while introducing a flexible, modular approach for secondary components. The Green Belt (Part 1) and Infrastructure remain top priorities, while other work packages, such as Tree Planting and Biodiversity Monitoring, allow for scalable implementation.

Financial Overview

As of January 31, 2025, the project has received \$47,515, primarily from foundation grants (65.5%) and private donations (32.7%). Encouragingly, private donations have exceeded expectations, surpassing the 2024 target by 20%.

Of the total funds, 87.3% have been allocated to labor costs, reflecting the project's hands-on, field-based nature. Budget adjustments have been made to accommodate unexpected logistical demands while ensuring that all resources are used strategically.

Funding applications remain in process, and we are confident in approaching our fundraising targets by mid-2025.

Outlook: A Sustainable Future

With our refined strategy, dedicated team, and strong partnerships—including support from the Municipality of Loja, MAATE, and UTPL—we are well-positioned to complete the Green Belt before the 2025 wildfire season.

This project is more than just ecosystem restoration—it is a model for sustainable development, balancing social, environmental, and economic progress. By investing in this initiative, we are:

- 🌱 Sequestering carbon and mitigating climate change
- 🌱 Protecting Ecuador's unique biodiversity
- 🌱 Creating economic opportunities for local communities

The momentum is strong, and we are on track for a successful 2025. With continued support, we will turn this vision into a lasting reality.

GENERAL REVIEW

The year 2024 has been a year of significant experiences, challenges, and successes. Thanks to the unwavering dedication of our team in Ecuador, we have not only overcome these challenges but also turned them into valuable learning opportunities.

One of the most striking demonstrations of this commitment occurred during the wildfire season when fires approached the Sacred Mountain. Our team, together with local volunteers, took immediate action—spending an entire week in the mountains fighting the devastating Quilanga Fire, which burned over 10,000 hectares before being contained. Armed with nothing but pine branches, machetes, and rakes, they worked 18-hour days, relying on water from mountain creeks and food delivered by donkey. Their efforts successfully split and ultimately extinguished the fire, showcasing an extraordinary level of perseverance and teamwork.

Beyond wildfire response, our team has consistently demonstrated resilience. Throughout the year, they endured challenging living conditions—staying in tents from Monday to Friday while working on firebreaks and constructing an outdoor kitchen. Their basecamp consisted of a walk-in tent donated by Finca Sagrada, with a basic kitchen setup: a gas stove on the floor, a few cooking utensils, and a handmade wooden bench. Each team member brought their own tent, setting it up on leveled platforms they carved into the terrain. Despite these conditions, they remain highly motivated, committed to the project, and appreciative of the fair working conditions and the meaningful impact of their efforts.

That said, we recognize that such conditions make it difficult to attract additional workers, which presents a challenge as we strive to accelerate progress. Finding skilled laborers willing to work in this demanding environment has proven to be more difficult than anticipated.

Another unforeseen challenge is the increased time and labor required for material transport and work on the mountain ridge. While our initial proposal accounted for an estimated 33% additional time for high-altitude work, we now see that it is closer to 50–67% more time. Naturally, this also impacts labor costs.

Financially, we are managing these challenges proactively, but securing sufficient funding remains a challenge. As of now, approximately half of the proposed funds have been approved by foundations (see Finances), which means we still need to secure additional resources to fully implement our initial plans. Several funding



applications are still in process, and we continue our fundraising efforts. Encouragingly, our private donor base has exceeded expectations, surpassing our CHF 12,500 fundraising goal for 2024 by an impressive 20%.

Given this financial reality, we have made strategic adjustments to our work plan. We are prioritizing key work packages while categorizing some tasks as "optional" to ensure that the core project impact remains uncompromised. Additionally, we are optimizing expenses by reducing non-essential investments. These adjustments allow us to stay within budget while maintaining our long-term project vision. More details can be found in Proposed Adaptations.

While we navigate these challenges, we are also strengthening our network of partners. We are proud to now collaborate with the Municipality of Loja and the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition (MAATE)—both of whom support our project. Furthermore, our partnership with UTPL is growing, and together, we have developed an initial experimental design for the tree islands along the mountain ridge.

We remain highly motivated to complete the Green Belt before this year's wildfire season and are confident in our ability to achieve a successful 2025 for the Sacred Mountain Reforestation Project. With our dedicated team, committed partners, and a well-adapted strategy, we are on track to make a lasting impact.



