



Threats and Solutions

Fifteen percent of the Amazon rainforest has already been destroyed. Since the 1970s, an area of ancient rainforest the size of France has been lost. In 2000 alone, almost two million hectares of rainforest in the Brazilian Amazon were lost to illegal and destructive logging, mining, industrial agricultural plantations and other human industries such as road building. A significant part of what remains is under direct threat, as are the forest plants, animals and people who depend upon the forest. One of the greatest dangers to the Amazon rainforest is illegal and destructive logging.

There is no single solution to saving the Amazon rainforest and stopping the destruction. The solutions for the forest and the people, whose ways of life depend upon it, must be based on a wide range of socially and ecologically responsible initiatives.

The causes of destruction

Logging is one of the principal causes of the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. By building logging roads into pristine rainforest, the logging industry also opens the door to further devastation of the forest ecosystem through clearing for cattle ranches and soya plantations, over-hunting, fuel wood gathering and mining.

Fuelled by the demand for cheap supplies of tropical timbers for both the Brazilian domestic market and the international market, the illegal timber trade represents a major factor in forest degradation. The Brazilian government itself estimates that 80 percent of all timber produced in the Brazilian Amazon is illegal in origin. Of all the timber that is cut, as much as 70 percent is wasted in the mills.

Rio Earth Summit – ten years later!

In 1992 world governments met at the United Nations (UN) Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro to address the global environmental crisis. The largest environmental conference ever held, the Rio Earth Summit resulted in five separate political agreements, including the legally binding Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), an agreement specifically aiming to protect the world's ecosystems such as ancient forests, and the plants, animals and way of life of the people that depend upon them.

But ten years later, there has been very little in the way of increased protection for the Amazon. In January this year, the Brazilian government announced a US\$40 billion plan to convert much of the forest into highways, logging concessions and an array of other industrial developments.

Scientists have estimated that this new plan, called "Avanço Brasil" (Advance Brazil), will lead to the damage or loss of 33 to 42 percent of the Brazilian Amazon. Even if the government and industries only manage to raise a portion of the funds needed for this project, the proposals give an indication of government attitudes towards this threatened ancient forest and the people for whom the Amazon is home.

Protecting indigenous lands

As industrial logging and other destructive industries move further and further into what remains of the Amazon rainforest, many indigenous people's cultures and ways of life are put at risk. While Brazilian law provided for the complete protection of all indigenous lands by 1993, to date, only half of the indigenous lands in Brazil have been demarcated.

The Deni, one group of Indians living in a remote area of the Amazon rainforest in the south east of Brazil's Amazonas State, have been waiting 20 years to have their land demarcated. Their land is now threatened by commercial logging, so the Deni have taken control over the demarcation of their lands. In September and October 2001 the Deni, with the assistance of Greenpeace and our partner organisations CIMI and OPAN, will demarcate their most vulnerable borders.

But many other indigenous lands remain under threat.

Productive Conservation

Indigenous groups are not the only people dependent on the forest for preserving traditional ways of life, rubber tapping has been a traditional way of life for many people living in the Amazon rainforest. Today, as many as 63,000 families depend on rubber tapping, a livelihood that does not destroy the trees from which the latex is extracted.



Extractive Reserves are protected areas of forest established by the Brazilian government to allow the rubber tappers to maintain their traditional way of life. Extractive Reserves cover perhaps one percent of the Brazilian Amazon rainforest. Greenpeace has been working with the rubber tappers and other groups to demand an increase in the area of Extractive Reserves to ten percent of the Brazilian Amazon.

With the protection of indigenous lands through demarcation and other initiatives such as the creation of more Extractive Reserves, as much as 30 percent of the Amazon would be legally off limits to industrial logging and large scale industrial development.

Certified logging operations offer an important way forward for the logging industry in the Amazon. Greenpeace believes that the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is currently the only socially and ecologically responsible certification system that independently verifies logging operations to a set of international recognised standards. Some companies in the Amazon, such as Precious Woods and Gethal Amazonas, have already received FSC certification and are now selling timber from their operations to countries around the world.

Many solutions are needed to protect the Amazon rainforest and its resources, on which the lives of 20 million people depend. Effective solutions must maintain people's quality of life and ensure long-term protection for the forest and its unique plants and animals. But these can only be achieved if sound environmental and economic alternatives replace the current destructive models.

Threats and Solutions: facts and figures

The Destruction of the Amazon Rainforest

Illegal and destructive logging is one of the biggest threats to the Amazon rainforest. According to the Brazilian government, 80 percent of the timber is illegal in origin.

In the last 30 years, we have lost 14 percent of the Brazilian Amazon, 50 million hectares, an area the size of France, bigger than all of Japan or the state of Texas and almost the size of Chile.

'Deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon was greater last year [2000] than at any time since 1995 according to new satellite data released by the Brazilian government.' Environmental News Service, May 2001

Around 1,000 of Brazil's recorded species of higher plants and animals are considered under immediate threat of extinction.

A handful of large companies from Europe, Asia and the US control more than 12 percent of the Amazon's timber processing capacity and almost half of the export value.

Over the past 10 years the production of industrial round wood in the Brazilian Amazon increased by approximately 19 percent over the previous decade. Areas designated for protection increased only marginally, from 3.8 to 4.4 percent of Brazil's landmass.

Productive conservation

If all traditional indigenous territory in Brazil was officially mapped and demarcated, approximately 20 percent of the Amazon rainforest would gain protected status.

Over two-thirds of all mass produced pharmaceutical drugs are derived from medicinal plants. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 80 percent of the world's people use plants to treat a wide range of illnesses from headaches to infections. The medicinal potential of plants of the Amazon has only just begun to be realised internationally. At present, close to 650 species of plant with pharmaceutical properties and economic value from the Amazon have been assessed.

Forty-eight native fruits of the Amazon have been identified as having the potential for sale on the international market. The fruits of the Acai palm found in the Amazon, are traditionally used to make a type of juice that is rich in minerals. A single palm tree produces up to 20 kilograms of fruit per year. In 1995 almost 106,000 tonnes of juice was produced at a value of US\$40 million.

Amazon Expedition 2001



GREENPEACE

Eco-tourism in the Amazon has huge potential but is at present managed in an unsatisfactory way. Eco-tourism has the potential to guarantee minimal environmental impact on the Amazon rainforest through the application of environmentally friendly technologies and environmentally sympathetic accommodation for visitors. It could also guarantee that the income received from such activities would directly benefit the local communities.

“Short of a miraculous transformation in the attitude of people and governments, the Earth’s remaining closed canopy forests and their associated biodiversity are destined to disappear in the coming decades,” said Klaus Toepfer, Director of the United National Environment Program, on August 21, 2001.

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