Rescuing Mission 1.5°C

If the world has any chance to reduce temperatures below 1.5°C, a three-prong strategy is required. This includes a roadmap to transition away from fossil fuels, a roadmap to achieve zero deforestation, and scaled-up carbon capture, especially through forest and ocean nature-based-solutions.

A three-track strategy is needed

COP30 negotiators face a stark arithmetic problem. Phasing out unabated fossil fuels is essential to stabilizing the climate, yet mitigation centered on energy alone will not keep global warming from overshooting 1.5°C. Emissions from land-use change - especially deforestation - persist at scale, and the world is forgoing the measurable carbon storage, resilience and biodiversity benefits that nature-based solutions can deliver on relatively short time horizons. A pragmatic strategy for COP30 to return temperatures below 1.5°C involves three tracks: (1) accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels, (2) adopting a credible pathway to zero deforestation, and (3) expanding forest, ocean and coastal (or "blue carbon") measures that capture carbon while protecting communities and strengthening livelihoods.

Fossil emissions reduction is necessary but insufficient

The climate context is sobering. Global mean temperature exceeded the 1.5°C threshold over a 12-month period for the first time last year.[1] That breach does not permanently doom the target, but it narrows the margin for error.[2] It also elevates the value of mitigation actions that can produce near- and mid-term results. While fossil fuels are responsible for almost 70 percent of greenhouse gas emission, roughly a tenth are due to deforestation and other land-use change. These latter emissions are front-loaded: once a forest is cleared, decades of stored carbon are rapidly released. By contrast, protection and restoration of forests, wetlands, mangroves, and oceans can yield additional carbon removals

[1] See https://blog.ucs.org/carly-phillips/were-on-track-to-overshoot-1-5c-of-global-warming-why-does-that-matter/.
[2] See https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2025.

within years, not generations, while improving local hydrology, moderating heat extremes, and supporting biodiversity. Seen this way, a nature-inclusive strategy is not a diversion from energy decarbonization; it is a necessary complement to it.

Think of the global climate–nature system as a trembling pressure cooker already running hot at 1.5°C. Steam is escaping, contributing to intensifying heat waves, droughts, floods and coastal impacts, with destructive consequences for the environment, lives and livelihoods. Turning down one burner helps, but it is not sufficient: reducing fossil fuel emissions will only partially lower the pressure. To release enough steam to stabilize the system, governments, companies and societies must also cut forest-related emissions and, critically, scale nature climate–based solutions in forests, mangroves and oceans, the most effective and cost-efficient biological carbon sequestration systems we have.

A political opportunity for a breakthrough

Diplomatically, the moment for adopting a three-pillar strategy is favorable. A “troika” of past COP hosts - UAE (COP28), Azerbaijan (COP29) and Brazil (COP30) - has already established a mission to keep 1.5°C within reach by transitioning away from fossil fuels.[3] Building on that foundation, Parties in Belém can widen the lens to include the protection of forests and oceans without diluting ambition on energy. Indeed, Brazil has signaled interest in a timeline for zero deforestation and has emphasized large-scale restoration as part of its nationally determined contribution (NDC).[4] Because Brazil cannot meet its targets without restoring at least 12 million hectares, a transparent, finance-backed approach to land and coastal ecosystems’ restoration is not only environmentally sound; it is politically and economically coherent for a major forest country.

[3] See https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/un-climate-change-conference-belem-november-2025/troika-mission-15.
[4] See https://cop30.br/en/protection-of-tropical-forests-and-energy-transition-will-be-central-to-leaders-summit-agenda.

Getting to zero deforestation is essential

Forests are the most immediate test. A credible roadmap to zero deforestation requires measurable interim milestones, robust monitoring, and predictable finance that rewards verified performance. One emerging vehicle is the TFFF, a flagship initiative designed to mobilize resources for tropical forests. While still early days, it is already generating support and illustrates the kind of instrument that can shift incentives on the ground when paired with strong safeguards.[5] More broadly, pay-for-results partnerships, high-integrity jurisdictional carbon crediting, and enforcement against illegal clearing can operate together to bend the curve. The social science is equally clear: recognizing Indigenous and local community land rights correlates with lower deforestation rates and better conservation outcomes.[6] Aligning financial flows with communities that steward high-carbon ecosystems improves the odds that climate benefits are real and durable.

Nature-based solutions emphasizing forest and ocean restoration

While recognized by small island states, the ocean track is often undercounted in climate plans despite its outsized potential. Mangroves, seagrasses and salt marshes sequester carbon at rates that can exceed many terrestrial systems on a per-area basis and store it in soils for centuries. They also provide first-order adaptation benefits: buffering coasts from storm surge, stabilizing shorelines, supporting fisheries and improving water quality. Yet these ecosystems continue to be degraded or converted.

