

## Rainforest Alert - Guyana

### INTRODUCTION

Rainforest Foundation (RFUS) supports Wapichan, Macushi, Patamona, Arekuna, and Akawaio communities to monitor and protect more than 18,500 square miles (over 4.8 million hectares)—an area roughly the size of the Dominican Republic. Guyana is under threat particularly from gold mining.

### REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Guiana Shield is located at the start of two atmospheric rivers that carry moisture across South America, playing an outsized role in stabilizing weather patterns that sustain forests in the Amazon Basin and the continent. A [2017 study](#) found that deforesting less than a third of the rainforests in the Guiana Shield could result in significant changes in the water cycle, both continentally and globally.

### THREATS

Guyana is one of the most heavily forested countries in South America, covering 71,400 square miles (18,492,515 hectares), or 87% of the country, and maintains a low deforestation rate (0.084% in 2017). However, Guyana also has extensive subsurface mineral assets—including gold, diamonds, and bauxite—and mining claims cover large swaths of the country. Every year, mining pushes deeper into Guyana’s interior. According to the Guyana Forestry Commission, 53% of the country’s deforestation emissions stem from mining and related infrastructure development.

Guyana’s forests are also threatened by illegal international miners crossing in from Brazil and Venezuela to extract gold and diamonds. During the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based forest monitors in the Rupununi region of southwest Guyana detected a record number of illicit border crossings. With the economic downturn driving up both unemployment and the price of gold, these incursions will likely increase.

Much of Guyana’s mineral estate is on land owned, claimed, or managed by indigenous peoples. The Guyanese legal framework and institutions, however, provide inadequate protection for forests and indigenous peoples’ lands. A recent oil boom threatens to bring extensive infrastructure development to Guyana, granting extractive access, forestry resources, and industrial agriculture opportunities on land previously protected by rugged geography.

### PARTNERS

Amerindian Peoples Association (APA), South Rupununi District Council (SRDC), North Pakaraimas District Council (NPDC), Upper Mazaruni District Council (UMDC) and Moruca District Council (MDC), who collectively represent the majority of Guyana’s interior indigenous populations.

## PROJECT DETAILS

Rainforest Foundation US and our indigenous partner organizations are employing the *Rainforest Alert* model that links technology, on-the-ground capacity, and national advocacy. In Guyana, this work is coupled with robustly mapping customary use areas of indigenous peoples (hunting, fishing, and cultural) so as to expand indigenous peoples' land titles and push back on government assumptions that vast forest and mountain areas in Guyana's interior are unused.

### How it works

- A national data hub located at APA headquarters in Georgetown receives satellite deforestation alerts and reviews satellite imagery to detect threats on indigenous peoples' lands. Additionally, these initial indications of a threat frequently come from locals on the ground.
- Information collected at the national data hub is passed to field hubs in the respective districts, and alerts are verified by monitors via foot patrols.
- Field data hubs compile the information and evidence for discussion with indigenous leaders at the district level, who decide how to address the threat.
- In the event that local leaders decide to address the threat by engaging with government authorities, legal support or the media, the data managers support them to build compelling evidence-based cases for their advocacy.

### Results

In general, this program has succeeded in both addressing discrete threats to indigenous land as well as strengthening governance and management within the district councils. Specific results include:

- 23 indigenous community-based monitors trained
- 13 deforestation threats detected
- 6 coordinated interventions of deforestation suspects
- 6,563 square miles (1.7 million hectares) of lands monitored

## PROJECT NEEDS

Support needs for ongoing activities are listed below (figures are annual):

- Stipend support for staffing field data hubs and ranger operations: 200k
- Funding support for additional field hubs, particularly in Moruwa, an isolated village located in a remote forest area used by multiple communities for hunting and gathering, which is under increasing threat from mining: 100k

### Contact

Cameron Ellis, Senior Geographer, Rainforest Foundation US: [cellis@rffny.org](mailto:cellis@rffny.org)