WORK PROGRESS

Work Package: Infrastructure

Path for Material Transport

Completed in October, the transport path to the mountain ridge and base camp is now fully operational. Despite challenging conditions, the team's hard work paid off, enabling efficient transport of materials via donkeys, mules, and horses. The path has already proven invaluable and, as a bonus, makes the hike up the mountain easier, allowing for a more energized arrival. See the impressive results in the title image and additional photos below.



Path on Southern Slope

While an existing footpath provides access to the southern slope, it won't be sufficient for establishing the Green Belt. Improvements are needed, and work began in the last week of January.

Base Camp

January marked the inauguration of our newly built Outdoor Kitchen, a 20m² space that serves not only for cooking but also as a communal gathering spot and a sheltered area for tents. As we progressed, we realized that construction at this altitude is far more effortful and time-consuming than anticipated. Given these challenges, we adjusted our plans, postponing the construction of cabins and prioritizing more immediate needs. These adaptations, along with financial considerations, are outlined in the "Strategic Adaptations" chapter. Next, we will build a dry toilet during the upcoming dry season.



Fencing

In the beginning of January, the fences in the cow's main paths have been repaired. Due to further damages caused by the animals, more investment was needed to make sure cattle will not be able to enter the important parts of the mountain anymore.





Work Package: Green Belt

Green Belt

Work on the Green Belt began in late January 2025. Before constructing the water catchment, the team had to build a small transport path, causing a slight delay. Now, construction is underway while additional materials are being transported uphill for the irrigation system.

With the dry season approaching, time pressure is increasing, as several tasks—burying the water pipe, building the southern slope path, and digging the water pool—still require excavation. Once the soil dries, it becomes extremely hard to work with. To accelerate progress, we are expanding our team to tackle multiple tasks in parallel.

Rainwater Retention Landscaping

As planned, no investments into Rainwater Retention Landscaping have been made yet.

Work Package: Maintenance

Fire Breaks 2024

With exceptionally dry conditions since 2023, we anticipated a severe fire season and proactively established a fire break near the planned Green Belt to protect three years of progress. Strong winds temporarily halted work when we were halfway through—but these same winds fueled an uncontrollable wildfire in Quilanga, the first of several major fires in southern Ecuador.

As the fire spread toward the Sacred Mountain, our workers rushed to finalize the fire breaks. Meanwhile, Cristian led a team of ten volunteers from Tumianuma and Finca Sagrada into the mountains, determined to stop the advancing flames. Against all odds, they succeeded in containing the fire—saving hundreds of hectares of land, an achievement elsewhere only possible with aerial firefighting support from Peru and Colombia.

At the same time, the remaining team completed the fire breaks on the mountain. The impact is remarkable—so much so that the results are now visible on Google Maps' latest satellite imagery:



Other Work Packages

As indicated in the proposed Timeline, we have not yet started with the implementation of other work packages. Before starting any other work package, the highest priority lies in the completion of the Green Belt.

Tree Planting: The planting of 2.500 seedlings is planned for the beginning of the next rainy season (Dec 2025 – Mar 2026). The planting of tree islands along the mountain ridge is dependent on the completion of the experimental design and the collaboration with researchers of the UTPL. We are well within the schedule right now. It is planned to make the first plantings during the next rainy season (Dec 2025 – Mar 2026) as well.

FINANCES

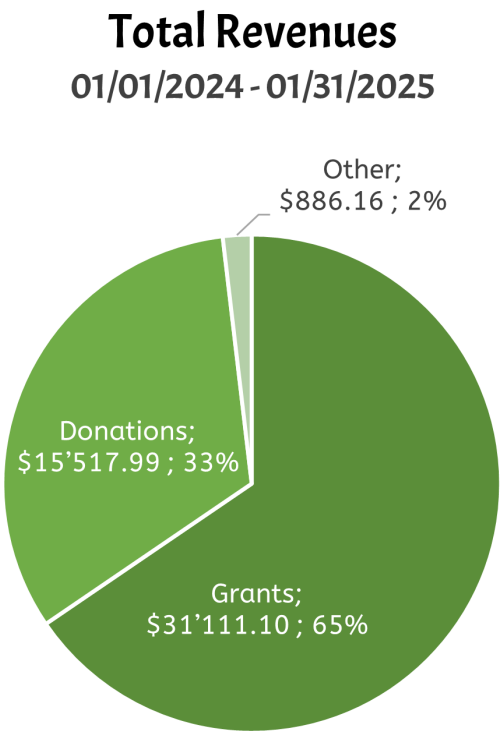
The reporting date on financial information is 01/31/2025.

