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## Colombia to protect remote region bordering Venezuela

The Colombian government is reportedly planning to create a new protected area in a remote part of the country bordering Venezuela. According to *El Espectador*, Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos plans to declare an area of the *Estrella Fluvial de Inirida* river a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. The Ramsar designation would effectively prohibit mining in 253 000 hectares of the wetlands in the Guainia region. Guainia is home to at least 15 indigenous communities and a wealth of wildlife, including at least 470 fish species, some of which are exported for the freshwater aquarium trade. Mining is seen as the region's biggest challenge in conserving habitat and biodiversity.

Source: [news.mongabay.com/2014/0113-colombia-estrella-fluvial-del-inirida.html](http://news.mongabay.com/2014/0113-colombia-estrella-fluvial-del-inirida.html)

## African countries unite against illegal timber trade in Congo Basin

Governments of Africa's main timber-producing countries, the timber industry and civil-society organizations have agreed to jointly combat illegal timber trade in the Congo Basin, FAO announced after an international wood industry meeting in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, last October.

By adopting the Brazzaville Declaration in October, representatives of six African countries—the Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon—the timber industry and civil-society organizations committed to the sustainable and legal development of the wood industry in the region.

Source: [www.fao.org/forestry/eu-flegt/84682/en](http://www.fao.org/forestry/eu-flegt/84682/en)

## Mangroves lose ground in Myanmar

Mangrove cover in Myanmar's Ayeyarwady Delta declined by nearly two-thirds between 1978 and 2011, leaving coastal areas more vulnerable to disasters such as Cyclone Nargis, which killed 138 000 people in 2008, according to a recent study in *Global Environmental Change*.

The research, which is based on remote sensing and field data, found that dense mangrove cover in the Ayeyarwady Delta declined from 2623 km<sup>2</sup> in 1978 to less than 1000 km<sup>2</sup> in 2011, an annual deforestation rate of 3% over the period. Most of the mangrove loss was due to agricultural expansion, primarily for rice production.

Source: [news.mongabay.com/2013/1126-myanmar-mangroves.html](http://news.mongabay.com/2013/1126-myanmar-mangroves.html)

## Cameroon grants lease for new oil-palm plantation

The Government of Cameroon has granted a three-year provisional lease for an oil-palm project, according to [mongabay.com](http://mongabay.com). The project, by US-based Herakles Farms, involves the conversion of 20 000 ha of land to

oil-palm plantations, less than one-third of the 73 000 ha the company had originally hoped to turn into oil palm. Environmental groups oppose the project, claiming that it will destroy wildlife-rich forest. The project was halted last May by Cameroon's Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife due to environmental concerns.

Source: [news.mongabay.com/2013/1126-herakles-approved-in-cameroon.html](http://news.mongabay.com/2013/1126-herakles-approved-in-cameroon.html)

## Oil-palm company fined US\$30 million for destroying orangutan forest

An Indonesian court has fined an oil-palm company for violating environmental laws when it cleared protected peat forest that is a stronghold for endangered orangutans in Indonesia's Aceh Province.

In January 2014, the Meulaboh District Court concluded that PT Kallista Alam had illegally cleared and burned forest within the protected Tripa peat swamp in northwestern Sumatra. The company has been ordered to pay 114.3 billion rupiah (US\$9.4 million) in compensation and 251.7 billion rupiah (US\$20.6 million) to restore damaged areas.

By moving forward with forest clearing without proper permits or sign-off by nearby communities, Kallista Alam violated a nationwide moratorium on new plantation and logging concessions, a presidential decree on the conversion of peat moss areas, and the sanctity of a high-conservation-value area known for its orangutan population. The actions sparked international outrage, with more than 1.5 million people signing online petitions calling for greater protection of Aceh's forests.

Source: [news.mongabay.com/2014/0109-aceh-tripa-court-decision.html](http://news.mongabay.com/2014/0109-aceh-tripa-court-decision.html)

## Older trees grow faster and store more carbon

A study reported in the journal *Nature* has found that, for most species, bigger trees increase their growth rates and sequester more carbon as they age. An international research group reported that 97 percent of 403 tropical and temperate species studied grow more quickly the older they get. The research group used records from studies on six continents involving repeated measurements of 673 046 individual trees, some data series going back more than 80 years. Large, old trees do not act simply as senescent carbon reservoirs, reported the research group, but actively fix large amounts of carbon compared with smaller trees, contrary to long-standing beliefs that large old trees are unproductive. While the finding applies to individual trees, it may not hold true for stands of trees, said the research group.

Sources: [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/01/140115132740.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/01/140115132740.htm); [www.nature.com/nature/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nature12914.html](http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nature12914.html)