



Strengthening Local Voices for the Governance and Conservation of Yasuní National Park, Ecuador

Despite Ecuador's small size, it is one of the most biologically diverse countries in the world. Since 2002, the Wildlife Conservation Society has worked in the country's Yasuní National Park (YNP) in the Ecuadorian Amazon to protect the Park's natural resources. Yasuní is one of the world's top biodiversity hotspots, estimated to contain about 4,000 species of plants, at least 70 species of mammals, and more than 600 species of birds.

Significant Threats to Biodiversity

Biodiversity across Ecuador, and particularly in the Amazon region, is threatened by unplanned colonization, water and air pollution, and the over-exploitation of natural resources. The forests in Yasuní are subject to hunting by indigenous people and some colonists. In the past few years, WCS has been documenting the impact of hunting in order to assess current patterns of use and to develop sound recommendations for sustainable hunting of wildlife. Illegal logging is also a big problem in Yasuní, resulting in local extinctions of tree species. Negative impacts of oil exploration, such as oil spills as pictured below, are widespread and will increase if the Ecuadorian government accelerates the production of oil without mitigating the environmental impacts. In the past year, President Rafael Correa has been re-considering opening up pristine areas of Yasuní for oil exploitation. He is currently negotiating with multilateral institutions so that oil revenue is subsidized by international organizations.



An oil spill in Yasuní National Park. Photo: AVECITA
Chicchón, WCS

In addition to a rich diversity of plants and animals, the Ecuadorian Amazon and surrounding areas (a 12,000-square-kilometer landscape) is inhabited primarily by the Huaorani and Kichwa indigenous groups. With a population of about 1,500, the Huaorani are one of the smallest and most traditional ethnic groups in Ecuador. In recent years, we have been able to strengthen the quality of the Huaorani's participation and voice in the Management Committee for Yasuní Biosphere Reserve.

The Tagaeri and Taramenane are indigenous groups related to the Huaorani but that have chosen to live away from any contact with Western society. They range through large expanses of forest as nomadic hunters and gatherers. The recommendation from the Management Committee is to avoid contact with these groups and to avoid visiting the areas in which they live. The Kichwa and non-indigenous mestizos surrounding the Huaorani have a sedentary lifestyle as they primarily practice subsistence agriculture. WCS is working to ensure indigenous peoples can continue to depend on Yasuní's natural resources for their traditional ways of life.



A WCS survey revealed that local people feel the two main threats to their livelihoods are the sustainability of wildlife as a protein source and new colonists whose numbers are putting additional pressure on resources. Photo: Avecita Chicchón, WCS

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) works in partnership with indigenous groups, local communities, and the Ecuadorian government to protect the region's outstanding natural resources. WCS facilitates discussions among this group and oil companies, conducts research, and educates local stakeholders to accomplishing the following: a) strengthen the technical capacity of the Ministry of the Environment and the National Park Service staff, b) organize and strengthen the Yasuní Management Committee, c) work with the Kichwa to improve their land management capacity, d) monitor impacts of human activities on wildlife use and forest cover, and e) gather information on key wildlife species' needs, and monitor wildlife populations to better evaluate our efforts and ensure the long-term survival of the region's wildlife.