Revenues and Expenses

Since the start of Phase 2 of the Sacred Mountain Reforestation project in the beginning of 2024, we have received a total of \$ 47'515,25. Of these funds, the majority was provided us by foundation grants (\$ 31'111,11; 65,5%). The smaller but still very significant provider of funding were private donors who in total, donated \$ 15'517,99 (32,7%). Favorable exchange rates from CHF to USD (compared to the 0.9 CHF/USD we calculate with) created a revenue of \$ 886,16 (1,9%).

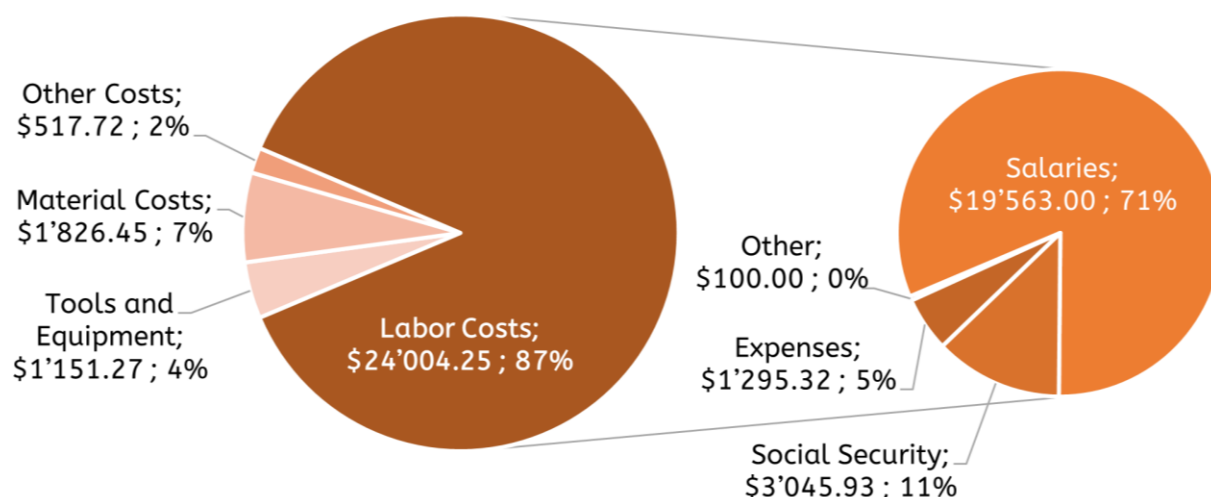
In the same period, a total of \$ 27'499,69 were spent. The grand majority of those expenses went into Labor Costs (87,3%). 71,1% of the spendings were salaries alone and another 11,1% were Social Security payments. Another 5,1% were spent on work related expenses (such as food and transportation).

Only 12,7% of the expenses were spent on non-labor related spending: 6,6% were spent on materials, 4,2% on tools and equipment and 1.9% on other costs.



TOTAL EXPENSES

01/01/2024 - 01/31/2025



Fundraising

Grants*

Within the first six months since the beginning of our fundraising efforts, six foundations have approved our funding request providing us with total funding of \$ 93'333,33 (CHF 84'000,-). This amounts equals 47,7% of the funding we sought to obtain for the whole period of 2024-2027. The temporal distribution of the approved funding is the following:

2024	2025	2026	2027
\$ 27'777,78	\$ 36'666,67	\$ 14'444,44	\$ 14'444,44

*We refer to all funding from foundations as "Grants".

The proposal is still pendent for decision making in several foundations. We are confident to approach our funding objectives by early summer 2025.

Donations

From the beginning of 2024 until January 31st, 2025, we have received \$ 15'517,99 in form of private donations. During this period, one generous person has donated \$ 4'444,44 (CHF 4'000,00). Another single person has donated \$ 1'111,11 (CHF 1'000). All other donations have been of smaller nature, typically between CHF 50 – 300.

