

Environmental Overview: El Salvador

	El Salvador	US Statistic	World Average
Overview			
Human Population Density	282 people/km ²	30	45
Areas Under Protection	754 km ²		
Average Size of Protected Area	8.5		
Deforestation			
Total Forest Area	736,000 acres (14.4% of land)		
Current Primary Forest	15,000 acres (0.3% land)		
Original Forest Lost	94%		
Original Vegetation Lost	80%		
Forest lost since 1990	190,000 acres (-20.5%)		
Annual deforestation rate (2000-2005)	-1.7%		
Air Quality			
CO2 Emissions	6.7 million metric tons	5,800	28,000
	0.9841 metric tons/ person	19.49	4.2
NOx Emissions	70 metric tons/km ²	1,290	500
PM 10	35.49 mcg/m ³	22.63	48.8
SO2 Emissions	700 thousand metric tons/km ²	1680	1561
CFC Consumption	0.96 per 1000 people	0.79	5
Water and Sanitation			
Fresh Water Pollution	1.21 tons/km ³	1.14	2.4
Rural Home Use of Contaminated Water	41%		
Surface Water Contamination	90%		
Wastewater discharged without Treatment			
a. Municipal Waste	98%		
b. Industrial Waste	90%		
Rural Access to Water Broad Definition (direct house connection)	70% (38%)		
Urban Access to Water	94% (81%)		
Rural Access to Sanitation	39% (2%)		
Urban Access to Sanitation	77% (63%)		
Biodiversity			
Change in fish catch from previous year	19.80%		
Percentage surface area protected for biodiversity	0.90%		
Threatened Species	59		
Soil			
Soil damaged or rendered useless due to erosion	77%		
Annual fertilizer intensity	60 kg/acre	48	59
Pesticide use on Cropland	1070 kg/acre		

El Salvador is the most densely populated country in the Western Hemisphere. As a result, El Salvador's environment and natural resources are being consumed and destroyed at an alarming rate. Issues such as deforestation, water pollution, waste management, and the overuse of agrochemicals are prevalent in most communities across the country, and adversely affect most everyone.

Deforestation – Deforestation is one of the most serious environmental issues in El Salvador. Logging and agriculture, as well as the collection of wood for fuel by local populations have left all but 14.4% of El Salvador's land area deforested; all but 0.3% of El Salvador's primary forests remain. Deforestation has increased the risk of erosion and mudslides, which in recent history has resulted in significant loss of human life and the displacement of tens of thousands of Salvadorans. Deforested areas are also more susceptible to wildfires, which have caused millions of dollars in damage. Erosion and poor land management have also left over 50% of the Salvadoran countryside unsuitable for food cultivation. Eroded, bare topsoil left to bake in the hot tropical sun is less able to absorb strong seasonal rains that replenish aquifers below the surface. As a result, El Salvador's springs are producing approximately 30% then than they once did, leaving rural populations to depend on expensive pumps to reach the lower water tables, which are decreasing at a rate of 1 meter per year.

Water and Sanitation – ANDA ((Adminstracion Nacional de Acueductos y Alcntarillados) is the government agency responsible for managing the nation’s water resources. Though ANDA provides water to 40% of the population, another 30% must rely on others resources such as a municipal government, rural cooperatives, or others, while another 30% do not have water in their homes. Treatment of wastewater and sewage is almost nonexistent in El Salvador. As a result, raw sewage and other untreated waste generally ends up in a streams, rivers, or lakes, causing significant damage to local ecosystems and serious public health issues.

Contamination of Surface Waters – Agricultural runoff, untreated manufacturing and municipal waste, sewage, and other materials contaminate an estimated 90% of El Salvador’s surface waters. Such large-scale destruction of the water resources affects all aspects of Salvadoran life. Many in rural and urban areas rely on rivers, lakes, and streams for their drinking water, bathing, and washing clothes. Using contaminated water resources contributes to high rates of gastrointestinal diseases and other public health issues. Though El Salvador has a fairly progressive and clear environmental regulatory system, it is rarely applied, allowing people, corporations, and government entities to dump waste into rivers and lakes with impunity.

Agrochemicals: Numerous pesticides and toxic chemicals such as DDT that are banned in the U.S. are still widely used in El Salvador, adversely impacting fish, birds, humans, and ecosystems. The residues from agrochemicals have killed nearly all plant life in 75% of the 290,000 acres of once-fertile marshland in El Salvador. Part of the problem is the misuse and overdependence of agrochemicals by rural farmers, who often experience serious health problems such as infertility, cancer, and neurological problems after prolonged exposure. One of the greatest concerns is the high rate of renal failure among El Salvador’s farmers. Though numbers are unavailable, public health officials believe that thousands of Salvadoran farmers die every year from renal failure caused by overexposure to heavy metals found in agrochemicals.

The Environmental Regulatory System – Over the past 20 years, El Salvador has adopted a series of laws and regulations that aim to protect the nation’s environment and natural resources. The weak rule of law, poor enforcement mechanisms, and economic pressures have prevented the regulatory system from achieving its goals.

Currently, the tension between environmental protection and economic development is most evident in the cases such as Pacific Rim Mining in Cabanas, El Chaparral Dam in Morazan, and other development projects, that may provide local communities with jobs but at the risk of further degradation of the environment.



Vegetation and Land Use

- Cultivated area—coffee, cotton, sugarcane, cereals, and fiber crops
- Dense woodland—mainly broadleaf evergreen with some pine
- Mainly deciduous brush, grassland and pasture
- Mangrove swamp

