

ArteYUNQUE: Community Connection Through Art, El Yunque National Forest

Managing by Network, Case Study

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El Yunque National Forest, Puerto Rico



EL YUNQUE National Forest, also designated as the Luquillo Experimental Forest, represents many things to many people.

It has been recognized as a source of forest resources since the days of the Spanish Crown, and as a cultural resource since indigenous people inhabited Puerto Rico.

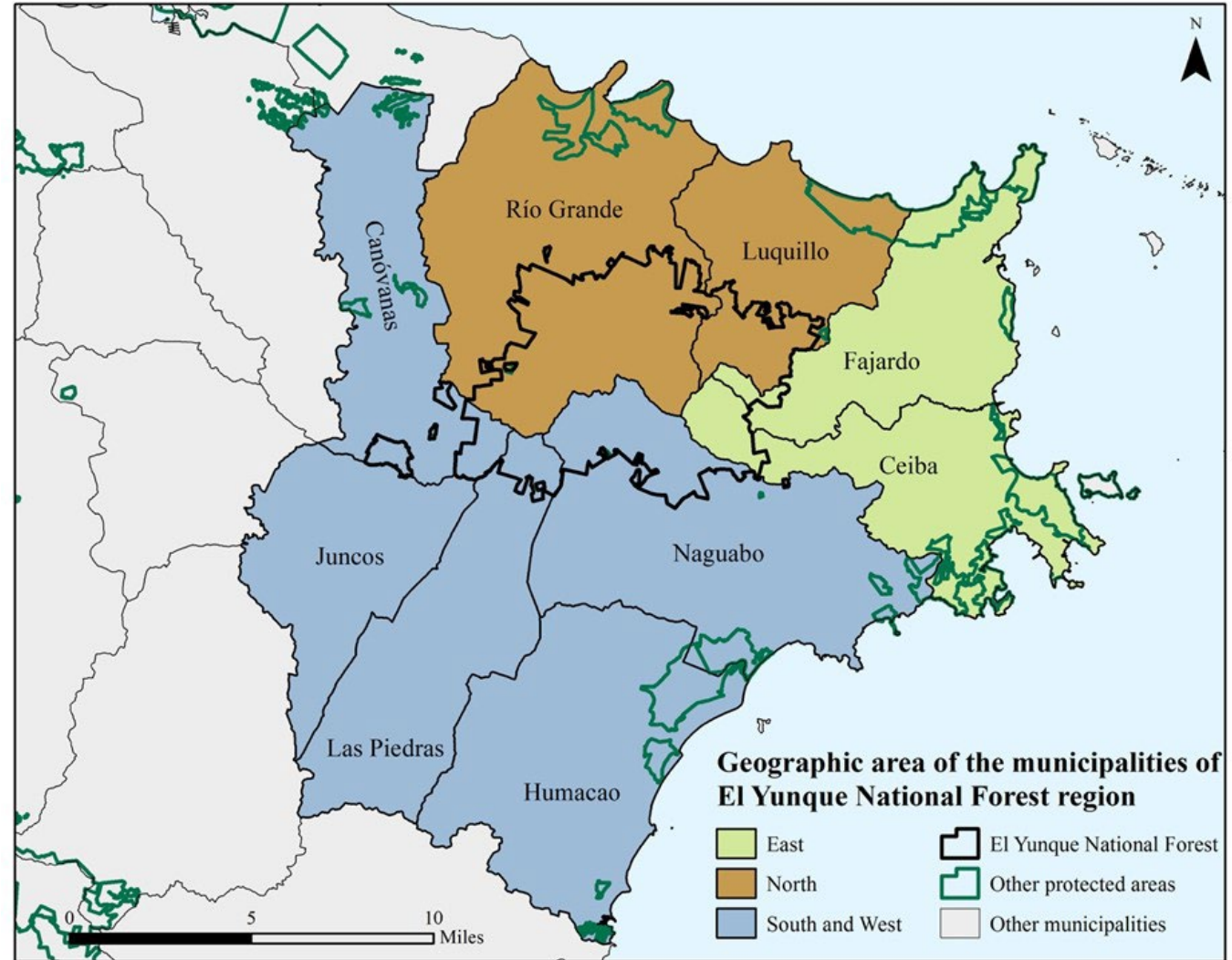


Photo: Jerry Bauer
El Yunque ATLAS

Municipalities of El Yunque National Forest Region

El Yunque is surrounded by **nine municipalities** in eastern **Puerto Rico**.

