



WWF
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LIVING AMAZON INITIATIVE

For a living Amazon

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The Amazon rainforest at dawn as
seen from the Andes

© KJELD NIELSEN

SEEING THE FOREST BEYOND THE TREES: An integrated vision of the Amazon

The conception of an ecological vision was the first step towards a ground breaking methodology which today is contributing to promote a greener development model in the Amazon biome

With an extension equivalent to twice the surface of India, the Amazon harbors the largest rainforest and river system on Earth. ([read more...](#))

ALSO IN THIS EDITION...

River dolphins: conservation ambassadors
of the Amazon



New publications & resources



(cont.) SEEING THE FOREST BEYOND THE TREES

services, locally, regionally and globally. Given its vast extension, and in order to ensure the sustainability of its biodiversity and the array of benefits it generates for the planet, the Amazon's conservation and development can no longer be addressed through a local or national lens, but instead, an integrated biome vision must be advanced.

Four years ago, a team conformed by experienced WWF scientists identified this need. "The challenge seemed both huge and pretty obvious, but still wasn't being efficiently tackled by most of our conservation efforts. Us, conservationists, had proven to be pretty effective in fostering successful local conservation endeavors, but the scale of the threats showed us the new way to go. We could no longer work on site based projects alone, but instead, had to take a broader look at the Amazon region, and this is how the Ecological vision concept arose", states Juan Carlos Riveros, Head of WWF's Living Amazon Initiative Science component.

It is home to one in every ten terrestrial species in the planet and it provides invaluable environmental

A biome approach

As a science based organization, WWF worked for years on identifying the main threats and opportunities for the biome. Given that the threats jeopardizing the Amazon know no political boundaries, an efficient long term conservation / development strategy had to take into consideration biome scale natural dynamics, human related activities, among others. "This led to the identification of conservation priority areas, and later on, to the development of a river basin data base, which brought together hydrological and ecological statistics and figures to characterize the river basins throughout the Amazon region", adds Riveros.

Based on Geographic Information System tools, further information was gathered and produced - with the kind collaboration of such organizations as The Nature Conservancy-, including data on vegetation types, natural protected areas, etc., until a decision support system was conceived: the Hydrological Information System - Amazon River Assessment methodology or HIS / ARA.

A step forward: using science to promote a greener development model

"There are no silver bullets in conservation, especially in an

area as rich and complex as the Amazon, but this new tool provides better opportunities than ever before to dialogue and support better informed decisions based on objective scientific facts", says Pedro Bara Neto, Head of the Free Flowing Rivers & Forest Friendly Roads strategy of WWF's Living Amazon Initiative.

The Amazon River basin comprise a network of over 100 000 Km of rivers and streams which connects the Amazon ecosystems with one another representing the vascular system of this unique region. If the river flows are cut, life in the Amazon is interrupted and the system as a whole is imperiled.

In this regard and with the aid of the HIS / ARA, WWF's Living Amazon Initiative is working side by side with the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment in providing the necessary input to orient the best possible decisions regarding hydropower projects. The first steps are being taken to foster a close collaboration relation with the government by which scientific tools such as HIS / ARA may provide guidance on how may infrastructure and other projects be best developed. The aim is to foster a fluent dialogue between such stakeholders as the Private sector, Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Mines and Energy, among others, to support better negotiations as to ensure a

sustainable development for the Amazon.

"We just took the opportunity, but this was possible because a solid scientific foundation existed, thus it was easy to obtain positive results", says Bara Neto. "Hydropower is just the first application we've seen so far for such a methodology, but this is just an initial step which should evolve to assist in decision making process regarding natural protected areas, agro commodities, etc.", he finalizes.

Although still a work in process, the HIS / ARA is already a concrete example on the urgent need and opportunity to promote an integrated vision of the Amazon, and on how science can assist in making the best possible decisions towards a greener development model for the Amazon.