TIMELINE

	2024				2025				2026				2027			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
INFRASTRUCTURE																
Build transportation paths		✓✓✓			✓											
Repair fences					✓											
Base Camp - Kitchen				✓✓												
Base Camp - Dry Toilet							✓									
Base Camp - Cabaña							✓									
					Completion Base Camp											
GREEN BELT																
Install water pipes					✓											
Construction of Water catchment					✓											
Excavate Water reservoir					✓											
Install Irrigation					✓											
Plant trees and agave						✓										
Rainwater Harvesting on Northern slope										✓						
Replacement of dead trees and agave								✓		✓						
					1'000 Trees & 1'000 Agave planted					500 m of Swales and 10 Dams implemented						
TREE PLANTING																
Tree saplings on Eastern slope								✓								
New areas along the Ridge								✓				✓				
New areas on Southern slope															✓	
					2'500 Seedlings planted								Min. 20'000 Trees planted			
MAINTANANCE																
Renewal of Fire breaks		✓✓✓✓				✓				✓						
Renewal of Swales						✓				✓				✓		
Maintanance of paths						✓				✓				✓		
Maintanance of Base Camp						✓				✓				✓		

✓ = Implemented
 (✓) = Currently being implemented
■ = Implementation planned in this month
■ = Implementation dependent on external corcumstances

COMPLIANCE TO PROPOSAL

General

Compliance to Schedule

Many circumstances of working on the Sacred Mountain are unpredictable. While we are doing this pioneer work, we are making new and unexpected experiences that often lead to delays in our work. We tried to estimate the working times as good as possible. However, the experience of last year shows that the conditions on the mountain are very unsteady making accurate planning a great challenge. Thus, we have experienced some bearable delays.

Budget Compliance

As mentioned above, working on the mountain is more difficult and more effortful than we anticipated during the budgeting process. This is also reflected in the budget compliance of the tasks that we have already implemented, with budget overdraws ranging between 5,1% and 63,9%.

Path on Eastern Slope

Compliance to Schedule

The construction of the path up the eastern slope took twelve weeks instead of the scheduled eight weeks.

Budget Compliance

Despite the fact that the implementation took roughly 50% longer than scheduled, we could limit the budget overdraw to 5.1% (\$ +421,17). This is basically due to the weekly salary actually being below the proposed average for the 2024-2027 period.

Goal Achievement

Path up the eastern slope is implemented and working.

Fire Break 2024

Compliance to Schedule

Delayed due to very strong winds that made work on the mountain dangerous and sleeping in tents hardly possible. Furthermore, we extended the fire break to include parts of the Viscacha habitat after we had confirmation of its presence there. Thus, this task was completed **in September instead of July**.

Budget Compliance

When we got the confirmation that the Ecuadorian Viscacha is present on the Sacred Mountain, we decided to build the fire break around a part of the Viscacha's habitat to protect it against wildfires as well. This, as well as the strong winds that complicated the work, caused a budget overdraw of 18,7% (\$ +1'137,17).

Goal Achievement

No wildfire on the Sacred Mountain for 2024 achieved.



Base Camp

Compliance to Schedule

The start of this task was delayed due to illnesses of several team members. Thus, we started already one month late (November instead of October). Additionally, we underestimated the effort and time consumption for construction work on top of the mountain. Therefore, we adapted our plans to the new circumstances (see Chapter “Strategic Adaptions”) building only the kitchen as a first step before taking on the WP Green Belt. It took two months to build the kitchen and thus, we finished **December instead of October**.

Budget Compliance

Regarding only the kitchen, the budget was overdrawn by 14,0% (\$ +968,05). In contrary to the original plan of an open field kitchen, we decided to build walls to provide the workers with a place that is sheltered from the recurring strong winds – providing a cozy place to sit together during their free time.

With regard to the whole Base Camp, the kitchen used up 22,5% of the budget leaving 77,5% for more infrastructure. With our adaptations of the Base Camp (see “Strategic Adaptions”), we will be able to drastically reduce the costs for the Base Camp (by roughly 1/3).

Goal Achievement

Sub-Objective achieved: the construction of an outdoor kitchen with common space.

Reparation of the Fence

Compliance to Schedule

This task took more time than expected because the neighbor’s cattle has destroyed other pieces of fences on the mountain that we needed to fortify to make sure the cows cannot enter anymore. It took the whole Field Team one week instead of only two landworkers. This task was strategically moved from before the Base Camp to after the Base Camp and thus implemented in **January instead of September**.