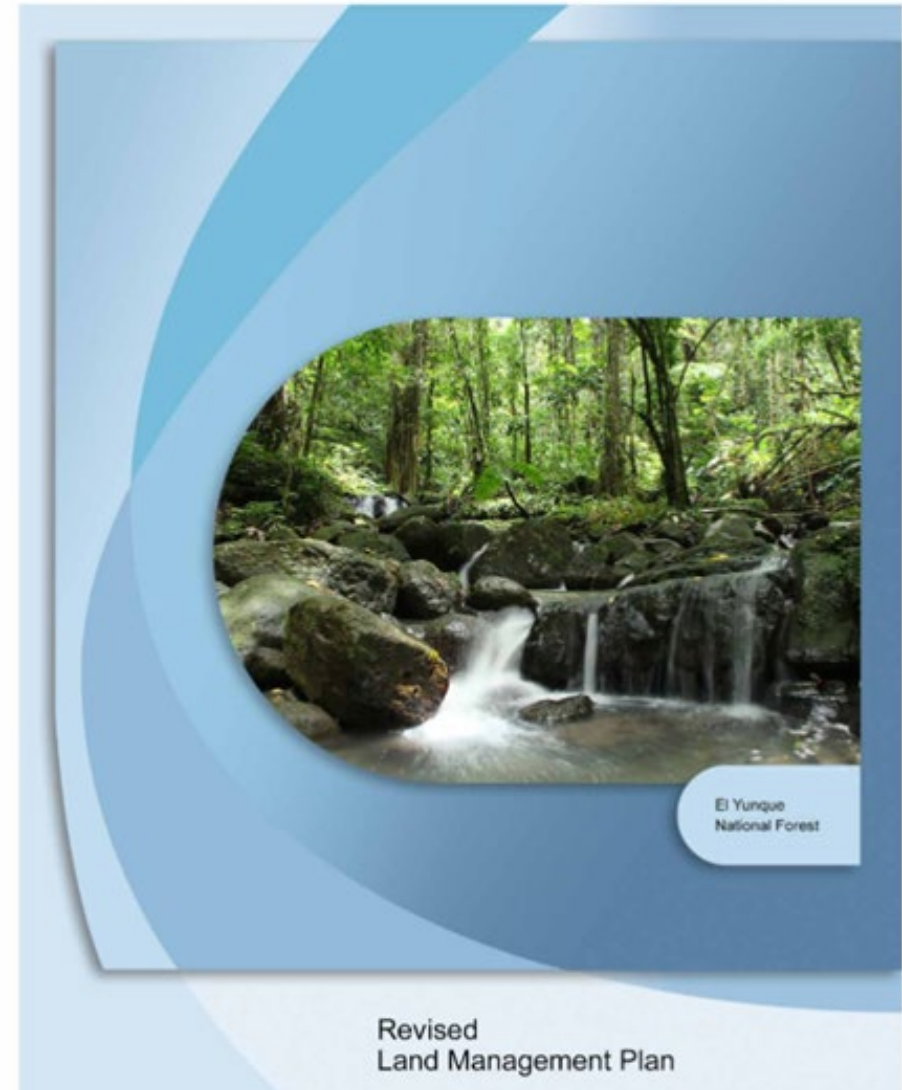
Stretching over **29,000 acres**, covers about 15% of the total area of the Region.



El Yunque Revised Land Management Plan

This Plan differs from the previous plan by **focusing on an integrated vision of ecological, social, and economic sustainability and connection to local communities.**

p.1 LMP



Vision

Maintain a healthy, accessible, and sustainable forest that integrates multiple uses; **provides economic, ecological, and social opportunities; promotes education, cultural and environmental identity and awareness for the conservation of its natural resources; and adaptive forest management that is inclusive and collaborative.**

LMP p.8



Distinctive Roles and Contributions of El Yunque

The Forest provides **environmental, social, and economic** benefits to **local and regional communities**, as well as to people across the Nation, making El Yunque an important and unique part of Puerto Rico.

