



ECUADOR

Change for good in Ecuador?

by Fiona Pérez, Manager, Rainforest Concern Ecuador

A referendum on 28th September 2008 in Ecuador resulted in the approval of the new constitution - Ecuador's 20th. Essentially, it allows the President to run for two consecutive terms as well as to dissolve the congress and to have greater control over the central bank.

It is hard to interpret the result, it seems that there is a collective feeling that the country needs a real change. The 444 articles that the constitution is comprised of are open to interpretation at this stage and there is a lot of uncertainty as to how these will be endorsed. Many say it is now up to the people to pressure the Government to make the changes, otherwise things will continue as before. A lot will come down to the political will of the President.

The constitution has an article that grants nature rights and people will be allowed to defend those rights in court. This is not a completely new concept but the first time it has been included in a constitution. The main areas of concern for our conservation work are: the expropriation of land which is unproductive farmland or without a social function. Despite mentioning the importance of protected areas, the President can decide whether to exploit these areas should it be decided that it is of national interest.



Santa Lucia nursery children

As you will see from Carlos Zorrilla's article, many positive steps have been taken to keep the mining threat out of Intag since the last newsletter, thanks to a tremendous amount of support from many organisations and individuals. However, the new mining law planned for late October could have terrible consequences for Ecuador's biodiversity.



Cloud forests: the highest number of endemic and threatened species on earth

Other threats, include Government plans to provide Hydroelectric power, in areas with fragile ecosystems, as well as the pressure to produce bio-fuels. In addition to this we continue to look for ways to deal with destructive road building practices in the forested areas of Intag, without alienating local communities and compromising their needs for a transport system. However, overall there is still good news to report since the last newsletter and our work does continue to make a real difference in Ecuador and despite needing your help more than ever, we are pleased to announce some noteworthy achievements. These include the purchase of more forest areas for the Neblina Reserve in Intag, thanks to sponsor-an-acre supporters, Good Gifts and Rainforest Rescue. The reserve, 1000 hectares (2471 acres), provides a substantial area of forest in the middle of the corridor.

In 2008 Rainforest Concern applied for Protected Forest Status from the Ministry of Environment for the area, formed an additional group of forest wardens from the surrounding area to protect it, and carried out training for all forest wardens. We need to raise more funds to continue community outreach in the surrounding areas, as well as increase our capacity to train and support forest wardens, both crucial areas of work which will help ensure the wellbeing of these forests.

In Paso Alto, with ALLPA and AACRI (local coffee grower's association) a major step has been the acceptance by one community to enter into the management plan process for the Protected Forest project (5000 hectares/

12,355 acres). This outcome is due, in no small part, to the positive results of a pilot agroforestry project started there with the help of Rufford Maurice Laing and individual supporters.

You will also read about the positive impact of the recent Earthwatch groups and their research at Sta Lucia, highlighting the existence of endangered species that need protection; as well as their certification by Rainforest Alliance as an ecotourism destination.

Rainforest Concern has supported the first year of a six year reforestation CO2 project at the Jatun Sacha Bilsa Reserve, as well as buying a piece of land for the Napo Andean Forest Foundation in the buffer zone of the Gran Sumaco Reserve. There are many more challenges ahead, and we hope you can continue to support our efforts in a country, which has truly incredible biodiversity.

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On the 12th November 2008 Ecuador's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum officially extinguished Copper Mesa Corporation's (previously named Ascendant Copper) Golden 1 mining concession in Intag, Ecuador. The Golden 1 concession formed a key part of the company's JUNIN mining project, and constituted the company's most valuable asset. The government measure means that the Golden 1 concession will revert back to the Ministry of Energy and Petroleum, and that it is all over for Copper Mesa in Intag.