PERUVIAN AMAZON

Logging threat looms over rich wilderness

In Peru's Amazon, rare species and uncontacted tribes are at risk from quickly advancing logging.

BY DAVE SHERWOOD

Special to The Miami Herald

DULCE GLORIA, Peru Armed with arrows, Carmelino Vasquez scurried down the jungle path, swinging his machete with the cadence of a grandfather clock. After almost an hour on foot, he swept his bow skyward to signal the end of the hunt.

"Caoba," he declared, struggling to mouth the Spanish word for mahogany, a rare species of tropical hardwood coveted for its reddish brown color the leading front in the sanctity of one of the last, and elegant grain.

States. have become servancy. closely guarded secrets nous tribes.



HARVESTING: Right, an Asheninka tribe member gathers mahogany to dye the traditional robes worn by their tribe members, shown above. Peruvian tribes are at risk from logging.

Here in the vast wilder- control of the resource- Earth. And scientists fear ness surrounding Peru's rich Peruvian Amazon. But for the region's vast for-Alto Purús National Park, the threat goes far beyond ests, which act as an enorthe locations of such trees, any single species, said mous sponge, soaking in worth tens of thousands of Chris Fagan, director of the pollutants responsible the U.S. consumer for drivdollars in the United the Upper Amazon Con- for climate change.

among members of indige- quickly advancing logging Fagan said. "The world has Industrial logging is uncontacted people into ing here." pushing ever deeper into violent conflict with setthe area, making mahogany tlers, while threatening the Peru for failing to take erning the forest industry,

ever-growing battle for most bio-diverse places on

Deforestation and the mahogany anymore," frontier have forced still- a stake in what is happen-

strong action to protect its the country's independent Mañaningo says an unconforests, while also blaming ing nearly 80 percent of found many problems. "This isn't just about the demand for Peruvian mahogany.

pact with the U.S. obli-Watchdog groups fault laws and institutions gov-

Ombudsman's Office and

illegal wood cutting focus tin pots. Another uncon-Though a 2009 trade on the loggers - who are tacted man, he said, often poor, indigenous emerged from the forest gated Peru to beef up the men paid very little for five years ago and now grueling labor — instead of lives on handouts in the the multinational corpora- downriver community of tions driving the trade. Puerto Breu. And an Environmental Investigation Agency frontations between logreport found that tracking gers and uncontacted peoan individual mahogany ples are becoming more tree from the Amazon for- and more frequent, he est to the docks in Lima says. remained difficult, if not impossible.

> "This is what happens when global, no-questions- resources are in high asked demand meets a demand. Gold miners, gas place with invaluable and oil interests and resources and weak, cor- hydropower developers all rupt or even absent institu- vie for some of the tions," said Julia Urrunaga, resources, while scientists who coordinated the EIA fight to defend the Amazon study.

Córdova, who recently met

tion takes time. agement in native commu- tapped immediately.

nities in Peru just can't be years, a process that was position clear. started by the signing of

our end." EDGE OF UNKNOWN

running out.

the trail for miners, farmers, hunters, coca growers U.S. Secretary of the Inteand road builders, who rior, has spent decades have pushed the frontier traveling the region and further and further into the sees the situation differwilderness home of uncon- ently. tacted peoples.

bors healthy stands of Earth," he said. mahogany.

through the cracked wood panels of a lonely guard the Yurúa River.

families, in a region so mahogany," he said. remote that locals travel tacted people.

Because these people ties. lack immunity to outsidticularly vulnerable to

tacted man, pressured by nongovernmental groups encroaching settlements, sneaked into town at night Stiff new penalties for and stole yucca plants and

Reports of violent con-

The region's natural for its natural ability to Former Agriculture absorb greenhouse gases Minister Adolfo De that cause climate change.

The conflict pits opposwith U.S. officials to dis- ing ideologies - those cuss Peru's obligations, who call for sustainable said improving the situa- use of the Amazon's resources — against those "Improving forest man- who believe they must be

In an editorial in the done in eighteen months," nation's leading newspasaid de Córdova. "It's a per, El Comercio, Presiprocess that will take dent Alan Garcia made his

"There are millions of the agreement and that we hectares of timber lying are pushing forward on idle, hundreds of mineral deposits that are not being worked," he wrote in 2007, adding that the region's Many believe time is rivers represent "a fortune that reaches the sea with-Mahogany loggers blaze out producing electricity."

Bruce Babbit, former

"The enduring values of Loggers need not flaunt the Amazon are its indigethe law, says Gerson nous peoples and the for-Mañaningo, a local Yurúa- ests and rivers that sustain region indigenous leader both these cultures and the whose territory still har- richest biodiversity on

The trade agreement is "The government is helping steer Peru in the simply not present here," right direction, but Amerihe declared, peering cans have a responsibility as well, Babbit said.

"The trade agreement is post on a bluff overlooking a good start, but American consumers and business Mañaningo's village, can also help by avoiding Dulce Gloria, is home to 50 wood products made from

Recent over-flights by only by dugout canoe and groups like Fagan's Upper carry shotguns to ward off Amazon Conservancy conjaguar attacks. The town firm logging activity conborders the Murunahua tinues unabated inside the Territorial Reserve, wil- reserve for uncontacted derness believed to harbor peoples - affecting both as many as 600 uncon- tribes living in the forest and in settled communi-

"Illegal logging will coner's diseases, they are par- tinue," Fagan said, "until the U.S. people and govquestionable Peruvian



CHOP: An Asheninka man looks up at the stately trunk of a mahogany tree - a coveted resource of the Amazon.







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