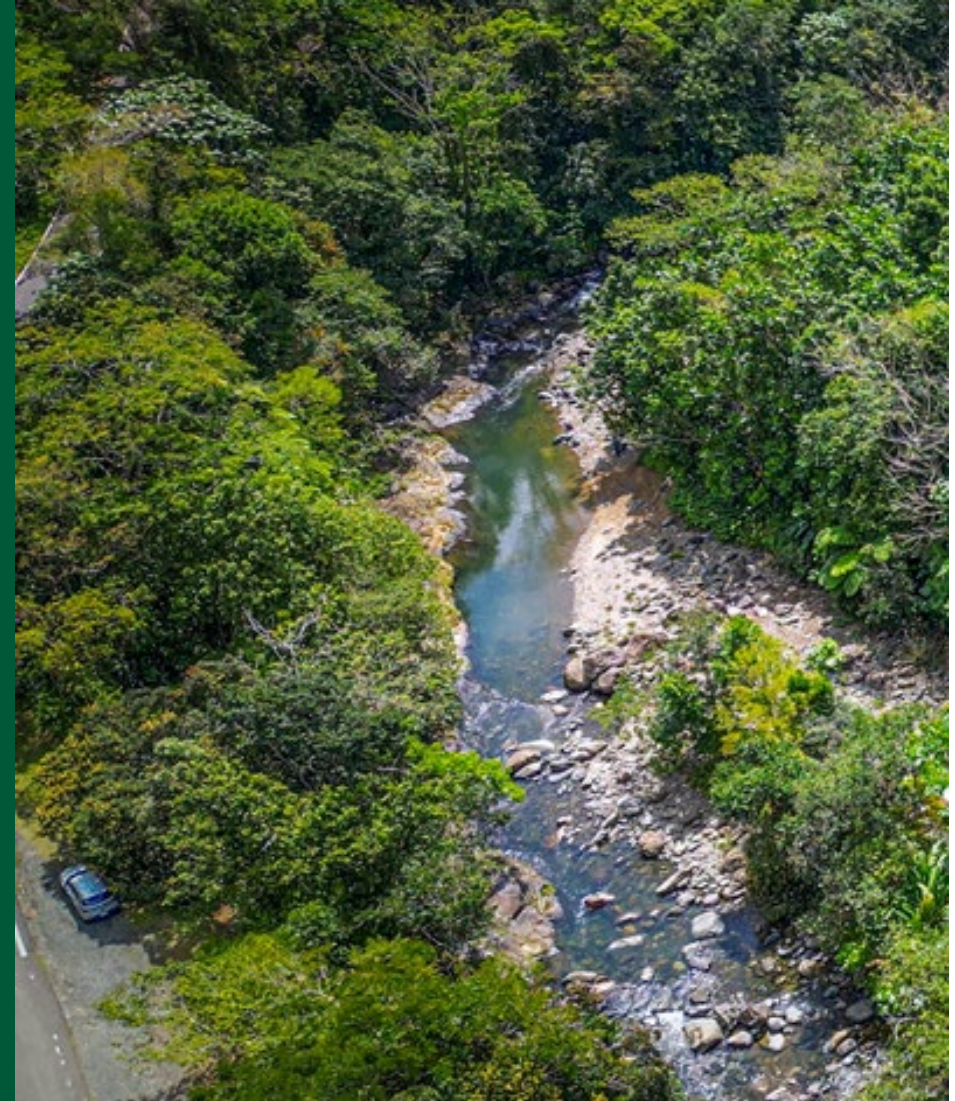
LMP p.6-7



Jóvenes en Riesgo, FADEY group activity at El Portal. June 2025.

Five Core Management Themes

1. Promote a stronger regional identity
2. Provide for healthy ecosystems
3. Incorporate collaborative adaptive management
4. Define a recreation, access, and tourism system
5. Increase environmental literacy



Shared Stewardship as a Model

Shared stewardship takes partnerships a step further into a collaborating process, where the public contributes to land management.



We realized that we can't just have random partnerships, we need to create synergistic systems that are interconnected



El Yunque National Forest Collaborators & Partners



- American Conservation Experience
- Centro para La Conservación del Paisaje
- Community Interface Resource Management Area Collaborative (CIRMA)
- Clemson University
- Comité Consultor de Participación Pública (CCPP)
- Corazón Latino
- Cornell University
- Eastern National
- **Fundación Amigos de El Yunque**
- Geological Society of America
- Greening Youth Foundation
- HistoriCorp
- Love In Motion / Trails Conservancy of Puerto Rico
- Luquillo Long-Term Ecological Research
- Municipio de Río Grande & Canóvanas
- Palladium International
- Para La Naturaleza
- Puerto Rico Agricultural Extension (4-H)
- Puerto Rico Department of Public Security
- Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña
- Student Conservation Association
- University of Puerto Rico
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- U.S. Department of Transportation (FHWA & VOLPE)
- Vitrina Solidaria
- World Parrot Trust



Naimar Ramírez, Nurture



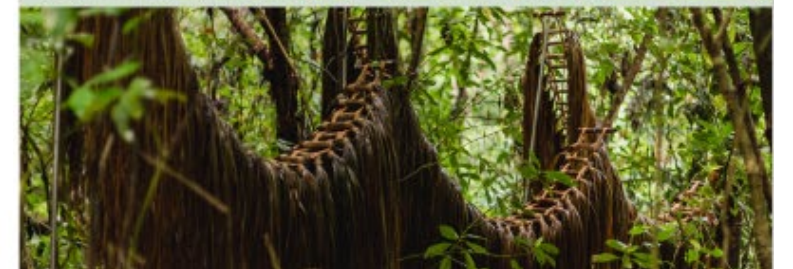
Nayda Collazo-Lloréns, *Interconnections*

El Portal de El Yunque is not just a place to interpret the natural environment of the forest. We also explore culture and connect people with communities and organizations. We believe that art is fundamental to this process.



