



## Brazil's Amazon National Park: Protection in Name Alone

***The Parque Nacional da Amazonia, or the Amazon National Park, straddles the border between the Brazilian states of Para and Amazonas. It is Para state's only park, a state that has suffered from the severe impact of illegal and destructive logging. For many unique forest plant and animal species of Para State, the Amazon National Park represents a last refuge. But this park is protected in name only. Government action is needed now to ensure that illegal logging, cattle ranchers, mining, road building and other industrial activities do not destroy Brazil's protected areas.***

The Amazon National Park was created on 19 February 1974 by Federal Decree No. 73.683. Comprising 994,000 hectares of rainforest, the Amazon National Park lies on the left bank of the river Tapajos. As the third largest park in Brazil, the Amazon National Park is burgeoning with life. Eighty metre tall chestnut trees dominate the forest of the region, which is made up of angelins, samaumas, jacarandas, and rubber trees. Giant water lilies, almost two metres across, colour the rivers where tambaqui, pirarucu and tucunare fish live. Tambaqui fish play a vital role in the shape of the forest, as they feed on the fruits of the trees when rivers flood, spreading the seeds far and wide. These rivers are also home for the Boi "fish", actually a manatee, currently under threat of extinction. The park's animal species are some of the most diverse in the world including jaguars, anteaters and wild dogs. Reptiles including turtles and alligators, and birds such as the Royal Falcon also live in the region.

It is the only national park in Para State, a state that has already suffered severe damage from logging and deforestation. Some 15 percent of the state, 187,206 km<sup>2</sup>, has been totally clearcut, and much of the rest badly damaged.

The Amazon National Park should be a refuge for environmental protection but it is now being destroyed.

### Infrastructure failings

Despite commitments made by Brazil at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 to introduce effective measures to ensure the protection of ecosystems such as ancient rainforests the government has failed to do so. It has not adequately funded or staffed Ibama (the Brazilian federal environment agency), or halted the lawlessness of the ranching, logging and other industries.

Given this situation, it is no surprise that Brazil's parks are parks in name only. These paper parks are being destroyed to make way for the short-term interests of corrupt officials and powerful industries.

### Crime against the Amazon National Park

Almost 30 years since its creation, the Amazon National Park's boundary has yet to be physically demarcated. In other words, there are no landmarks or signs to indicate that the area is a Federal Conservation Unit and cannot be exploited. Only two agents are in charge of supervising and protecting the whole park, an area the size of Jamaica.

On 16 April 2001, Ibama was notified that there was logging activity within the limits of the Amazon National Park. In May, a small team of Ibama inspectors went to the region and discovered an illegal clear-cut of 706 hectares of forest and further preparation of 3,000 hectares for clear-cutting within the park. According to the inspectors, the men working in the park confessed to be working for the Mayor of the local town of Itaituba, Sr. Wirland Freire, who had recently bought a farm near the park.

He was preparing the park to be burned in order to expand his cattle ranching operation.

Norberto Neves de Souza, the Ibama agent in charge of the operation, told Greenpeace that at least 70 chainsaws were operating within the park, because of 'the number of workers and the number of chainsaw belts and because of the speed of clear cutting.' During the inspection, Ibama confiscated 14 chains for chainsaws, two axes, 234 sharpening files, 89 scythes and four tents.

A team of Greenpeace activists accompanied a second Ibama inspection of the Amazon National Park and of the Mayor's farm later in May. During the inspection a chainsaw, two shotguns and various chainsaw belts were confiscated.

Mayor Freire has subsequently received two fines, totalling US\$20,000.



**Time for action, not paper parks**

The Amazon National Park is no more than a paper park because the government mechanisms and political will for its protection are inadequate. Similar situations exist across the Brazilian Amazon. In the State of Amazonas, for instance, 84 percent of protected areas exist only on maps and in filing cabinets.