Budget Compliance

Due to the increased labor effort, the budget was overdrawn by 63,9% which is the most significant budget overdraw so far – in percentages. However, considering the nominal monetary value, the difference is \$ 319,50 and it falls in the category “unforeseen” which is covered by the contingencies.

Goal Achievement

Successfully implemented. Implementation was delayed with no negative effects on the project.

Green Belt

Compliance to Schedule

As a result of the prior delays, the work on the Green Belt was started in January instead of November. Nonetheless, the work is progressing as scheduled thus far.

Budget Compliance

No meaningful statements are possible at this time.



BUDGET COMPLIANCE: WORK PACKAGES

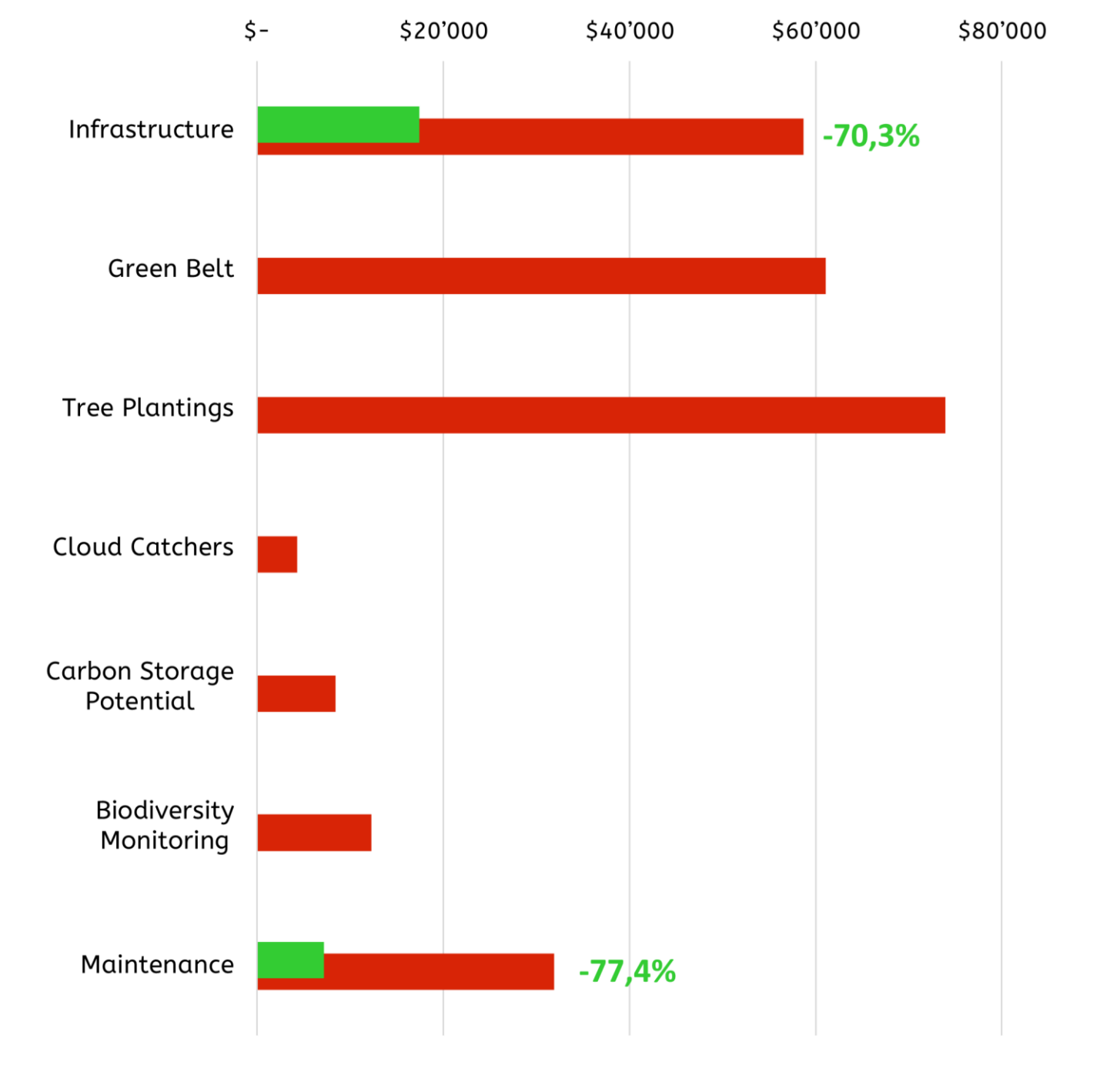


Fig. 1: The graph indicates how much of the budget amounted to each Work Package (red bars) has been used (green bars) and how much is left (green numbers in %).