SNEAK PREVIEW

Get a glimpse of the groundbreaking scientific methodology WWF is using to promote a greener development model in the Amazon. Watch the animated video here >>>



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YEARS AGO
WWF'S SCIENCE
TEAM BEGAN
ADVANCING AN
ECOLOGICAL VISION
FOR THE AMAZON

RIVER DOLPHINS: Conservation ambassadors of the Amazon

Dolphins are not only some of the most gracious and charismatic animals on Earth, but are rapidly becoming effective conservation messengers.

The Amazon is home to three species of dolphins: the pink river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*), the Bolivian river dolphin (*Inia boliviensis*) and the grey river dolphin (*Sotalia fluviatilis*). All of which have been facing increasing threats during recent years. From direct attacks by fishermen who erroneously see them as competitors, to the imminent realization of large hydropower and other infrastructure projects, the healthy populations of South American river dolphins are threatened by an uncertain future.

This is why, with support of the WWF's Living Amazon Initiative, a conservation coalition has embraced the challenge to ensure the wellbeing of South American river dolphins and the ecosystems they inhabit.

“South America is the last stronghold of river dolphins in the world. In places like Asia river dolphins face serious risks of extinction, and some of them are

already considered to be extinct. We must take that as a direct and clear reference to what could happen here if we don't tackle this issue in time”, says Saulo Usma, from WWF Colombia. Him, along with partners from the WWF Network, Wildlife Conservation Society, Fundacion Omacha and other organizations in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela have joined efforts with national authorities to promote a regional conservation approach towards saving these species, but most importantly to ensure the conservation of key aquatic habitats throughout the Orinoco and Amazon basins.

A regional conservation vision

The river dolphins have become the focus of a creative and integrated conservation approach. Not only a precise and groundbreaking censusing methodology has been designed and standardized to assess their populations and actual numbers, but based on these figures, their related habitat needs and identified threats, further conservation progress has been made.

Between 2007 and 2010 over 5000 km of rivers were covered by the scientific team in charge of censusing these species. This not only led to the most accurate dolphin population estimation to date, but also to building a regional network of dedicated specialists grouped under

3
SPECIES
OF RIVER DOLPHIN
INHABIT THE
AMAZON: PINK,
BOLIVIAN, AND GREY
RIVER DOLPHINS



Grey river dolphin
(*Sotalia fluviatilis*)

South America, home to 40 000 river dolphins

During 4 years a total of 11 censuses were carried out along 5000 Km of Amazon tributaries, involving 30 specialists. A total of 4123 river dolphins were registered, including: 1492 *Inia geoffrensis*, 1323 *Inia boliviensis* and 1308 *Sotalia fluviatilis*, which according to the scientific estimations led to calculate an amazing 40 000 dolphins within South America, most of which inhabit the Amazon wetlands and rivers.

These efforts have covered important and iconic protected areas in the Amazon such as La Paya National Park (Colombia), Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve (Ecuador) and the Gueppi Reserved Zone (Perú).



the South American River Dolphin Protected Area Network.

On this ground, conservation planning tools have been developed, from sustainable fishing plans for Peruvian and Colombian lakes with high dolphin population densities, to a Regional Action Plan for South American River Dolphins with input from specialists and national governments' representatives, which has already been presented in several international fora such as The World Meeting for the Conservation of Aquatic Mammals (Quebec, Canada), the IX Wildlife International for the Amazon and Latin America (Santa Cruz, Bolivia) and the XIV Work Meeting of Specialists on South American Aquatic Mammals (Florianopolis, Brasil).

A new Ramsar site promoted by dolphins

Besides the species themselves, these efforts have led to identifying broader threats to conservation (such as mining, oil exploitation, over fishing, illicit crops, etc.), as well as key ecosystems which need to be protected. In this regard and under the framework of the Living Amazon Initiative, several efforts have been fostered to improve resource management practices

in such protected areas as the Amacayacú Natural National Park in Colombia and the Gueppi Reserved Zone in Peru.