An intercultural project that promotes, contributes to, and nurtures the exploration and interpretation of art, nature, science, as well as the cultural and historical treasures of El Yunque.

Photograph Adriana Vázquez Acevedo



ArteYUNQUE
bridges the artistic
community with El
Yunque's natural
splendor, providing a
platform for creative
expression and
cultural reflection.



What the Partnership Makes Possible

- This program integrates nature, culture, art, and science in ways rarely seen on public lands.
- It opens the door to a completely new community, Puerto Rican art circle, offering a powerful new avenue for engagement.
- Art becomes a universal, accessible form of interpretation.
- Visitors experience El Yunque in a way that intersects creative expression + scientific knowledge + cultural memory + environmental stewardship.



Installation process supported by Forest Service staff.

Growth of the Program (2023–2026)



ArteYUNQUE
NATURA

Exploring the Dialogue between Art and Nature at El Yunque

April 22, 2023 – July 1, 2024

Science and Conservation Trail, El Portal of El Yunque

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Essays in Nature, Year 2 (2024-2025)



- Formalized collaboration model, Mellon Foundation funding secured (\$1million)
- Mitigation processes developed to protect natural resources
- Expansion of public programming

ArteYUNQUE, Mellon Foundation Proposal

ArteYUNQUE seeks to address the lack of opportunities for new artistic work in Puerto Rico by providing professional development, fostering decentralized creativity, and initiating international dialogues, with a vision that extends to raising awareness about environmental challenges through contemporary art.



Lena Galíndez
Brota el agua (Water Emerges)
Photograph by Adriana Vázquez Acevedo

ArteYUNQUE Goals (2024-2027), Mellon Foundation Proposal

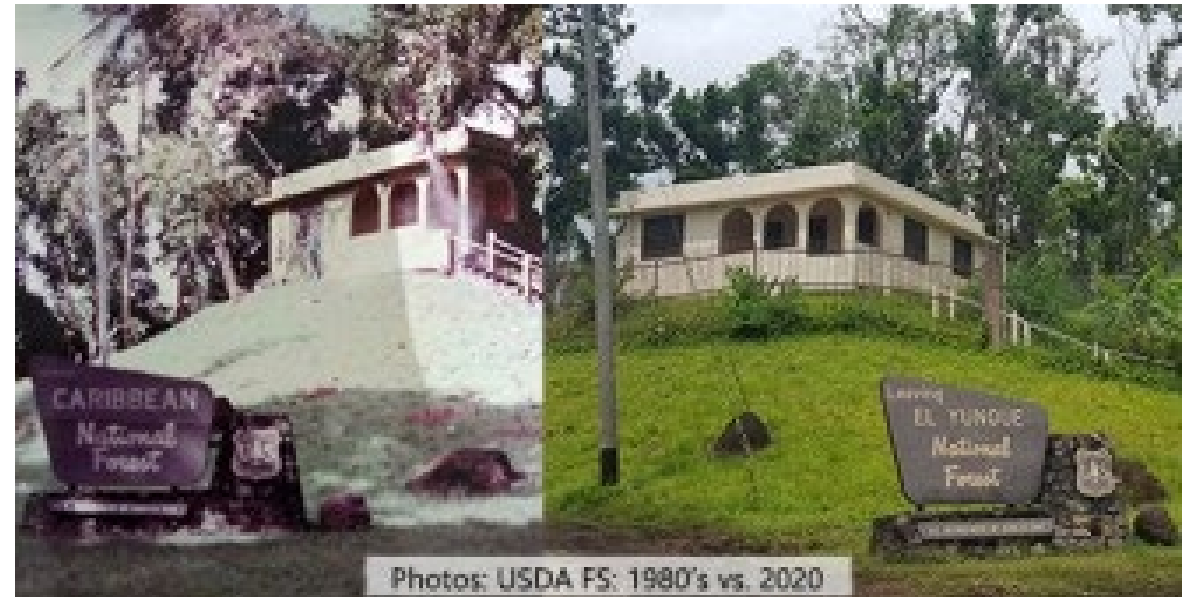
- Promote, support, and enhance El Yunque National Forest's conservation and education mission through contemporary art and cultural programming.
- Continue an annual exhibition of eight to ten (8- 9) site-specific commissions on El Portal's trail.
- Establish regular multidisciplinary programming (poetry, performance, film, music) in El Portal and other areas. Artists will receive a stipend for their work in these programs.



