



Rainforest Foundation US Quarterly



Second Quarter Newsletter, 2022

It's been a busy few months for us. As spring blossomed throughout the Global North, likewise much of Rainforest Foundation US's work has started coming to flower.

In Peru, we've expanded our community-led and tech-supported forest monitoring program—Rainforest Alert. Through the use of smartphone apps and satellite data, [Rainforest Alert](#) allows communities to quickly detect and stop illegal deforestation on their lands.

A 2021 study by partner Rainforest Foundation Norway found that only 1% of climate funding supports land tenure and forest management and only a fraction of that 1% makes its way to the frontline communities who are safeguarding tropical forests. We are working to change that paradigm. Beginning **in October of 2021 we piloted a new version of Rainforest Alert. In this new version, we implemented agreements to compensate entire communities for effective forest protection. And in May we sent the first round of payments to 22 communities, who have used the money for collective benefits like water filtration systems, solar-powered electricity, and expanded land title filings.**

In June, several staff attended the Tropical Forest Forum in Oslo. We met with global partners, allies, stakeholders, donors, and government officials to present on Rainforest Alert and a [peer-reviewed study](#) on the efficacy of the program.

We're excited about the work we're doing, more of which you will see spotlighted in this newsletter. The victories compound upon themselves, **and it is all a result of your support.** We hope that in these pages you'll see the same thing we do: that our movement today is planting the seeds for a cleaner, healthier, safer tomorrow.



Sincerely,
Suzanne Pelletier
Executive Director of Rainforest Foundation US

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS ▶▶



In the Upper Napo of Peru, Kichwa Communities Wall Off the Forest

As our rainforest protection program scales up throughout the region, a linkage of communities on the Napo River provides a chance for exponential gains.

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A Public Information Campaign to Enshrine Greater Rights for Guyana's Indigenous Peoples

Guyana's indigenous peoples are pushing for revisions to the Amerindian Act, the federal law that outlines their rights. Proposed changes include the right to collective territory, and upholding indigenous groups' land titling to fight extractive industries.

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Supporting Legal Action Against the Destruction of Panama's Forests

Our legal defense team was able to temporarily freeze logging permits that were granted on indigenous lands after a Panamanian governmental agency annulled the land claim of Aruza, a Wounaan village sitting on 31 square miles of primary rainforest in the Darien Gap. With the support of Rainforest Foundation US, Aruza is legally challenging the decision.

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A brief conversation between staffers
Sofiya Krasotina and Cameron Ellis



Sofiya Krasotina:

To start off, I'm honestly not entirely sure what a Senior Geographer does!

About space?

That's a subtle but important difference. But what does that have to do with forest preservation?

Can you give me an example?

So humans are part of the landscape and conserving it at the same time?

How do you find the balance between the indigenous people's vision for their rainforest and what a government needs to hear?



Cameron Ellis:

Ha! The title can be a little confusing. My job is really about supporting indigenous territorial security through translating between indigenous and Western ways of thinking about space.

I guess I could say "about how land is used," but that phrasing already bakes in some colonial assumptions. I work with indigenous communities to map out areas of the land around them that are essential for their lives. But many indigenous peoples wouldn't say they're using the land for those things, or that it belongs to them—they're a part of the land and forests.

Well, when you understand how indigenous peoples traditionally relate to the land, it's really clear that they're preserving it. There's been [a lot of great research](#) recently showing that forests with indigenous stewards consistently have less deforestation. It's just that settler governments and international conservation organizations have very different ways of thinking and talking about keeping a forest healthy. ▶▶ 

Sure! I was recently in the Northern Pakaraima Mountains in Western Guyana, with Patamona people. They often live on the edge between natural savannas and a forest, where they can get food. Several times a year, local people sharpen their arrows, build up their warshis (they're like backpacks), and go on a hunting trip with their entire families for weeks. They know how to hunt and forage in a way that they can come back to the same places year after year, and the same plants and animals will still be there. On my last trip, one man was telling me about a particular vine that they have to cut down at a particular time of day to get it to grow back.

Exactly. My job is to work with local community members and mappers to draw up a detailed map of exactly where the community goes to do what, or a precise conservation plan for how the community is going to steward the forest which matches what a government or NGO will want. That process also gives us a snapshot of where the forest is changing—they might say, "I always went to forage mushrooms over here, but now I can't find any there." That's something useful for conservationists to know. Then, for example, we'll approach the Guyanese government and advocate for them to grant the community legal title over the land that they have used for centuries.

It's immensely difficult. It's like translating in that you're never going to get everything across. I'm always striving not to dilute the vision of our indigenous partners, but to put enough of it into writing so that a government or NGO can recognize it as conservation — and so we don't get into a situation where national parks — as has happened in other countries — kick out the indigenous people. We're always trying to build the capacity of indigenous leaders so that they can advocate for themselves directly, instead of having to work through intermediaries like me.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT ▶▶



Saweto Defense Fund

The trial for four murdered indigenous environmental activists from Saweto in the Peruvian Amazon finally began in June after eight years of delays, persistent death threats to family and community members, and vast corruption.

Rainforest Foundation US has been working hard on behalf of Saweto community members and covering many costs related to the trial. We anticipate needing another \$282,000 by the end of the trial slated to conclude at the end of this year, which will support: attorney's fees for legal help to the victims; our staff time supporting the case and communications around it; helping with transportation for 13 witnesses from the community, who must make the three-day trek from their village to the trial location; and basic support and a safe house for the victims' families.

The implications are massive, as this could be the first time in Peru's legal history that logging company executives are held criminally liable for allegedly murdering indigenous environmental activists, rather than just the triggermen.

[READ MORE](#) about this trial and ways you can help.



For over 30 years, Rainforest Foundation US has worked to address climate change and safeguard biodiversity by promoting the rights of indigenous peoples and protecting rainforests from further destruction.



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