

Wetlands: vital ecosystems threatened by climate change and human activity ^[1]

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Además de su valor ecológico, Las Salinas de Cabo Rojo albergan una de las industrias más antiguas en Puerto Rico. (Jorge A. Ramírez Portela)

The Cabo Rojo Salt Flats are among the most affected, and their restoration will begin in March.

Despite the importance of wetlands for humans and other species, these ecosystems - historically and erroneously considered wastelands - face threats from climate change and from the citizenry itself, with actions such as drainage and landfilling, compromising their vital functions.

"The health of our wetland system, we could say, is currently average. We cannot say that we have a protected system throughout the island," said José Soto, an environmental scientist with the Caribbean Environmental Protection Division of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "There are some that do, but we always have those areas that have development and impact problems, due to lack of knowledge or actions that are considered excessive," he added.

In Puerto Rico, perhaps one of the best known wetlands is Las Salinas de Cabo Rojo. There, the rise in sea level, caused by climate change and natural phenomena such as Hurricane Maria (2017), has led to the loss of dunes.

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