At COP30, Parties could support proposals for a blue-carbon package, planting the seeds for a more comprehensive roadmap to be developed at the next COP, centered on at least three elements: national targets for conservation and restoration of coastal wetlands; expansion and effective management of high-quality marine protected areas, with clear rules, adequate enforcement and community participation; and scaled finance through mechanisms such as ocean restoration bonds and

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[5] See https://cop30.br/en/news-about-cop30/tropical-forests-forever-facility-tfff-proposes-innovative-financing-model-for-conservation.

[6] See https://www.context.news/nature/opinion/indigenous-stewardship-is-the-ignored-climate-solution.

debt-for-nature swaps tied to transparent baselines, independent verification and social safeguards. These measures are not substitutes for deep energy decarbonization, but they can deliver near-term emissions reductions and removals while enhancing resilience for the hundreds of millions of people living in coastal zones.

Financing the three tracks is feasible

Financing remains the pivot on which ambition turns. Estimates vary, but the investment required to halt deforestation and restore degraded landscapes and seascapes is significant yet pales compared with the economic damages of unmitigated warming. Public funds from multilateral development banks, climate funds and export credit agencies can be better aligned with zero-deforestation and blue-carbon priorities, using concessional capital to crowd in private investment. Corporate actors with land-use footprints should move from generalized pledges to purchasing verified outcomes in the geographies where they operate or source commodities. Carbon markets can play a role, assuring integrity standards are high. What is required are consistent baselines, permanence provisions, transparent registries, and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for affected communities. In all cases, credits must complement and not replace deep emissions cuts within value chains.

Strengthening cooperation between Global South and North

A three-track agenda also creates space for constructive North–South cooperation. Many countries in the Global South hold the ecosystems with the greatest mitigation potential per dollar invested including tropical forests, peatlands, mangroves and have strong domestic reasons to conserve and restore them. When Northern partners recognize high-integrity nature outcomes in the UNFCCC architecture, streamline access to finance, and support capacity for monitoring and enforcement, trust improves and ambition rises on all sides. For forest countries, reliable international support can lower the political and opportunity costs of shifting development pathways. For donor countries, investing in nature can unlock large, measurable emissions reductions and removals this decade while advancing biodiversity and adaptation objectives.

Three priorities for COP30 in Belém

To translate these ideas into COP-ready outcomes, Parties might focus on a narrative that emphasizes the following priorities in Belém:

First, redoubled efforts to transition away from and phase out fossil fuels. COP30 will need to continue the efforts generated since COP26 to phase-down unabated coal power, phase out inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies, triple renewables by 2030 and commit to hard NDCs that embed transition pathways with near-term targets on clean power and clear sectoral and finance packages aligned with 1.5C.

Second, issue a time-bound commitment in a roadmap to zero deforestation. Parties could adopt a goal to halt gross deforestation on a near-term timeline, accompanied by national trajectories, transparent monitoring, and results-based finance. The commitment should explicitly protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, whose territories often overlap with high-carbon ecosystems and whose governance reduces forest loss.

Third, call for nature-based solutions emphasizing both forests and a blue-carbon action package. Governments could pledge to strengthen protection and restoration measures for forests. There should also be an emphasis on conserving and restoring mangroves, seagrasses and salt marshes at scale; expanding and effectively managing marine protected areas with community co-management; and integrating coastal carbon into NDCs and adaptation plans. Finance mechanisms such as forest and ocean restoration bonds and performance-based debt relief should be paired with clear environmental and social safeguards.

Of course, delivering these objectives depends on a finance framework that blends public and private capital with strong integrity guardrails. Multilateral funds can anchor a pipeline of nature-based projects; private investors can scale them; carbon markets can provide additional revenue where standards are met. Across all instruments, transparency, verification and community consent are central to credibility.

None of these priorities lessen the imperative to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels. To the contrary, success in protecting and restoring forests and oceans makes the energy transition more achievable by

reducing near-term warming, providing cost-effective mitigation, and building resilience to impacts already locked in. Likewise, progress on energy reduces pressure on ecosystems by shrinking demand for land-intensive fuels and enabling more sustainable economic models. These tracks are complementary, and each strengthens the others.

As delegates arrive in Belém on November 10, the choice is not between “technological” and “natural” solutions, or between mitigation and adaptation. The real decision is whether the global response will match the scope and sequencing that science and practical experience now recommend. A diplomatic approach that couples a managed fossil fuel exit with zero deforestation, and scaled carbon capture, especially through forest and ocean nature-based solutions, is both feasible and aligned with the science. It reflects the mitigation potential on offer this decade, the co-benefits for biodiversity and resilience, and the political realities of North–South climate cooperation. With time compressed and the stakes high, broadening the agenda is not a concession. It is a plan calibrated to the world as it is and to the safer, more stable world Parties are working to secure.