BUDGET COMPLIANCE: WORK PACKAGES (2024)

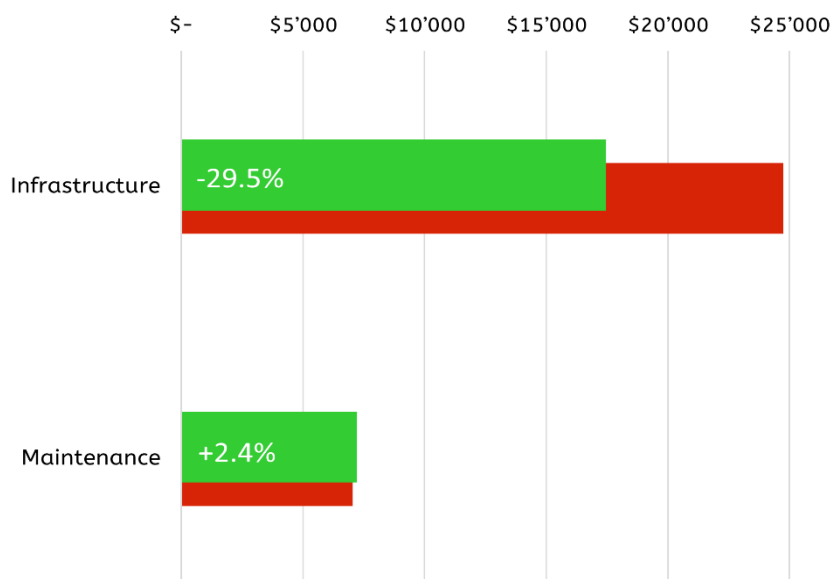


Fig. 2: Compliance to budget with respect to the proposed work package budget for the Year 2024. The budget of the WP Maintenance was overdrawn by \$ 167,17 (2,4%) while in the WP Infrastructure \$ 7.291,28 were saved and transferred into 2025.

BUDGET COMPLIANCE: TASKS

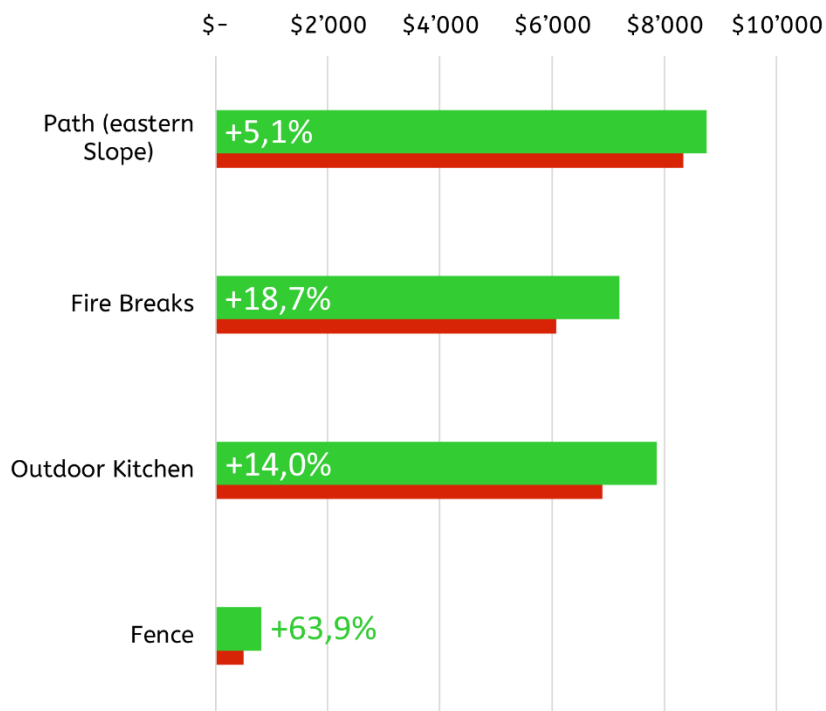


Fig. 3: Compliance to budget with respect to certain tasks. The budget of the Eastern Slope Path has been overdrawn by \$ 421,17. The budget for the Fire and kitchen were overdrawn by \$ 1.137,17 and by \$ 968,05, respectively. The reparation of the fences ended up costing \$ 319,50 more than anticipated.



