

Las Lianas

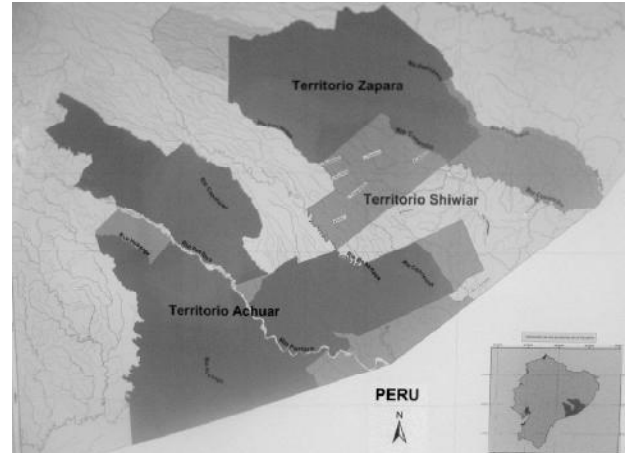
Resource Center for Science, Culture, & Environment

Program Update--Fall 2006

New Ways to Protect Ancient Lands

Since 2004, Las Lianas has worked in Ecuador's southern Amazon region to strengthen indigenous peoples' territorial claims and reaffirm the collective and indivisible nature of ancestral lands. Currently we are partnering with the Achuar, Shiwiar and Shuar peoples in collaboration with the Ecuadorian organization Fundación Pachamama. Our work has three objectives: Help each indigenous nationality gain legal status; assist them to obtain titles for untitled lands; and consolidate each nationality's lands.

Gaining legal status—We are assisting each group to register as an indigenous nationality with the Council for the Development of the Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador (CODENPE—a governmental agency). Until now, and in spite of gaining recognition under Ecuador's 1998 constitution, indigenous nationalities were not treated as such in practice. In order to conduct business, hold land, or deal with government agencies, they had to incorporate as organizations or federations, in the way that a union, social club, or cooperative might. This meant taking a form that ignored their unique culture, history, and status;



having to justify their existence to a variety of different government ministries; and needing to renew their organizations annually, instead of being acknowledged as the autonomous indigenous nationalities recognized in the constitution. Recently however, CODENPE—itsself governed by representatives from all of Ecuador's indigenous peoples—has been granted the power to

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Fish Farming Reaches More Families



Las Lianas has worked for the past ten years to help the Secoya people to construct small, sustainable fish ponds to improve nutrition while protecting the rainforest. The program has been so successful that other communities want to do the same thing. Now Secoya families are working with Las Lianas to train neighboring villages in the art and science of small scale sustainable aquaculture.

In 2004 and 2005 we began outreach and training to two communities. This year, we are beginning work with four

more villages downriver from the Secoya. Extension is based on village-to-village training. Secoya fish farmers train their neighbors in pond construction and fish husbandry. As skilled fish farmers training other communities, Secoya fish farmers both reinforce their own knowledge and skills, and gain public recognition.

Above, Secoya fish-farmer Gustavo Piaguaje leads a workshop in the Kichwa village of Shayari, home of the fishpond featured on page 4.

Celebrating 10 years in the Amazon!

Jim Oldham

It's hard to believe that we are completing a decade in Ecuador. I first arrived in early 1997, representing the Secoya Survival Project of ISIS, at Hampshire College, later to become Las Lianas Resource Center. We were responding to a Secoya request to support self-help development projects and soon we were working with local farmers to build sustainable native aquaculture.

Oil companies were also active in the region, however, and the negative effects of oil development on local lives and the rainforest were clear. We provided legal and technical support as the Secoyas negotiated with Occidental and the Ecuadorian government to protect their rights, and later, as they carried out community-based environmental monitoring.

Our partnership with the Secoya led us to regional, national, and international efforts to protect indigenous rights and promote sustainable rainforest development, and to new projects and partnerships with other indigenous nationalities. Highlights of our work can be found in the timeline below.

Our work is diverse, as these highlights illustrate. Sometimes we are asked what fish farming has to do with oil development? What is the connection between indigenous rights and the environment? The answer is that our work in each of three areas—sustainable food production; preservation of ecosystems; and legal

advocacy to defend indigenous peoples' rights—provides essential support for the other two.