Leila Mattina, *Urdimbre*

ArteYUNQUE Goals (2024-2027), Mellon Foundation Proposal

- Rehabilitate El Verde Ranger Station to establish a multidisciplinary artist residency.
- Establish programming that connects with El Yunque's neighboring municipalities, strengthening social ties among surrounding communities.
- Encourage collaboration, affiliations, and partnerships with local and international arts, scientists, environment, and ecological entities.



Ranger House | Artists Residency Program 2024-2025



Phase 1 | Rehabilitation (Mar 2024- Mar 2025)

- Rehabilitate and renovate the spaces to welcome the first cohort in 2025.
- The renovation includes fixing areas, purchasing equipment and appliances for the common area. Estimated budget (\$100,000).
- Commission local artists and designers to craft functional items, furniture, garden areas, and trails using El Yunque's raw materials and USFS resources. (\$10,000) +
Ej, Materia Madura,

Phase 2 | Curatorial Projects & Artists in Residence (2025)

- Host two 5-month residencies, accommodating a total of 4 artists per year.
- Each artist will have an individual bedroom and share a bathroom. The existing barn will be transformed into an exhibition/workhouse with studio space, capable of showcasing the final projects of the cohort.
- Artists are required to produce an exhibition project that includes community engagement.
- The selection of artists will be done through an open call. Nominating committee will select.

RÍO: Watershed of El Yunque, Year 3 (2025-2026)

- Major exhibition with 8 commissioned artists integration of mobile interpretation
- Bloomberg Connects joined as a partner
- Multi-disciplinary programming including tours, performances, workshops, and screenings.
- Artist Residency program launched at El Verde Ranger House (Jan. 2026)
- The program now functions as a multi-sector cultural-environmental platform embedded within the broader community engagement strategy of El Yunque



Dhara Rivera
The Rain, the House and the Invisible River.

Complex Realities (*it's not all rainbows and puppies*)

- Navigating Forest Service compliance, safety, permitting, and environmental requirements with artists who work in nontraditional mediums.
- Ensuring installations meet mitigation guidelines to avoid long-term environmental impacts — requiring close work between artists and FS subject matter experts.
- Balancing artistic freedom with conservation constraints.
- Bridging very different professional cultures (government, nonprofit, artists).
- Continuous coordination across funding cycles, timelines, and expectations.

What Makes ArteYUNQUE Unique?

The program positions El Yunque at the forefront of how public lands integrate arts and culture combining:

- artistic vision
- environmental science
- cultural storytelling
- community knowledge
- land management authority
- El Portal Rainforest Center, as the gateway to the Forest



Why It Matters?



- Builds deeper connections
- Reinforces authenticity
- Provides artists with space, visibility, and legitimacy within a national public land setting
- Enhances visitor experience by presenting the Forest through multiple lenses: ecological, cultural, historical, creative.
- Helps the Forest Service fulfill community expectations expressed during the Land Management Plan process, honoring the cultural layers of this landscape.

Looking Ahead

- Expand the model to more geographic areas around the Forest.
- Increase school and youth engagement through art-based watershed interpretation.
- Strengthen artist–scientist collaboration as a signature practice of El Yunque.
- Share this model nationally as an example of how art can deepen stewardship and partnership on public lands.



Gisela Colón
Ríos de Oro y Polvo (Rivers of Gold and Dust)
Photograph by Adriana Vázquez Acevedo

PRESS Coverage

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ARTS • ART REVIEWS

Puerto Rico's National Forest Is a Living Laboratory of Art and Ecology

ArteYUNQUE brings artists like Daniel Lind-Ramos and Gisela Colón to El Yunque to explore water, ancestry and ecology through art.

By Elisa Carollo • 01/15/26 11:48am

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<https://observer.com/2026/01/arteyunque-el-yunque-puerto-rico-art-ecology/>



Design a better world

Puerto Rico's rainforest center reborn: in pictures

El Portal in El Yunque national forest, Puerto Rico. Photograph: Jesse Ilan Kornbluth/The Guardian

After two devastating hurricanes, El Yunque national forest has built a new visitors center that hosts a vibrant arts festival

Jesse Ilan Kornbluth

Thu 16 Apr 2026 09:00 EDT

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/gallery/2026/apr/16/puerto-rico-el-yunque-rainforest-in-pictures>

Questions: Q&A



¡Gracias! Thank you!



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