MAINTAINING THE AMAZON’S FORESTS FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

Madre de Dios, Peru
MADRE DE DIOS, PERU

Nestled in the Amazon Basin bordering Bolivia and Brazil, the region of Madre de Dios in southeastern Peru is considered one of the most biodiverse landscapes anywhere in the world.

This 8.5 million-hectare\(^1\) expanse of low-lying rainforest supports countless species of flora and fauna, including healthy populations of jaguar, tapir, and other large Amazonian mammals, as well as many Indigenous and local communities.

The province of Tahuamanu holds the largest extension of preserved forests within this region, forming a vital natural corridor. But the province, like all of Madre de Dios, faces significant threats from deforestation.

FORESTS UNDER PRESSURE

Peru is home to the second-largest expanse of forest in the Amazon\(^2\)—and the site of significant deforestation. More than 50 percent of the country’s annual greenhouse gas emissions come from deforestation and land use change.\(^3\)
The region of Madre de Dios has been hit especially hard. An expanding agricultural frontier, cattle ranching, infrastructure projects, human migration, poorly planned urban expansion, gold mining, and illegal logging all drive deforestation in Madre de Dios. The Inter-Oceanic Highway, which connects the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans through Peru and Brazil, has accelerated the region’s growth and deforestation. Social and political issues, such as unclear land tenure, limited involvement of stakeholders in decision-making, and lack of planning further contribute to forest loss. In Tahuamanu province alone, the rate of deforestation increased by 100 percent over just three years between 2013 and 2016. For this reason, Tahuamanu has been the locus of many efforts to reform land use policies and support sustainable livelihoods that protect existing forests. Most recently, WWF has placed its focus on agricultural and livestock production in Tahuamanu, engaging local farmers and ranchers in discovering new ways forward that benefit people and nature.

OUR RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN MADRE DE DIOS

Over nearly two decades, WWF has worked with local stakeholders in Madre de Dios to foster sustainable livelihoods and plans for development, capacity-building, engagement of Indigenous and local communities, improvements in governance, and forest monitoring and certification initiatives. These efforts have built a foundation of trust in the region.

In our most recent work in Tahuamanu, WWF collaboratively developed a pilot program that aimed to work with local ranchers to identify and implement best practices in livestock management that would improve productivity while increasing tree cover and reducing the expansion of the agricultural frontier.

This work has:

- **Demonstrated the viability of sustainable cattle ranching in Madre de Dios.** The 10 Tahuamanu ranchers who engaged in the pilot did not just strengthen their individual capacities for sustainable land use and help identify best practices for their livestock production. They went on to implement these best practices, share their positive outcomes with other stakeholders, and thus spark greater interest and commitment from political leaders, government agencies, and other ranchers in the region.

  By meeting and exceeding its initial goals, the pilot provided the necessary proof of concept to attract attention and funding from national and subnational authorities interested in replicating and scaling up the piloted process. As a result, an additional 200 ranchers in the region received support from the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Irrigation to implement the identified best practices, with 75 actively working on making these changes even during the coronavirus pandemic.

- **Built the framework for knowledge exchange and scaling up.** This work empowered the ranchers to share their experiences through multiple channels. The best practices and recommendations they helped identify were compiled into manuals that will make this knowledge accessible well beyond the province’s borders. Their lands became classrooms, first for themselves and then for other farmers and ranchers seeking better ways to work with and protect the land. And their voices found greater reach, as they gained seats at the technical roundtable that...
helps determine livestock-related policy for the region.

With this new representation and capacity came new partnerships as well. The ranchers were able to connect to local and regional governments, relevant government agencies, international resources and funding opportunities, and even to each other more strongly than ever before. This combination of strengthened capacities, opportunities for knowledge exchange, and access to technical resources, partnerships, and funding effectively sets the stage to scale up this work from the province level to the Madre de Dios regional level.

- Set principles and criteria to inform regional, national and international plans and commitments. Through the pilot ranchers’ engagement with the regional roundtable, the recommendations and best practices that emerged from this work came to inform regional policies for the development of sustainable cattle ranching. These, in turn, informed the province’s concerted development plan, which is key to obtaining public funding, as well as the regional strategy for rural low carbon development as part of the Governors’ Climate and Forest Task Force.

In this way, the achievements and lessons of this pilot will help guide how Madre de Dios takes up and supports the environmental agenda and regional, national, and international commitments related to the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the climate plans at the heart of the Paris Agreement.

The Regional Government of Madre de Dios (GOREMAD) selected WWF-Peru as a key partner for the design of its regional strategy for rural low carbon development. To complement this effort, WWF-Peru led the analysis of the decarbonization pathway for Madre de Dios. Together, these represent significant steps toward mapping a future that protects both livelihoods and landscapes in Tahuamanu and Madre de Dios.

Endnotes
1 World Wildlife Fund. Interview with Maria Eugenia Arroyo, Forest and Climate Coordinator for WWF-Peru, https://wwf.panda.org/?225690/Interview-with-Maria-Eugenia-Arroyo-
Forest-and-Clim
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