STRATEGIC ADAPTIONS

STRATEGIC ADAPPTIONS

Reason

Over the past year, we have gained deeper insights into the challenges of working on the mountain ridge. The demanding terrain and logistical complexities require more efficient approaches to ensure steady progress. At the same time, we recognize the importance of optimizing resources to maximize impact.

Our original proposal presented the project as a comprehensive package, which may have suggested that all work packages hold equal priority and that full funding is a prerequisite for success. In reality, the project is designed with a modular structure, allowing us to implement key components step by step, based on their urgency and strategic value. This flexibility ensures that we remain focused on our core objectives while adapting to evolving conditions.

In this chapter, we outline strategic adaptations, presenting a clear prioritization of work packages and tasks. This refined approach highlights the project's adaptability and ensures steady progress, even under evolving conditions.

Refinements in Work Packages

To align the project's workload and objectives with available resources, we have strategically adjusted some of the original plans enhancing efficiency:

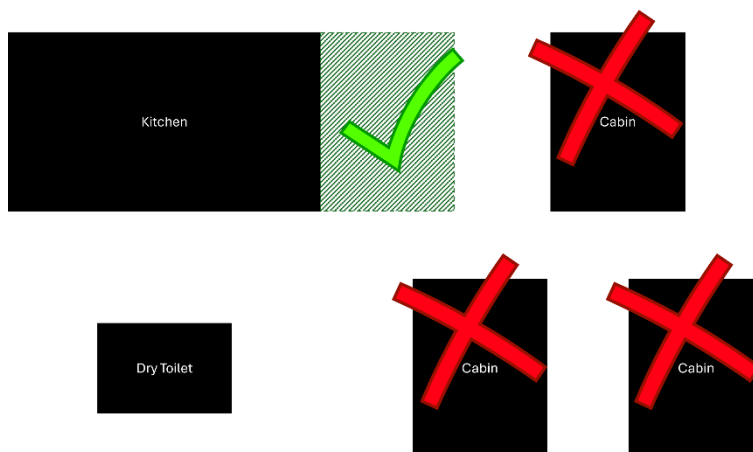
Work Package / Task	Amounted Budget*		Comment
Infrastructure	\$ 58'500	\$ 41'320	
- Base Camp	\$ 40'450	\$ 23'460	
- Paths	\$ 17'590		
- Fences	\$ 460		
Green Belt	\$ 60'760		
Green Belt Part 1	\$ 60'760	\$ 39'450	
- Material Transport	\$ 1'180		
- Hoses & Catchment	\$ 8'200		
- Water Pool	\$ 2'470		
- Irrigation Installation	\$ 3'860		
- Tree & Shrub Planting	\$ 23'740		
Green Belt Part 2	\$ 21'310	\$ 9'100	
- Rainwater Retention	\$ 21'310	\$ 9'100	Workload: Field Team, 7 Weeks Adaptation of Objectives
Tree Plantings	\$ 74'410		
Maintenance	\$ 31'910		
Cloud Catchers	\$ 4'000		
Carbon Storage	\$ 8'450		
Biodiversity Monitoring	\$ 12'300		
	\$ 250'330	\$ 221'000	

*Including Contingencies & Administration

Work Package: Infrastructure (Base Camp)

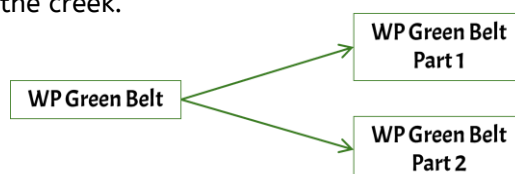
As we gained a clearer understanding of the logistical demands of construction at the Base Camp, we strategically refined our approach to ensure both functionality and efficiency. Instead of building the three proposed cabins – originally estimated at \$25,000 – we have opted for a more practical solution: extending the existing kitchen by 3 meters, adding 12 m² of extra space.

This extension will accommodate two bunk beds, providing comfortable sleeping arrangements for four people – the core team members who spend the most time at the Base Camp. This solution not only enhances working conditions but also optimizes our resource use, achieving cost savings while maintaining the essential infrastructure needed for daily operations.



