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A Renowned Honda Racetrack Certified as one of Japan's First OECMs

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On October 6, 2023, the automotive brand Honda [announced](#) that Mobility Resort Motegi—a racing circuit primarily used to promote the brand—was one of the first areas in Japan to be recognized under the classification of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure (OECM). The move is part of a larger initiative by the Japanese government to expand natural reserve areas and enhance biodiversity conservation, inspired by the global mission set forth in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to protect 30 percent of land and water area by 2030.

Mobility Resort Motegi was opened in 1997 in the northern part of Tochigi Prefecture. Covering 640 hectares (about 1,582 acres), the world-renowned racing circuit has hosted events from world championships to concerts. But it is also situated within dense forest area that Honda now has a duty to protect, thanks to Japan's use of an emerging conservation tool called an OECM.

First described in 2010 in the [Aichi Biodiversity Targets](#), OECMs are [geographically defined areas](#), outside of Protected Areas (PAs), that achieve long-term conservation outcomes. They offer a degree of flexibility that traditional PAs do not, because the area's primary objective does not need to be conservation, as long it is delivering on its promised benefits to biodiversity. In Honda's case, the company is able to certify the region as an OECM even though its primary objective for the resort might be to support its brand, because that use does not preclude it from protecting much of the forested area.

Before it became a racetrack, the Mobility Resort Motegi area was unmanaged woodland and rice fields. Responsible management strategies have since been implemented to improve the forest's biodiversity. Logging has reduced tree density, allowing sunlight to penetrate further, and other areas, including terraced rice paddies, have been restored to protect the endangered *Nannophya pygmaea*, a type of dragonfly native to Japan. Additional habitats have also been added or improved to enable greater biodiversity within the forest.

Japan has identified OECMs as being crucial to its chances of achieving its 30x30 goals. In 2022, Japan's Ministry of the Environment published its "[30by30 Roadmap](#)". This showed that, as of 2020, the nation had conserved just over 20 percent of land and 13 percent of sea area, exceeding the prior decade's goals set in Aichi Biodiversity Target 11, but further challenging it to maintain pace in the current decade. Thus, in addition to expanding its existing PA system, Japan is leaning into the opportunities presented by OECMs—which can be registered in the World Database on OECMs and count toward Global Biodiversity Framework targets—to create a flexible conservation system that welcomes more stakeholders to the table.

In response, various Japanese enterprises, civil society organizations, research institutions, and others have begun to collaborate to propose the goal of creating over 100 "areas beyond natural reserves that contribute to biodiversity conservation". These will include company-owned forests, managed by enterprises, and school forests, which are owned by schools for the purpose of facilitating environmental education.

The formal recognition of OECMs presented an opportunity for Honda to both commit to and benefit from responsibly managing and stewarding Mobility Resort Motegi, about 70 percent of which is forest. Of the 640 hectares (about 1,582 acres), 414.1 (about 1,023 acres) are now certified as an OECM site and will undergo regular forest monitoring and study. The property provides habitat for approximately 5,800 species, including several rare species such as *Cybister chinensis*, a type of large aquatic insect. The resort has been conducting various activities to conserve nature and its reliant species.

Achieving this certification required Honda to establish biodiversity conservation guidelines and commit to conducting regular biodiversity monitoring. The data collected from regular monitoring is then used to support ongoing conservation work. In addition, forest surveys and monitoring studies are being conducted to promote sustainable forest development and workshops are being leveraged to begin building a workforce of people interested in aiding with this development.

Hidden within the forest, Mobility Resort Motegi has also developed Hello Woods, a forest park that offers racing enthusiasts the opportunity to connect with nature. The park provides various natural experiences such as forest exploration, woodland walks, and zip-lining. Honda has adopted an undergirding "theme" for this work of promoting the "coexistence of people, nature and mobility".

Mobility Resort Motegi was one of 122 initial sites that Japan [certified as OECMs](#) in October 2023. Together, these sites cover 77,000 ha (about 190,271 acres). Another 63 areas, totaling 8,000 hectares (about 19,768 acres), are [slated to be certified](#) on March 8, 2024. [Among these are](#) Toyoda Iron Works Co. and Mitsubishi Corporation.

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