

Great News & Terrible News From Brazil: Tribe Protects Forest, Government Dams Amazon

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A first-of-its-kind project in Brazil is rewarding an indigenous tribe for keeping their forest in tact, preserving their way of life and creating a model for how to preserve rainforests.

The 1300-member Paiter-Surui is the world's first indigenous tribe to earn carbon credits for their forest. Because their forests absorb carbon dioxide, they will get the funds they need from carbon offset projects to preserve their way of life.

"This project can be a model for indigenous groups across Brazil," says Divaldo Rezende, Environment Secretary for the Amazonian state of Tocantins. "We're watching it very closely in our state, and I know others are as well."

The Surui Forest Carbon Project has earned validation from both the Verified Carbon Standard - which ensures it follows recognized procedures for measuring carbon emissions reductions - and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standard Gold - which ensures the project is being carried out in a way that preserves biodiversity and serves the people living there.

The project is part of a broader effort by the Paiter-Surui to chart an economic course for the next 50 years without converting their forest to farmland as settlers around them have done.

"Future generations also have the right to live, the right to have forests," says Chief Almir Narayamoga Surui, the tribe's 37-year-old leader. "This project makes it possible for us to preserve the forest as providers of an ecosystem service."

The 248,000-hectare Surui territory, Sete de Setembro, is situated squarely in the "arc of deforestation," a frontier of agricultural development that is extending northwest, deeper and deeper into the Amazon. As the forest is clearcut or burned, carbon stored in the trees is released into the atmosphere, contributing mightily to climate change.

Forest Trends, an environmental non-profit, introduced the tribe to the concept of carbon credits and commissioned the technical and legal work necessary to achieve them. The Amazon Conservation Team helped map the territory, the Institute for the Conservation and Sustainable Development of Amazonas (Idesam) provided technical support, and the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund (Funbio) set up Fundo Surui, which will administer income from the carbon project. Google supported the monitoring platform; USAID provided some funding.

Verified Carbon Standard has documented that actions undertaken by the Surui from 2009-2011 alone have prevented 205,000 tons of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere, forming the basis of the carbon credits.

Situation in Brazil

In 2011, deforestation in Brazil's Amazon fell to its lowest level since monitoring began 23 years ago, dropping 11% for the year and 25% from 2004, when expanding cattle and soy operations reached their peak.

"Only" 2400 square miles of forest was cleared in 2011, according to satellite data from Brazil's National Institute for Space Research.

Brazil's government takes credit for stepped monitoring and enforcement of illegal logging, but a slower economy and reduced demand for farm produce are also part of the reason.

Stopping deforestation could cut global carbon emissions by three billion tons a year - the equivalent of more than [one-third of fossil fuel emissions](#). The amount absorbed by regrowth of natural forests on logged and abandoned land is 1.6 billion tons.

Although the situation improved overall, some Amazon states saw deforestation double. One of those states is Rondonia where two hydro dams are being built, which leads us to the next chapter in this story.

Brazil on Dam Building Spree in Amazon

While they crow about reduced deforestation in Brazil's Amazon, the government is destroying the forest.

Brazil's President and former Energy Minister, Dilma Rousseff, says the government is investing \$93 billion to build 20 hydro plants by damming rivers in the Amazon.

Rainforests 100 times the size of Manhattan will be flooded -2,462 square miles - thousands of people will be evicted from their ancestral lands, and transmission lines will cross the Amazon, carrying the energy to cities.

One of the dams will be the world's third-largest on Xingu River, which flows halfway across the country to the heart of the Amazon.

Brazil needs to increase electricity generation 55% by 2020, according to the government's Energy Research Agency, because gross domestic product grew 51% from 2002-2011. But the government is borrowing to finance the dams, adding to its annual deficit, which jumped 89% over the past three years. The economy is now slowing - it grew 2.7% in 2011, the second-lowest rate since 2003.

The government says building dams will generate cleaner, cheaper energy than natural gas or coal.

The mega-dam construction will do more harm than good to Brazil, says a report by 40 economists, anthropologists, engineers and biologists. It will damage the environment, force thousands of people off their land and require increasing taxpayer subsidies.

Brazil could cut electricity demand by retrofitting existing power plants and distribution grids and building solar, sugar cane and wind plants, says Pedro Bara, an energy specialist for World Wildlife Fund's office in Sao Paulo.

The lakes will cover trees and underbrush with water, and as they decompose, they produce methane, with emissions 25 times as potent as carbon dioxide. The reservoirs formed by damming the rivers will be stagnant, mosquito-infested water.

It goes without saying that these dams will destroy large sections of the most biologically diverse rainforest on Earth, which the world has been working to protect for decades.

It is a nightmare.

Read the full article on Bloomberg:

Website: www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-04-11/rousseff-roils-amazon-as-brazil-hydropower-makes-people-homeless.html

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