For example, fish farming responds to destructive development by replacing lost forest resources. At the same time, it plays an important role in preventing future destruction: By helping preserve the health and well-being of indigenous communities, it enhances their autonomy and ability to continue to defend the rainforest.

Similarly, environmental protection, which we value in its own right, also benefits and strengthens indigenous communities who depend on the sustainable harvest of the region's rich natural resources.

Finally, while we support the struggle for indigenous rights as matter of justice, we also recognize that the exercise of greater rights will greatly enhance Amazonian communities' ability to continue to protect and conserve the rainforest.

In sum, continued attention to all three concerns—sustainable livelihoods, environmental protection, and indigenous peoples' rights—is what defines our program. We believe it is key both to supporting the interests of autonomous Amazonian cultures and to preserving the Amazonian forests and wetlands that are home to some of the world's greatest plant and animal diversity. We are proud of what we and our partners have accomplished so far, and we look forward to continuing this vital work.

Highlights of our work

1997: Community planning & needs assessment with Secoya. Establish indigenous aquaculture initiative. Intervene to stop an upstream municipality from dumping raw sewage into Shushufindi River. First workshop on oil development & negotiating.

1999: Aquaculture: Partner with Canadian Executive Service Organization to improve technologies & expand project. Oil: Establish legal and technical advisory group to help the Secoya draft, & win oil company acceptance of a Code of Conduct for dialogue around oil exploration.

2001: Lead Oxfam-funded exchange between Secoya & indigenous Peruvian fish farmers. Our work on the Code of Conduct, aquaculture, and environmental & human health effects of US-sponsored war on drugs in Colombia are all featured at the biannual forum of the 9-nation Amazon Alliance of indigenous peoples.

1998: Fish pond construction & training extends to 3 Secoya villages. Help Secoya successfully challenge agreement for oil exploration illegally made with one village. Facilitate community dialogue to resolve internal disputes created by oil company intervention.

1998: Ecuador adopts constitution recognizing indigenous peoples' rights; the struggle to implement them continues.

2000: Secoya sign oil exploration agreement, win important concessions on compensation & environmental protection. Community-based monitors trained, uncover & stop violations of environmental standards. Aquaculture: First experiments collecting & breeding wild-caught fish. Community-based research continues to improve pond construction & fish survival.

International Cultural Exchange



This year Las Lianas was invited by the Institute for Training and Development (ITD), to help coordinate an exchange among indigenous peoples in the US, Ecuador, and Guatemala. Along with ITD and the Mayan organization UK'U'X B'E, we have organized a 3 phase exchange that gives indigenous leaders the opportunity to share approaches to preserving cultural autonomy while participating in the larger society. It is providing space to reflect on a variety of aspects of cultural diversity such as a people's cosmology, traditional knowledge, language, social organization, history, governance, education, arts, agriculture, resource management, and economic systems. Phase one took place in Ecuador and Guatemala last February. In each country, representatives of indigenous

organizations came together to discuss the challenges of preserving minority cultures—how to pass on and preserve knowledge and traditions yet remain open to change; how to engage with the broader society while keeping one's own community whole. Las Lianas brought together 25 participants, representing 12 indigenous peoples or nationalities from all over Ecuador. They included painters, musicians, teachers, students, hunter/farmers, shopkeepers and government employees. From these perspectives they reflected on issues of identity and cultural autonomy and identified themes and examples to share with their counterparts in the US and Guatemala.

For phase two, participants in Ecuador and Guatemala chose six representatives each to travel to the US for a 3-week series of workshops and visits with Native Americans in the northeast. Much was shared: the visitors were saddened by stories of the loss of languages, impressed by the self-governing reservations, and moved by the efforts of communities to understand and recover from the long term impacts of Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools and other acts of oppression. They went home with new ideas for cultural and educational projects that they hope to implement in their communities.

The final phase will take place in February 2007, when Native North Americans will visit Guatemala and then, with the Guatemalans, go to Ecuador for a final conference and sharing of experiences, hosted by Las Lianas.

2003: Las Lianas incorporates in US. Host visit by Secoya President Wilmer Piaguaje to publicize our collaboration. Oil: On-going environmental monitoring & dialogue with Occidental Oil Co. Aquaculture: Collect fish from flood plain lakes in Cuyabeno region & stock for breeding in Secoya ponds.

