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NETWORK

Rengifo-Grau hopes to ‘move the hearts of the people’ as head of Chile’s first biodiversity conservation fund

Lily Robinson
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The *International Land Conservation Network* (ILCN) is delighted to share the news that Eugenio Rengifo-Grau, who partnered with the ILCN through its Large Landscape Peer Learning Initiative (LLPLI) in 2018 and 2021, will now lead *Fondo Naturaleza Chile*. On June 1, Rengifo-Grau took on the title of executive director for *Fondo Naturaleza*, which is the nation’s first institution aimed at addressing the historical government underfunding of biodiversity conservation in Chile. He said he hopes to “move the hearts of the people to be part of this project”.



Eugenio Rengifo Grau @eugeniorengifo

A resident of Frutillar, Chile, Rengifo-Grau was part of the first cohort of LLPLI, a program—sponsored by ILCN and its parent organization, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy—that brings together practitioners from around the world and organizes them into teams to delve deeply into the strategic elements of an ongoing conservation initiative. Rengifo-Grau and his colleagues from the Chilean Patagonia brought to the table their experience in organizing communities along the *Ruta de los Parques*, a conservation corridor of more than 28 million acres, established collaboratively by civic sector organizations and the Chilean Government in 2017.

Though rich in biodiversity, the government of Chile has, historically, only modestly funded its efforts to protect its natural resources. Globally, it is among the ten countries that devote the least funding to biodiversity conservation, relative to size and Gross Domestic Product. *Fondo Naturaleza* looks to reverse that trend and address the crisis facing the region due to climate change, habitat loss, and the

depletion of natural resources. Chile's Ministry of the Environment began planning for *Fondo Naturaleza* in 2017 and the foundation was formally established in September of 2021.

The foundation is modeled after the Network of Latin American and Caribbean Environmental Funds, a 26-member organization of conservation initiatives of which *Fondo Naturaleza* is now a part. Through a combination of public and private funding, the foundation will complement and coordinate with state resources and action by funneling money into community-based civil society organizations across the country. The aim is to bolster ground-level initiatives that give power back to citizens to protect the land that sustains them, especially in communities that surround protected areas.

In his position at *Fondo Naturaleza*, Rengifo-Grau said that his first priorities will be to build up a staff and establish mechanisms for funding and collaboration that allow the organization to broadcast its mission globally. Early on, *Fondo Naturaleza* will focus on two work programs. Its Marine Protected Areas Program aims to create a network of marine protected areas in Chile and the Forests and Watersheds Program will work to bolster watershed resiliency in the face of climate change.

Rengifo Grau brings a wealth of experience in conservation work and leadership to the position. Most recently, he served as the executive director of Elemental Reserves, where he worked collaboratively with local people and organizations from three areas of Chile to actualize conservation plans and promote partnerships. He became an Eisenhower Fellow in 2019 and holds degrees in public policy and political science from Universidad Adolfo Ibañez and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, respectively.

During his time with LLPLI, Rengifo-Grau formed a strong collegial tie with Greg Moore. Moore is the former director of the *Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy* in California, and an expert in the art of orchestrating public- and civic-sector collaboration to achieve ambitious land- and marine-conservation goals. Moore praised his former colleague, "his gift is really his ability to create a vision, bring people around that vision, and, very innovatively, make that vision a reality." This highlights the values that Rengifo-Grau says drive his work. "I think I have the ability to build bridges between different worlds," he explained, saying that he sees the dissemination of knowledge and solutions across communities as integral to land conservation.

Moore said the foundation will meld the "durability of government commitment with the innovation of the non-profit sector," and illustrate the global implications of its initiatives. "Climate change adaptation and mitigation in a country like Chile is not only a benefit to that country, but to ... the full planet." Moore also commended the role of the International Land Conservation Network at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy in creating a network to support this kind of internationally-beneficial program. He highlighted the institute's "ability to help get the job done on behalf of [its] own country and [its] own community, but—really—on behalf of large landscapes and biodiversity across the globe."

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