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Ecuador seeking compensation to save the Amazon

Ecuador President Rafael Correa is asking the international community to come up with a plan to compensate Ecuador for not exploiting the Ishpingo-Tiputini-Tambococha (ITT) forest. The ITT is an oil concession area within Yasuni National Park, which covers 2.5 million acres (1.01 million hectares) within the Ecuadorian Amazon. If foreign governments, businesses and environmental organizations match half of the projected revenue for 10 years' worth of oil extraction, Ecuador will not allow drilling in the region. However, the plan for such compensation must be developed before foreign companies finish bidding on the oil concession (expected to take eight to twelve months). The government estimates that the revenue from the ITT block would be US\$700 million per year for ten years, putting the compensation figure proposed at US\$350 million per year for ten years. A financing plan for Correa's proposal to not allow drilling has not yet been detailed, but according to the Christian Science Monitor (Rich Clabaugh, 'Ecuador Invites the World to Save Its Forest', 5 June 2007), Ecuador's minister for energy, Alberto Acosta, envisions a combination of "bilateral and multilateral debt-for-conservation swaps, bilateral donations, individual contributions, contributions from environmental and human rights NGOs, and the placement of certificates for non-exploited crude on international markets." Foreign governments are also expressing interest, as are groups such as Save America's Forests (www.saveamericasforests.org/Yasuni/index.html) and the campaign 'Yasuni depends on you!' (www.sosyasuni.org).

New species discovered in Suriname forest

US-based NGO Conservation International (CI) recently presented the results of a 2005 expedition and 2006 follow-up survey to government officials, reporters and others that details eastern Suriname's biodiversity. The expedition was led by CI's Rapid Assessment Program (RAP), during which researchers found 24 species previously unknown to science, including a frog with fluorescent purple markings (*Atelopus* spp) four other new frog species (*Eleutherodactylus* spp), six fish species, 12 dung beetle species and a new ant species. They also rediscovered a rare armored catfish (*Hartiella crassicauda*) that had not been seen for more than 50 years. The Suriname government was called upon to take swift action in declaring the area a protected zone in order for the new species and the biodiversity in the region to survive. Although the places where the discoveries were made are far from civilization, they are totally unprotected and threatened by illegal small-scale gold mining thriving in the Suriname interior. To view pictures and read more about the CI expedition, see <http://web.conservation.org/xp/frontlines/2007/06040701.xml>.

Tropical deforestation and climate change

According to new research published in *Science*, tropical deforestation releases 1.5 billion tonnes of carbon each year into the atmosphere. An international team of experts from the US, UK, Brazil and France compared data from eleven climate-carbon computer models. The results show that deforestation in the tropics accounts for nearly 20% of carbon emissions due to human activities and will result in the release of an estimated 87 to 130 billion tonnes of carbon over the next century. This is greater than the amount of carbon that would be released by 13 years of global fossil fuel combustion at current levels. This new research shows the considerable value of maintaining and managing tropical forests as carbon sinks. The study's authors stated, "If by 2050 we slow deforestation by 50 per cent from current levels, with the aim of stopping deforestation when we have 50 per cent of the world's tropical forests remaining, this would save the emission of 50 billion tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere. This 50/50/50 option would avoid the release of the equivalent of six years of global fossil fuel emissions." The article and other outputs from the Global Carbon Project are available at www.globalcarbonproject.org/products/publications.htm.

Market shift in China

The world's third largest home improvement retailer, B&Q, recently announced a scheme to root out illegal supplies and guarantee within three years all timber products sold at its China stores will be from certified responsible forestry programs. This announcement follows a Greenpeace survey, which revealed that many timber species commonly sold in home improvement stores across China, including merbau, teak, jatoba and sapelli, come from countries where it is alleged that up to 80% of the logging is illegal and destructive. B&Q, with 60 stores across China, is one of the biggest home-improvement retailers in a country that has seen double-digit growth in demand for such materials due to its rapid economic development and urbanization. B&Q Asia's Chief Executive Officer said that the company has started working to ensure that all the timber products it sells in China come from legal sources. B&Q also guaranteed that, within three years, all product lines it sells in China will come from certified ecologically responsible forestry operations, in keeping with its parent company Kingfisher's global purchasing policy. B&Q China has recently stopped selling flooring made from merbau, due to allegations of unsustainable management of this species in major exporting countries.