



ECUADOR

population: **13.8 million**
capital: **Quito**

total land area: **27,684,000 ha**
primary forest 2005: **4,794,000 ha**

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Refusing to be 'undermined' in Intag

by **Carlos Zorrilla, Project Director, DECOIN (Defensa y Conservación Ecológica de Intag)**

DECOIN was founded in 1995 as a grass roots environmental organisation to conserve the unique biodiversity in the Intag region of northwest Ecuador. Alongside Rainforest Concern, DECOIN have created 34 community owned and administered forest and watershed reserves, benefiting thousands of people, primarily by providing them with a clean source of drinking water.



Carlos Zorrilla at a participating watershed reserve

In addition to the forest watershed reserves, DECOIN has helped communities set up larger reserves that are currently conserving over 5,000 hectares of native forest in the Intag area. The most successful conservation project in Intag however continues to be the DECOIN/Rainforest Concern Watershed Reserve, which is so far protecting over 800 hectares of some of the world's most biodiverse and threatened forests, part of the Tropical Andes Biological Hotspot. This is home to dozens of threatened species, from jaguars and spectacled bears, to plate billed mountain toucans, various endangered frog species, and one of the world's most threatened bird species, the Black Breasted Puff Leg Hummingbird, which was only recently spotted in the Intag region. This latest discovery underscores the need to protect as much of this rapidly vanishing habitat as possible.

The desire for clean water, together with the fact that the reserves belong to the communities, have guaranteed they remain protected. If there's an action that threatens the area, and thus the water quality, it is not long before everybody knows about it! Social pressure in these cases works much better than environmental laws.

Due to grass roots interest in clean water in the Intag region, the Cotacachi Municipality has allocated more funds than ever this year towards the protection of watersheds. This is an important sign that the objective of changing local people's attitude towards their environment is working. However, the area is still seriously under threat

from a large scale copper mining scheme. Ascendant Copper Corporation's Junin mining project directly threatens nine forest-watershed reserves, as well as the Junin Community reserve which sits on the copper deposit. In total, the mining company's 22,500 hectares in mining concessions includes nine of the 30 community forest reserves we have helped to create.

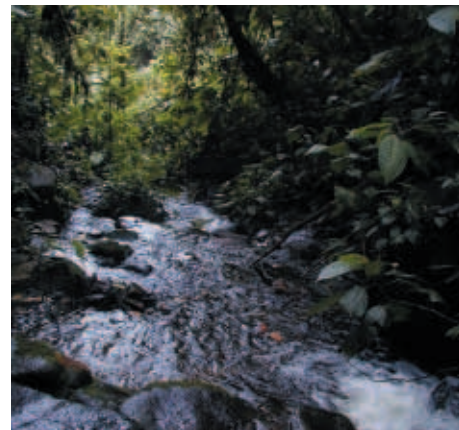
It takes 110 tonnes of water to produce one tonne of pure copper. To make that same tonne of copper, about 700 tonnes of ore, made up of rocks and subsoil, as well as top soil and the forests and wildlife holding on to it, has to be processed.

The waste then ends up in landfill, contaminating everything it comes into contact with. Water discharged from open pit mines is also acidic. This acid water destroys aquatic life and leaves streams toxic for thousands of years.

An upsurge in the demand for minerals in the last four years has greatly increased the threat that mining represents to the world. Modern mining has offered no solution to the environmental destruction that accompanies it. This is especially the case in developing countries, where corruption is rife, and environmental and mining legislation has been gutted by international financial institutions like the World Bank.

Resistance to a copper-molybdenum mine in Intag is well known to Rainforest Concern readers. It all started in 1995 when communities got together to oppose a Japanese funded "development" project. Their resistance focused on providing sustainable alternatives to the mine, including the creation of community forest reserves.

Communities have actively opposed the mine since Ascendant Copper showed up in Intag in 2004. Resistance has prevented Ascendant accessing their mines, leaving their scheme at a



complete standstill. The company has subsequently responded violently.

Early one October morning last year, 19 armed police showed up at my home. The warrants for my arrest and to search my house were based on made up accusations by a person no longer in the country. My lawyer was able to revoke the arrest warrant, but today I'm facing more charges stemming from these false allegations.

Then, at the end of 2006, the mining company, through a subcontractor, sent in 100 heavily armed men to access their mining concessions. Community members not only stopped the incursion, they also managed to arrest half of the men! It transpired that they were ex-military personnel, though the mining company later claimed the men were "agricultural consultants".

These aggressive tactics highlight what's happening all over the world due to the upsurge in demand for metal. Yet local resistance also shows how work by Rainforest Concern and DECOIN has been instrumental in empowering communities to take on the mining corporations. We have for a long time believed that conservation that's not in the hands of the people will be unsustainable. Today the people of Intag have confirmed that belief.



Ascendant Copper Corporation's aggressive tactics