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Oil Developer Permitted to Log in Ecuadorian National Park

COCA, Ecuador, March 28, 2005 (ENS) - An undisturbed rainforest area of Ecuador's Yasuni National Park is about to be logged to make way for oil development.

On Friday, the Ecuador Ministry of the Environment Coca office issued a logging license to the Brazilian state oil company Petrobras to cut trees in Yasuni National Park. The loggers will clear a swath for an access road, an oil processing facility, and two drilling platforms.

The logging and oil development will affect the area's indigenous people. The rainforests to be cut are within the primary rainforests of the Chiru Isla Quichwa community and the core of the oil operation will be built within 15 kilometers of a Huaorani community.

The license allows Petrobras to cut over 21,500 cubic meters of wood, much of it within the park.

Matt Finer, Ph.D., a staff ecologist with Save America's Forests who is conducting scientific studies in the park, said, "This amounts to the clearing of 89.5 hectares (221 acres) of megadiverse, primary, amazonian rainforest in one of the least disturbed parts of Yasuni National Park."

According to the chief of Yasuni National Park, the dock along the Napo River constructed to serve this development is 80 percent completed and Petrobras will soon be ready to start road construction.

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Quote of Note

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity

belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."
-- Aldo Leopold, American environmentalist and author

Lowland woolly monkeys, *Lagothrix lagotricha poeppigii*, are vulnerable to habitat disturbance. (Photo by Persson courtesy Anthony DiFiore/NYU)

In December, 50 rainforest scientists from several countries declared their opposition to the construction of the new oil road into the park. In a letter and report submitted to Ecuadorian President Lucio Gutiérrez, the scientists warned that penetration of the road into pristine forest areas will lead to species extinctions.

Ecuadorian environmental and human rights groups launched an unsuccessful lawsuit in Ecuador's Constitutional Court to halt the project.

Environmental groups and scientists are now frustrated because it is now obvious that Petrobras and the Environment Ministry have every intention of building a road. They are in a panic, says Finer, "because it now appears that we are now just weeks away from the beginning of road construction."

Yasuní National Park, located in the Ecuadorian Amazon, protects one of the Earth's most biodiverse rainforests and is a refuge for threatened species such jaguars, Amazonian tapirs, giant otters, harpy eagles, and woolly monkeys.

The scientists had urged that Petrobras be required to use roadless means to develop oil in this unique reservoir of biodiversity. At a meeting in November to strategize against development in Yasuni, they pointed out the devastating ecological effects caused by new roads penetrating the rainforest.

Roads increase the area of forest subjected to hunting and settlement pressure. "Any future oil development must treat the intact rainforest as an ocean and use roadless methods to access the oil," said Tom Quesenberry, director of the Mindo Biological Station, situated in a cloudforest area of the Ecuadorian Amazon.

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