



Gift to the Earth



Peru: significant moves to protect biodiversity and respect indigenous people's rights

SUMMARY

In November 2004, the government of Peru established the Alto Purus National Park and the Purus Communal Reserve over a 2.7 million hectare expanse of Peruvian Amazon tropical forest along the Brazilian border. It is a true step forward for the conservation of key forest areas as well as important populations of endangered species such as the jaguar, the giant river otter and the black spider monkey.

March 2005 saw a giant boost for the rights of indigenous communities as the government committed by decree to establish a special commission that will propose a law to secure the creation of well managed territorial reserves for indigenous people living in voluntary isolation. This represents an important move for strengthening strategic partnerships between conservationists and indigenous groups, as territorial reserves complement natural protected area networks whilst simultaneously protecting indigenous rights.

Over the past five years, the Peruvian government has also promoted the modernization of the forest sector by promoting a more orderly and responsible utilization of the country's forest, the second largest tropical forest in South America. Similarly, it has established and installed a multi sector commission to combat illegal logging.

These commitments represent important steps towards meeting the targets and policies agreed by Peru at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Convention for Biological Diversity, and the World Park Congress.

WWF, the global conservation organization, recognizes these commitments as a Gift to the Earth, WWF's recognition of globally significant conservation achievements – an example of environmental leadership and an inspiration to others.



The Alto Purus landscape in Peru covers more than 2.7 million hectares and is one of the largest landscapes of contiguous protected areas and indigenous territories in Peru. High rainfall, soaring humidity, complex topography, and meandering river systems have created a mosaic of habitats and forest types of outstanding biodiversity and unique ecological and evolutionary processes.

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BACKGROUND

The Alto Purus protected area and indigenous territory landscape includes a 2.5 million hectares national park (IUCN cat. II), the largest protected area in Peru; and 200,000 hectares communal reserve (IUCN cat. IV), which will be co-managed by the national government and the local indigenous people.

Within the Purus watershed, there is also a territorial reserve in favour of the Mashco Piro indigenous group that lives in voluntary isolation from the outside world. The physical and cultural survival of such isolated groups fundamentally depends upon the integrity of their lands and territories as well as continued access to the resources upon which their livelihoods and cultures depend. WWF recognizes the rights of indigenous people living in voluntary isolation and therefore applauds the Peruvian decision to create a Special Commission in charge of submitting a proposed law to Congress which includes: (a) establishment of a legal framework for the protection of indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation or initial contact in the Peruvian Amazon; (b) ratification of the system of territorial reserves set aside specifically for indigenous people in voluntary isolation or initial contact; and (c) definition of an integral transectoral policy in which the State, civil society, local populations and representative indigenous organizations participate in the protection and management of territorial reserves.

Outside protected areas and indigenous territories the Peruvian government has committed to the modernization of the forest sector by promoting more sustainable and socially equitable forest management. By 2004, 24 million hectares of the Peruvian Amazon were declared as Permanent Production Forests. These are forests set aside specifically for sustainable management activities, which simultaneously generates important economically viable and environmentally sound development activity in the Peruvian Amazon Basin. Fully supported by President Toledo, the concession process has already allocated 7.3 million hectares of forests in the states of Madre de Dios, Ucayali, Huácano, San Martín and Loreto for sustainable management.

The creation of a Multisectoral Anti-Illegal Logging Commission further illustrates the determination of the Peruvian government to fight illegal logging. The president of this Commission was recently appointed by President Toledo and will be responsible for developing strategies to tackle the illegal activities which are currently plaguing forest concessions, indigenous communities and natural protected areas, undermining the efforts towards sustainable forest management.

THE CONSERVATION BENEFITS

The Alto Purus National Park and the Purus Communal Reserve fall within the Southwestern Amazon Moist Forests ecoregion, an area of high biodiversity and unique ecological and evolutionary processes. It contributes to the conservation of a landscape totalling over 8 million hectares of protected areas and indigenous territories in Brazil and Peru.

The limited research undertaken on the area has already shown a high diversity of mammals (196 species) and a remarkable level of bird and butterfly endemisms. It is home to such rare species as the Goeldi's monkey (*Callimico goeldii*) and bush dog (*Speothos venaticus*), and such endangered and threatened species as the black spider monkey (*Ateles paniscus*), the jaguar (*Panthera onca*), the scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*) and the giant river otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*). Forest cover in Alto Purus is also relatively intact as there has been minimal human intervention in the area since the time of the rubber boom. The two areas harbour such economically important forest species as mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) and cedar (*Cedrela odorata*). Various palm species valuable for their non-timber resources are also found in the Communal Reserve and National Park, such as "huasai" (*Euterpe precatoria*), "pijuayo" (*Bactris gasipaes*), and "aguaje" (*Mauritia flexuosa*).



Alto Purus is an area of fascinating and important cultural diversity. Nine different ethnic groups, the Amahuaca, Ashaninka, Cashinahua, Chaminahua, Culina, Mastanahua, Sharanahua, Shipibo and Yine, live on their ancestral lands in harmony with nature. In addition, between 200 and 600 indigenous peoples live in voluntary isolation in the dense tropical forests of Alto Purus. © WWF-Canon / André BÄRTSCHI



Illegal logging of highly quoted cedro tree (*Cedrela odorata*) along the Rio Las Piedras, which originates deep inside the Alto Purus National Park and territories for indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation. Forest crime not only destroys nature but also jeopardizes long-term livelihoods of local communities and indigenous peoples.
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RELEVANCE FOR WWF'S TARGETS

The actions recognized in this Gift to the Earth contribute to the target of establishing and implementing a viable, representative network of protected areas in the world's most threatened and biologically significant forest regions by 2010. This is also a vital move in Peru towards improving sustainable management in 200 million hectares across the world's production forests. Similarly, they positively contribute to cross-cutting issues recognized as being of great importance by WWF, specifically the recognition and protection of indigenous rights.

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The **Gift to the Earth** is WWF's recognition of a globally significant conservation achievement, which addresses WWF's conservation priorities in globally significant natural areas by:

- 🌐 Advancing conservation of biodiversity, especially forest, freshwater and marine ecosystems, or enhancing the prospects for survival of threatened species.
- 🌐 Addressing global threats posed by climate change, toxic chemicals and unsustainable use of resources such as timber, freshwater and fisheries.

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