



SURINAME

population: **0.5 million**
capital: **Paramaribo**

total land area: **15,600,000 ha**
primary forest 2005: **14,214,000 ha**

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Severe flooding in 2006

Protecting and Managing Wayana Tribal Traditional Lands of the Surinamese Interior

By Mark J. Plotkin, ACT President and Gwen Emanuels-Smith, ACT-Suriname Program Director

In 2005, with support from Rainforest Concern, the Amazon Conservation Team (ACT) completed a series of ethnographic land use maps for the six million acres of traditional lands of the Wayana indigenous people of remote southernmost Suriname in full collaboration with both the tribe itself and the cartographic arm of the Surinamese government. With this achievement, ACT and its tribal partners have created land use maps for the entirety of the indigenous lands of southern Suriname and adjacent Brazil, covering over 32 million acres of rainforest. The Wayana maps thoroughly illustrate tribal settlement patterns, hunting and fishing grounds, and areas of biocultural risk.



Traditional fishing

With renewed assistance from Rainforest Concern, and using the maps as a basis, efforts are currently underway to develop a community-based land management and conservation plan for the preservation of these precious resources,

which constitute some of the most intact lowland tropical forests on the planet. The critical components of this plan are to identify and evaluate the threats to the forestland, develop monitoring plans and build capacity for forest protection (park guards), and establish direct communication channels with the local government. For the Wayana tribe, which numbers approximately 600 in Suriname, it has also become necessary to identify means to accommodate competing interests, particularly as the depletion of industrial resources such as gold, bauxite, timber and sand in the coastal areas has forced the mineral extraction industry to look southward. Small-scale gold mining activities and unconstrained timber harvesting also pose a risk to the integrity of the Wayana lands.

In late 2006, as a baseline for the development of the management plan, an exhaustive ethnological study of the Wayana was completed, providing an ecological, demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural baseline perspective on the Wayana communities living in and around Apetina, Palumeu, and Kawemhakan. To collect data for the survey, men and women from the Wayana community were trained to interview their community members in social aspects of their community including natural resource distribution, settlements, income generation, and markets. The study identified vulnerabilities, threats, and problems; constraints to sustainable community development; and capacities, resources, and opportunities to overcome these constraints in the target communities.

The Wayana were also instrumental in the officially recognized formation of the pan-indigenous association of southern Suriname,

TALAWA, which allows the tribes to present a unified front in land management negotiations with other stakeholders, and increases their perceived validity as first-tier stakeholders in these discussions. ACT provides ongoing capacity building sessions to TALAWA representatives. Also, with ACT as facilitator, monthly meetings are now conducted between southern Suriname tribal representatives and government agencies. A specific recent concern has been severe food shortages in the Wayana communities occasioned by disastrous flooding in the Surinamese interior in May 2006. ACT has provided training and knowledge-transfer in a variety of crop protection methods, emphasizing biological over chemical techniques.

Looking ahead in 2007, with Rainforest Concern's support, ACT will be working with the tribe to identify areas requiring immediate protection, to develop an all-round vigilance system for protection of Wayana traditional lands, and to train Wayana representatives in protection and monitoring techniques. As well, ACT will continue to convene meetings assembling regional stakeholders in order to facilitate participation of the Wayana in regional conservation and land use strategies with the Surinamese government and conservation NGOs.



ACT biologist with Wayana researchers

The Amazon Conservation Team was founded in 1996 to work in close partnership with indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin to conserve biodiversity, improve health care, and help perpetuate traditional knowledge across generations. Since that time, ACT has partnered with over 25 indigenous groups and has helped protect and manage over 40 million acres of lowland tropical forest in Suriname, Brazil, and Colombia. ACT staff, most notably Dr. Mark Plotkin, have been working with the Amerindians of southern Suriname for over 25 years. ACT-Suriname is a foundation incorporated in Suriname with its central office in Paramaribo.