

# Las Lianas

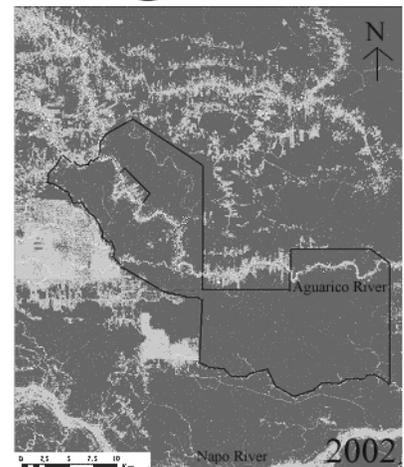
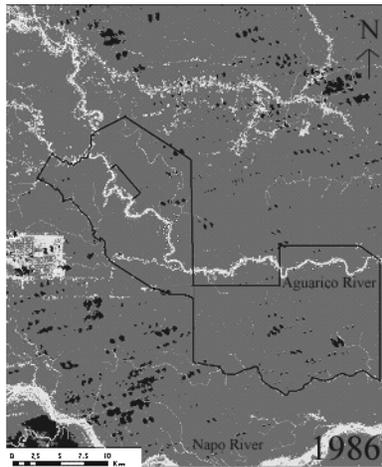
Resource Center for Science, Culture, & Environment

Program Update--December 2005

## Preserving Culture, Protecting Land

Las Lianas combines the twin goals of defending indigenous cultures and protecting the environment. We often speak of the importance of the rainforest and ancestral lands to cultural survival, but it is equally true that indigenous cultural traditions and local autonomy are key to protecting the rainforest. The satellite images reproduced here provide striking evidence of this latter point and of the urgency of our work.

These views of Secoya lands and the surrounding region show the advance of deforestation in northeastern Ecuador in recent decades. Industrial farming of African palms for oil has caused massive deforestation on the southwest boarder of Secoya territory. Oil development followed by colonization has driven forest loss to the north. The less disturbed areas to the northeast and south include other indigenous lands and two parks. Secoya territory provides a critical buffer zone for this area.



*Satellite images (1986 & 2002) show Secoya lands (outlined) remain intact while rapid deforestation (lighter areas) occurs nearby. Black spots in 1986 image are clouds. Andy Maclean provided the images.*

The images reveal how much better-preserved are the forests inside Secoya territory than in the surrounding areas. Some clearing (for small scale farming) has taken place in Secoya territory along the Aguarico River, but this pales compared to the clearing done by settlers along one segment of the river which the Secoya lost ownership of back in the 1980s. The close correlation between intact forests and intact cultures highlights the importance of an integrated approach to cultural survival and environmental preservation. Las Lianas supports the efforts of the Secoya and other indigenous partners to protect their land and culture through a

variety of activities. Sometimes the environmental benefits are immediately obvious, as with the prevention of the building of roads at two different points during oil exploration in Secoya territory, or our legal support for the Achuar and Shiwiar peoples in southeastern Ecuador to secure title to their traditional lands and protect them from development.

Equally important, however, is the development of alternatives to destructive development, such as our aquaculture initiative, so that indigenous communities can continue to live sustainably in the forest. Rainforest peoples need such renewable local resources to provide for their families and to continue to their way of life. It is through their cultural survival and economic well-being that they retain the capacity to hold the line against the destruction of the forest.



*The landscape passed by these Secoya children is not what their parents once saw. Where colonists from other parts of Ecuador have settled, the forest has been cleared for cattle and farming. It is very different from what they see when traveling past lands still managed by their families.*

# Esteban Lusitande

Last July, the world lost a good and gentle man. Esteban Lusitande was shaman, nature guide, hunter, farmer, father, grandfather. He was a friend who shared his home, humor, knowledge, and kindness with many. Sadly and horribly, he was murdered last July as he traveled to a nearby village to perform a curing ceremony. We miss him greatly.



Esteban was born to a Cofan-Siona family in Colombia, where he was trained as a Shaman. As a young man, he and his Siona wife settled in the Secoya community on the Aguarico River. Here, under the influence of evangelical missionaries, he abandoned shamanism for many years. He returned to healing five years ago, after seeing a nephew die suddenly from a strange illness and feeling powerless to save him. His killer is believed to be someone from the village he was visiting, motivated by jealousy and a misplaced fear of his power, and possibly addled by alcohol. Esteban's death is a loss for his people and for us all.

## Program Highlights

**Breaking news:** Remember the security contracts between Ecuador's army and oil companies that we disclosed last spring? The Defense Ministry has annulled these agreements and announced plans to restructure oil industry security. Media reports suggest that public outcry after we revealed the contracts played a part in the decision. We can't yet say to how much better the new plan will be, but we are pleased to have helped end the problematic security agreements. Visit [laslianas.org/updates](http://laslianas.org/updates) for links to our original article in the spring 05 update, and to a longer version published in the journal *Synthesis/Regeneration*.

**Recognition:** The best compliment a funder can offer is to continue to support our programs. But it is also gratifying when they share what they like about the work. Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger has supported our work since 2000 and features our aquaculture project in their current newsletter, available at [www.mazon.org/Who\\_We\\_Are/Newsletter-eNewsletter/MAZONNewsFall05.pdf](http://www.mazon.org/Who_We_Are/Newsletter-eNewsletter/MAZONNewsFall05.pdf). We appreciate the support and the recognition!

## Highlights, continued

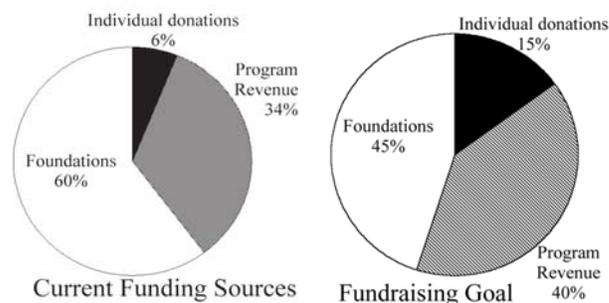
**Ancestral lands:** This year, we helped the Achuar nationality gain legal recognition--a critical step toward gaining collective title to all their ancestral lands in southeast Ecuador. We are collaborating in the writing of a handbook to help other indigenous groups take the same step. We are also helping Achuar, Shiwiar, and Shuar work with INDA, the national land-titling agency, to gain title to lands not yet officially recognized.

**Indigenous justice:** Bolívar Beltrán, Las Lianas' legal director, spoke on *Indigenous Criminal Justice: From Crime to Punishment* at the XII Annual Meeting of Constitutional Court Justices of Latin America in Uruguay. His talk will be published in the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's 2006 Yearbook of Latin-American Constitutional Law.

**Aquaculture:** Las Lianas' aquaculture program continues to expand. Current plans include support for aquaculture in the Quichua community of Shayari with pond construction under the guidance of experienced Secoya fish farmers. Las Lianas will provide materials and fish to stock in the ponds.

## Thank you to all who have contributed to Las Lianas. Your donations are essential to our work.

Donations are key to sustaining our program. Foundation grants are a primary source of revenue, but funding is limited and often ends after a fixed period. Fees from program services—work done for indigenous groups with their own funding—are a growing resource but inconsistent year-to-year. Only a broad base of regular donors can ensure continuity in our program and let us respond to new requests for assistance. Please consider making a recurring (monthly, quarterly, or annually) donation to Las Lianas.



You can make either one-time or recurring donations online at: [laslianas.org](http://laslianas.org), or by mail to:

**Las Lianas Resource Center**  
**301 East Hadley Road**  
**Amherst, MA 01002**

All donations are tax deductible.