More importantly, thanks to the support of WWF Switzerland and WWF International, these efforts are contributing to the designation process of the Estrella Fluvial Inírida wetland (Río Negro headwaters, Colombia) as a new Ramsar Site, based on its importance as a river dolphin habitat, but overall as a key aquatic ecosystem within the Amazon – Orinoco transition area.

SEE THE RESEARCH TEAM IN ACTION

The region along the Putumayo River in the west Amazon harbors some of the most unique ecosystems. In this area, within the trinational border between Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, a team of scientists went on an expedition to count river dolphins.

[Whatch the video here >>>](#)

5000
KM OF SOUTH
AMERICAN RIVERS
WERE COVERED
BY THE SCIENTIFIC
TEAM

Other stories from the region



From Purus to the whole Amazon: mahogany's comeback

Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) is almost extinct in most of the Amazon. However, the same indigenous inhabitants who once helped control the illegal logging of the species in Peru are now the ones who are starting to export the result of years of conservation and management: wild mahogany seeds. **(read more)**



Vital link in the Peruvian Amazon: Healthy people - Healthy ecosystems

“For conservation of nature to succeed it is necessary to guarantee the welfare of people”, says Aldo Soto, biologist of WWF, who has been working in the Abanico del Pastaza Wetlands Complex (Peruvian Northern Amazon), for several years. **(read more)**



Protecting the Amazon

“Many people have a very strong connection to specific mammals or birds or communities”, JC Riveros, WWF's senior scientist for the Amazon. “My own career began with tracking parrots ante the other species as a landscape ecologist, using scientific tools to identify key areas for biodiversity conservation”. **(read more)**

Recent publications & products

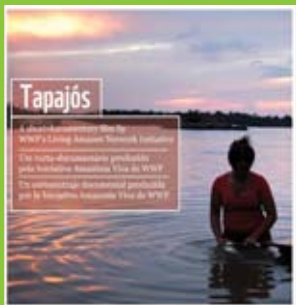
REPORT: The road to development: building a policy case from the grassroots



The Amazon piedmont is a global conservation priority, lying within both the Amazon biome and the Northern Andes. WWF has been working here since 1995 to support and implement a conservation vision.

When advances were made towards the creation of a new, much needed road in the province of Putumayo, in southern Colombia, WWF and local partners were concerned about the potential impacts on the area's important forest ecosystems and communities. **(read more)**

VIDEO: Tapajós: a short documentary film by WWF's Living Amazon Initiative



Shot entirely in Vila Sao Luiz, Vila Pimental and the Amazonia National Park, in Brazil, this film showcases the beauties of the land, people and wildlife near Itaituba on the Tapajós River.

This region is under the threat of a large hydroelectric dam project, Sao Luiz, and is one of the areas prioritized by the Living Amazon Initiative's Free Flowing Rivers strategy. **(watch video)**

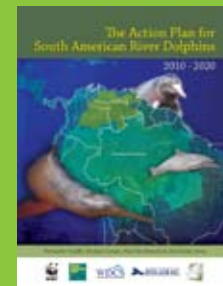
VIDEO: Hydrological Information System for Amazon River Assessment HIS-ARA



HIS-ARA is the result of years of work by the WWF science team in assessing an integrated vision for the Amazon, which states that the future of the region depends on free-flowing rivers to connect priority conservation areas to the Amazon river.

Now everyone can easily learn about this groundbreaking methodology. **(watch video)**

PLAN: The Action Plan for South American River Dolphins



This Action Plan represents a consensus of a river dolphin group of specialists all around South America. It concerns about the status of the currently recognized river dolphin species (*Inia geoffrensis*, *Inia boliviensis* and *Sotalia fluviatilis*), threats to their survival, and measures needed to better understand and address those threats. **(read more)**



Want to learn more?
Visit our website

About the Living Amazon Initiative

Built upon over 40 years of experience in the region, WWF's Living Amazon Initiative shares a vision for an ecologically healthy Amazon Biome that maintains its environmental and cultural contribution to local peoples, the countries of the region, and the world, within a framework of social equity, inclusive economic development and global responsibility. ([read more](#))

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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