Work Package: Green Belt (Green Belt)

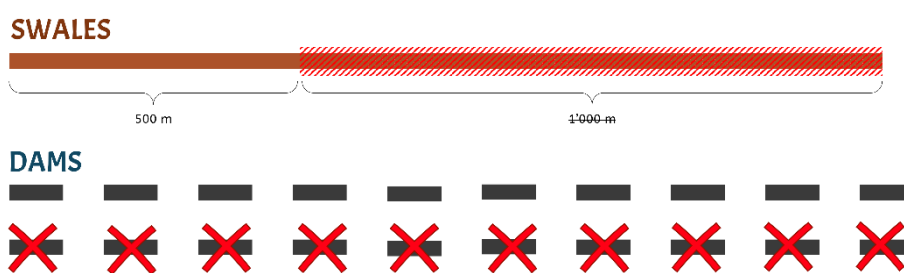
The WP Green Belt is being separated into two WPs, Part 1 and Part 2, to be able to account for their distinct priorities and urgencies. Part 1 is the Green Belt itself with all necessary installations and plantings while Part 2 are the rainwater retention measures to compensate for the withdrawal of water from the creek.



Work Package: Green Belt Part 2

Having re-evaluated the situation, we think less extensive measure are sufficient to compensate for the withdrawal of water. The absence of fire is the most decisive factor for the amount of water in the creek. Thus, the Green Belt will also help maintaining the water levels in the Laurel Creek. Additionally, the tree plantings will additionally support the revitalization of dried up springs.

Instead of min 1.500 m of swales and min 20 dams in erosion gullies, we propose to reduce to min 500 m of swales and min 10 dams.



Prioritization

To ensure an efficient and impact-driven approach, we have assessed all work packages and tasks based on two key dimensions: their contribution to the project's overall impact and their urgency.

- 🌳 Highest priority (1): Tasks that are critical to the project's success and require immediate action to prevent risks or increasing costs.
- 🌳 Medium priority (2): Tasks that are important but not urgent, meaning they contribute significantly to the project's impact but can be scheduled more flexibly.
- 🌳 Lowest priority (3): Tasks that are not essential in the short term but valuable for long-term monitoring and future development. These can be postponed without compromising the project's core objectives.

While we aim to implement all planned components, this structured prioritization ensures that we focus first on the most impactful and time-sensitive tasks, while keeping flexibility for future progress.

Priority	Work Package	Urgency	Importance	Costs
1	Green Belt Part 1	1	1	\$ 39'450
2	Infrastructure	1	1	\$ 41'320
3	Tree Plantings*	3	1	\$ ≥74'410
4	Green Belt Part 2*	2	2	\$ ≥9'100
5	(Cloud Catchers)	2	2	\$ 4'000
6	(Carbon Storage)	3	2	\$ 8'450
7	(Biodiversity Monitoring)*	3	3	\$ ≥12'300

() = Optional WPs

* = flexible WPs

Flexibility

The two highest-priority work packages – Green Belt Part 1 and Infrastructure – offer little flexibility in their adapted form. They cannot be easily paused or postponed, as their timely completion is essential for the success of other dependent work packages.

In contrast, other work packages – particularly Tree Planting, Rainwater Retention Landscaping (Green Belt Part 2), and Biodiversity Monitoring – are highly scalable and adaptable. The allocated budgets reflect carefully defined objectives, ensuring meaningful impact. However, these work packages have the advantage of gradual scalability, allowing adjustments based on evolving circumstances. The objectives are set as minimum targets, always with the ambition to achieve the best possible outcome.



OUTLOOK

With these strategic refinements, we are sharpening our focus – moving efficiently and effectively toward our vision for the Sacred Mountain and the region. Every step we take brings us closer to a landscape where ecological restoration and sustainable development go hand in hand.

Together, we are proving that it is possible to restore natural ecosystems while creating tangible opportunities for local communities – balancing environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Our approach is more than conservation; it is a blueprint for a future where nature thrives, communities prosper, and climate resilience is strengthened.

By investing in this project, you are directly contributing to:

- 🌱 Carbon sequestration and climate mitigation – tackling one of the greatest challenges of our time.
- 🌱 The protection of Ecuador's unique biodiversity – safeguarding rare and threatened ecosystems.
- 🌱 A sustainable future for local communities – fostering economic opportunities rooted in conservation.

This is not just a project – it's a movement toward a more sustainable and resilient world. The foundation is laid, the momentum is strong, and with your support, we can turn this vision into lasting reality.

Now is our time to act. Join us in making a difference.

