



PARAGUAY: Zero Deforestation Law contributes significantly to the conservation of the Upper Parana Atlantic Forest

On November 4, 2004, the Paraguayan National Congress passed a law prohibiting the conversion of forested areas in the country's Eastern Region.

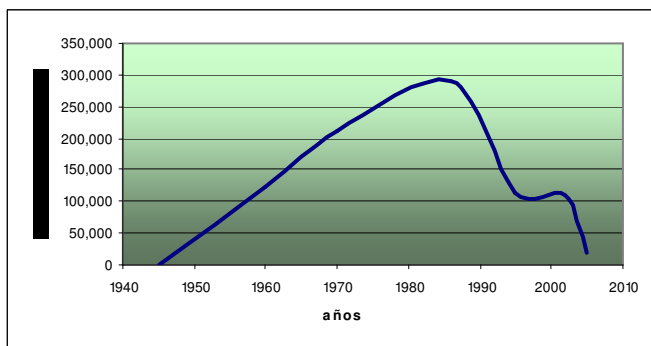
Law No. 2524/4, known also as the "Zero Deforestation Law", was promulgated with the aim of promoting the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of the Upper Parana Atlantic Forest. This will help ensure that the forest can fulfill its environmental, social and economic functions, thereby contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of its inhabitants.

The passing of the law is the result of the joint efforts of the Ecology Commission of Paraguay's House of Representatives, environmental attorneys, and, above all, Paraguay's Environment Secretariat (SEAM), civil society, WWF, and other environmental organizations.

Implementation of the law has reduced the deforestation rate in Paraguay's Eastern Region by 85 per cent. Until 2004, Paraguay had the highest rate of deforestation in the Americas and the second highest in the world. But with deforestation greatly reduced, there is now hope that the threatened Upper Parana Atlantic Forest can be saved. The Zero Deforestation Law brought lawsuits and convictions against landowners for "environmental crimes" relating to punishable acts of deforestation.

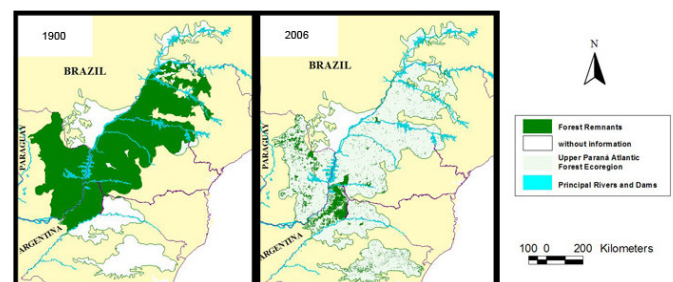


During the last 50 years the Atlantic Forest in Paraguay has been reduced to barely 12 per cent of its original area. Today, its remnant forests are highly fragmented and degraded. Of the 8,600,000 hectares that comprised the Upper Parana Atlantic Forest, little more than 1,000,000 hectares remain.



Deforestation Rates in the Eastern Region of Paraguay

Source: MAG, cited by IICA; SFN, 1995; cited by FAO, 2000; CIF, 1994; cited by FAO, 2000; GLCF, 2002; FAO, 2003; GP- WWF.



The successful work carried out by the Republic of Paraguay in the decree and implementation of the Zero Deforestation Law has received the recognition of WWF, the global conservation organization, which on 30 August 2006 presented various government representatives with the "Leaders for a Living Planet" award. The award is given out to institutions, organizations, governments and individuals who display outstanding environmental leadership, contribute greatly to biodiversity conservation, and promote sustainable development.



Attorneys of the Environment Secretariat (SEAM) confiscate logs extracted illegally. Source: SEAM, Paraguay.

THE UPPER PARANA ATLANTIC FOREST

The Upper Parana Atlantic Forest is part of the Atlantic Forest Ecoregion located in South America. It includes northeastern Argentina, southern Brazil, and almost the entire eastern region of Paraguay.

In spite of the onslaught it has been subjected to, the Upper Parana Atlantic Forest possesses some of the largest remnants of the Atlantic Forest Ecoregion, and is considered to be one of the most biologically diverse areas in the world.

Among the animals that inhabit these forests, the most outstanding are the large predators such as harpy eagles and felines – jaguars, cougars and ocelots. There are also other mammal species such as tapirs, deer, coatís, peccaries and monkeys, as well as over 500 species of birds. In addition, a great diversity of reptiles and amphibians can be found, including alligators, tortoises, snakes, lizards, toads, and frogs.



The jaguar, one of the most charismatic mammal species that live in South America. © WWF Canon/ Anthony B. Rath.

Some of the most outstanding flora that exist in the region include the *palmito* (palm tree) and the *cedro* (cedar tree).

Many of the fauna and flora species in the Upper Parana Atlantic Forest are in grave danger of extinction.

BENEFITS OF CONSERVING THE UPPER PARANA ATLANTIC FOREST

Besides being a refuge for unique and threatened species, what remains of the Atlantic Forest also directly affect the people's quality of life. Forests are vital for the protection of the sources of rivers, contributing to the conservation of the freshwater supplies that are essential for our survival. One of the greatest subterranean reservoirs of water in the world, the Guaraní aquifer, depends on the conservation of the Atlantic forest remnants. In addition, the forest prevents soil erosion, excessive sedimentation of rivers, and provides other services which are necessary for life in cities as well as in rural areas.



Ache girl. © WWF-Paraguay / Fernando Allen.

The Upper Parana Atlantic Forest is the traditional territory of 184 indigenous communities of the Paí Tavyterá, Ache, Mbyá, and Avá Guaraní ethnic groups, all belonging to the Guaraní Ache linguistic family. Many of these communities were expelled from their territories, which were later used for agriculture, or they were crowded into small urban spaces. These communities continue to dedicate themselves to hunting and gathering, to the extent to which this is still possible in the remaining forests.

The influence of the indigenous community can be perceived in the daily use of the Guaraní language by the entire Paraguayan society. Guaraní is one of Paraguay's two official languages.

THE "LEADERS FOR A LIVING PLANET" AWARD

The certificate "Leaders for a Living Planet" is a recognition awarded by WWF to individuals, organizations and governments that display outstanding environmental leadership, make exceptional efforts that inspire others, and perform a significant role in the achievement of conservation objectives.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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