The Itatiaia National Park in the Southeast of Brazil was in 1937 the first national park, and today there are 42 national parks spread across the five regions of the country. Most recently, on August 7, 2001, the federal government created a new park, the National Park of Serra da Cotia, in Rondonia State, spanning some 283,600 hectares.

Greenpeace lauds this announcement but calls on the international community and the Brazilian government to ensure that protection of parks in the Amazon goes beyond mere declarations, by providing technical and financial support to transform these "Paper Parks" into effectively protected areas.

Only when these conditions are met will the Brazilian government be able to eliminate the widespread destruction of the Amazon rainforest by corrupt officials such as Mayor Freire.



## Brazilian Units of Conservation

### 1. Conservation Units of Indirect Use (without sustainable management activities)

**National Parks:** Conservation units that are destined for integral preservation of natural areas with characteristics of great relevance on the ecological, scenic, scientific, cultural educational and recreational aspects, prohibiting environmental modifications and direct human interference. Measures for the recovery of altered systems and necessary management activities to recover and preserve the natural equilibrium, biological diversity and the natural processes are excepted. Public visits for recreational and educational purposes are supported by the Management Plan for the Unit, in accordance with the regulations set forth by Ibama.

**Biological Reserves:** Created in accordance with laws No. 4.771 (15 September 1965) and No. 5,197 (3 January 1967), they are units of conservation destined for the integral preservation of the biota and other existing natural attributes within its limits, without direct human interference or environmental alterations, except measures for the recovery of its altered ecosystems and necessary management activities to recover or preserve the natural equilibrium, biological diversity and natural ecological processes. Biological reserves are not destined for recreational visits, but educational visits are permitted according to the determinations of the management plan.

**Ecological Stations:** Created by law No. 6.902 (27 April 1980), these are conservation units that are destined for the integral preservation of the biota and other natural attributes that exist within their limits and for scientific research. Recreational visits are not permitted, however educational visits are permitted according to specific regulations.

**Ecological Reserves:** Decree No. 89336 (31 January 1984) defines ecological reserves. They can be either public or private, according to their ownership status, to be determined by CONAMA. This organisation is also in charge of establishing the norms and criteria for the rational use of the environmental resources within these reserves. Recreational visits are not permitted, however educational visits are permitted.

### 2. Conservation Units of Direct Use (that allow sustainable management)

These are areas in which exploration and direct economic exploitation is permitted, in a planned and regulated manner, in other words, caring for sustainable development categories: National Forests, Extractive Reserves and Areas of Environmental Protection.

**Environmental Protection Areas:** Created by Law no. 6.902 (27 April 1981), and regulated by Decree No. 99.274 (6 June 1990). Constituted by public or private areas, they have the objective of disciplining the occupational process of lands and promoting the protection of biotic and abiotic resources within their limits, to assure the well being of the human populations who live within them, protecting or increasing the local ecological conditions and maintaining landscapes and relevant cultural attributes.

**National Forests:** Created according to Law No. 4.771 (15 September 1965). They are areas of public domain with native or planted vegetation, established with the objective of promoting natural resource management, with an emphasis on the production of timber and other vegetable products, guarantee the protection of water resources, scenic beauty and historic and archaeological sites, as well as promoting the development of basic scientific research and application of environmental education and recreational activities, leisure and tourism.

**Extractive Reserves:** Created by Law No. 7,804 (18 July 1989). Decree No 98.897 (30 January 1990) treats Extractive Reserves as territorial spaces considered of ecological and social interest, located in areas that possess natural or exemplary characteristics of biota that allow for their self-sustainable exploration, without prejudice of environmental conservation.

**Biosphere Reserves:** Areas prescribed by the Humanity and Biosphere Programme, launched in 1972, during the 16<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference of UNESCO. These should include:

- Samples of natural biomass;
- Unique communities of natural areas of exceptional interest;
- Examples of harmonious use of the Earth; and
- Examples of modified or degraded ecosystems where restoration of natural conditions is possible.

A Biosphere Reserve can include conservation units of integral protection or sustainable management and areas unaltered by man for agriculture, cattle farming, etc.