2005: Las Lianas incorporates in Ecuador. Begin aquaculture extension to new communities, with Secoya fish farmers as trainers. Investigate & publicize secret security contracts between oil companies & Ecuadorian military. Assist Achuar & Shiwiar to gain legal status as indigenous nationalities.

2006: Ecuador cancels Occidental Oil's operating licence & takes over its operations in dispute over taxes & contract violations; implications for Amazonian communities remain uncertain.

2002: Begin study of birds as indicators of rainforest health. Publish Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Ecuador with Fundación Kawsay. Publish fact sheets on aerial herbicide spraying in Colombia, and critiques of US government reports on the subject. Lead team drafting proposed law of Indigenous Justice for Ecuador.

2004: Aquaculture: First generation of offspring from wild-caught fish successfully reproduce in ponds. Territories: Begin partnership in Southern Amazon with Achuar and Shiwiar to reform and unify each nationality's lands. Oil: Support successful Secoya effort to stop unauthorized road through their territory.

2006: Coordinate Ecuadorian portion of indigenous cultural exchange between Guatemala, Ecuador, & US. Publish manual for indigenous nationalities on obtaining legal status. Expand aquaculture project to 4 new communities. Help Shuar register as indigenous nationality.

This Year, Give 1000 Fish...



There's a new way to support Las Lianas while honoring loved ones this holiday season (or any time). Make someone proud by giving 1000 fish in their name, or by sponsoring a fishpond on their behalf. Your gift will allow Las Lianas and our Secoya partners to help more rainforest families

start farming fish while providing a meaningful and attractive present for someone you care about. Here's how it works.

- A donation of \$35 buys 350 fish. These are young fish a family can raise and begin harvesting in 8 months. You'll get a letter of acknowledgement and we'll mail (to you or to the recipient, your choice) an attractive certificate describing the gift and our program, with a salutation of your choosing (up to 25 words).
- A donation of \$50 buys 500 fish. Think of it this way: for just \$50 you can provide 1 to 2 fish meals a week to a family of five for an entire year. In addition to the certificate described above, we will include a 5x7 color photo from our fish-farming program.

- A donation of \$100 buys 1000 fish. Your recipient will get a certificate, a photo, and a complementary rainforest-seed necklace.
- For \$500, you can sponsor a fishpond. The donation covers material costs, transport, and training for the beneficiary family. Your friend or family member will receive a certificate and framed photo symbolizing the present. Later in the year, we will send them a report with pictures and a description of the beneficiary family.

To order, send your tax-deductible donation and tell us the gift you want, whom it is for, and where to send it. For other presents, see the hammocks and beaded necklaces on our website: laslianas.org, or write for more information.



...or maybe a fish pond

Ancestral Lands

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recognize indigenous nationalities and affirm their full constitutional status. In 2005, Las Lianas helped the Achuar, and then the Shiwiar become the first two nationalities to register with CODENPE. We also co-authored a manual to teach other indigenous groups how to do the same. This year, we helped the Shuar, as well as many of the local communities within each of the three nationalities, to register with CODENPE. The process is challenging but important, since it requires a community or a people to rethink their governing structures and how they connect to and reflect their particular cultural identity.

Obtaining titles to ancestral lands—Our second objective is to help our partners gain legal title to ancestral lands not yet formally recognized. This process involves community mapping and preparation of historical land-use studies, as well as resolution of any competing land claims between groups. It requires working closely with government agencies as well. Again it is a complex process, involving dozens of communities with lands whose

legal status is widely varied and poorly documented by the government, often with faulty maps and incorrect names. Las Lianas' role includes training indigenous leaders, participating in strategic planning, drafting legal papers, coordinating with government offices, and project documentation. This year alone, we helped seven Shuar communities gain legal title to their lands.

Consolidating territories—The final objective is the reform of each nationality's territory, currently held by individual communities under diverse titles, into a unified territory under a single title. This reform has the strong support of the grass-roots communities who plan to sign over their legal titles to the nationality as a whole. The shift will strengthen their ability to defend their lands from threats of oil and other destructive development by engaging the entire nationality any time there is an incursion into any part of the territory. The reform will also increase autonomy, since conflicts about land use between or among communities (who continue to manage their individual areas) will now be resolved internally rather than requiring recourse to the government or courts. We expect the Shiwiar and Achuar to carry out this reform in 2007.