



World Rafting Championships 2011 - the first ever certified carbon neutral world sports event

The International Rafting Federation (IRF) delivered the first certified carbon neutral world sports event with their Costa Rica 2011 World Rafting Championships. Following is the success story - a model for future events.

In 2011 Costa Rica raised the bar in global sustainable initiatives once again. The IRF's World Rafting Championships (WRC) held in Costa Rica in October 2011, was the first ever Certified Carbon Neutral world championship sporting event. [EARTH University](http://www.earthuniversity.com) certified the WRC as carbon neutral as a direct result of the leadership of the International Rafting Federation and local adventure tour company [Rios Tropicales](http://www.rios-tropicales.com) working with a team of Costa Rican host sponsors, communities, and organisations, including Turrialba Chamber of Tourism, and The Costa Rica Paddle and Adventure Association.



With over 600 participating athletes and officials from more than 35 nations attending, event organisers realised they could not only deliver a first-ever certified carbon neutral event, but ensure everyone involved became champions for a sustainable future.

Organisers contacted the Carbon Neutral Commission of EARTH University to plan how to certify the seven days long event. Event certification efforts were led by Rafael Gallo, owner of Costa Rica's largest private native rainforest reserve for carbon mitigation; and the person who transformed Rios Tropicales into Costa Rica's leading geotourism adventure company and sustainability advocate.

"We saw the perfect opportunity to make our environmental stewardship ideals real when the World Rafting Championships came to Costa Rica in 2011. Costa Rica has the knowledge, systems, people, and product in place to be able to develop and host a certified carbon neutral international sports event." said. Gallo.



To achieve carbon neutrality, the event had to remove, reduce, or compensate for 100% of the total carbon emissions associated with the 2011 World Rafting Championships. Event organisers used the GHG Protocol (Greenhouse Gas protocol) to measure the total carbon footprint, including the indirect impact of all participants' international flights to/from the event. The total event "footprint" came to over 1,000 tons of CO₂. Organisers reduced fossil fuel consumption through centralised participants' housing, sourcing local food and products, waste recycling, organic matter composting, and solar energy. Over 300 international athletes planted

3,000 native tree species in a 5.5 acre (2.2 hectare) deforested area of Costa Rica's rainforest on October 7th, 2011. These seedlings will absorb carbon and generate oxygen over a 15-year period to mitigate for all remaining event carbon emissions.

"The oxygen generated from the trees we planted in Costa Rica will eventually reach us in Norway", noted the Norwegian Women's Raft Team.

Dr Edmundo Castro, Director of the Neutral Carbon Program at Costa Rica's EARTH University, verified and validated the event's actions. The Carbon Neutral Certification was awarded in a ceremony after the tree planting work in one of Rios Tropicales Natural Reserves, to the enthusiastic applause of over 250 participants from Japan, Canada, Norway, Chile, Slovenia, Slovakia, Russia, Mexico, New Zealand, and Costa Rica.



"By thoroughly inventorying all carbon emissions associated with the planning and operation of this event, the IRF was able to then reduce and mitigate 100% of the event's carbon impact, thus becoming the very first Certified Carbon Neutral World Sporting Championship in modern history." said Dr Castro.

Objectives:

The Objectives of the project were:

- Achieve carbon neutrality by removing, reducing or compensating for 100% of the total carbon emissions associated with the 2011 World Rafting Championships
- Reach a global audience through the sharing of knowledge and engagement with athletes from all participating nations on:
 - Recycling
 - Composting
 - solar energy
 - local sourcing, and
 - tree planting mitigations to offset carbon footprints
- To pioneer the way in organising sustainable rafting events

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:

Although the UN Sustainable Development Goals were not agreed until 2015, the 2011 IRF World Rafting Championships was at the forefront of pioneering sports for sustainable actions. On reviewing the benefits of the event, the clear UN Sustainable Development goals that were aligned were:



2 - Zero Hunger

The use of locally sourced food for the catering before and during the event ensured that local farmers and communities benefited from the event taking place in their communities

7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



7 - Affordable and clean energy

Where possible, all energy supplied for the event accommodation, catering and administration was provided or offset with solar generated power

12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



12 - Responsible consumption and production

Before and during the event there was a huge effort in ensuring responsible consumption and production through the use of local sourcing, recycling, composting and shared housing greatly reducing the need for large transport and infrastructure projects

13 CLIMATE
ACTION



13 - Climate action

Over half of the 600 athletes and officials took part in the planting of three thousand trees on 07th October 2011 marking the largest offset to the event

15 LIFE
ON LAND



15 - Life on land

The location chosen for the tree planting exercise was a previously deforested area in central Costa Rica Through the efforts of the organisers, the land was purchased and to day remains protected

17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



17 - Partnerships for the goals

The collaboration between the IRF and its Costa Rican hosts raised local and international awareness of the value of sustainability in the world of adventure tourism and sport

Further Benefits:

Ensuring that the 2011 IRF World Rafting Championships were carbon neutral meant engaging with athletes and participants from a very early stage. A total of 58 teams and officials from over 35 nations participated in the 2011 World Championships Engagement before, during and after ensured that the reasons for taking such bold moves were shared not just with the participants but by member federations and those whom participants interacted with when returning home.

The essence of rafting is to be exposed to nature and the outdoors. Rafters are inherently protective of nature with many elite athletes and member nations actively working or participating in environmental organisations and causes within their home nations.



Short [video of the event's sustainability can be found here](#) (Spanish with English subtitles).

Future IRF Events:

With the carbon neutrality success achieved at the 2011 WRC, the IRF has pushed other host countries to adopt similar goals. As an incentive towards this end, the IRF has since placed the carbon neutral objective at a high priority when selecting host nations for its World Championships. The IRF is excited to report that China has accepted the challenge and will follow Costa Rica's lead by hosting the 2020 World Rafting Championships (postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic) as a carbon neutral event also.