

e-Edition Plus

A current events feature for teaching with electronic editions.

By Sara Shahriari

Development in the Amazon could affect the whole world

The Amazon Rain Forest is often called the Earth's lungs.

The Amazon is the world's largest tropical rain forest, and its trees and plants produce about 20 percent of the oxygen on the planet through the scientific process known as photosynthesis.

The Amazon rain forest spreads across nine countries on the continent of South America: Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. Its 1.4 billion acres spread out on either side of the Amazon River, forming an area called the Amazon River Basin.

Many native, indigenous people live in the Amazon, and they rely on the forest for survival. They hunt animals that live in the jungle, eat the fruits from its trees and fish in its streams.

But more and more in recent years, people from outside the rain forest are interested in the Amazon as well.

Some people want to cut down trees to make room to grow crops or create pastures for cattle. Some people want to mine for gold. And some want to search for oil.

On top of that, the governments of Brazil and Peru want to build hydroelectric dams in the Amazon Basin. While the dams would produce needed electricity for the countries, they would also flood areas, change the character of the Amazon River in some regions and affect the lives of people who live there.

All nations need crops, meat, oil and electricity to grow, but many people are asking how much it is possible to use the Amazon without destroying it and the indigenous people who call it home.

Resource conflicts

Conflicts over oil exploration, mining, dams and cutting down trees in the Amazon are increasingly in the news in South America.

In Ecuador recently, thousands of people won a "class action" group court case against an oil company they say has polluted the land and made people in the area seriously sick. The oil company says the ruling by the court in Ecuador is wrong.

In Brazil, there is heated debate over whether or not oil companies should be able to look for oil in the Amazon at all, especially near indigenous communities.

Native peoples

Experts estimate that there are 100 groups of indigenous people living in the Amazon rain forest who remain "uncontacted." This means the people live traditionally and have not had any contact with people outside the forest.

As hydroelectric projects and oil exploration reach farther into the rain forest, the lives of these people may be changed forever.

Whether or not these groups should be contacted — and how to protect them as development advances — are questions to which there are no easy answers.

One thing is certain, however:

We all breathe oxygen produced by the Amazon Rain Forest. The future of the Amazon will affect everyone on the planet, not just those people who make their homes there.

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Dams, development and oil exploration could change the lives of native people in the Amazon, some of whom have never had contact with people outside the forest.

Talk About the News

- There are thousands of indigenous people in the Amazon River Basin who have never been contacted by people from outside their tribes. Do you think governments should take steps to make sure these people aren't contacted and can continue living as they do, or should the people be contacted and made aware of the world outside the forest? Why?

Learning Standards: Engaging peers in constructive conversations of interest or importance; comparing world regions with respect to cultures, economy, governmental systems, environment and communications; exploring and reflecting on universal themes.

Explore Your e-Edition

- On Earth Day April 22, many groups and individuals will look for new ways to preserve natural areas and habitats. In the e-Edition this week, find a photo of an outdoor or natural area. Study the photo. Write a paragraph or short essay describing what the natural area provides people and wildlife, and what would be lost if the area were developed.

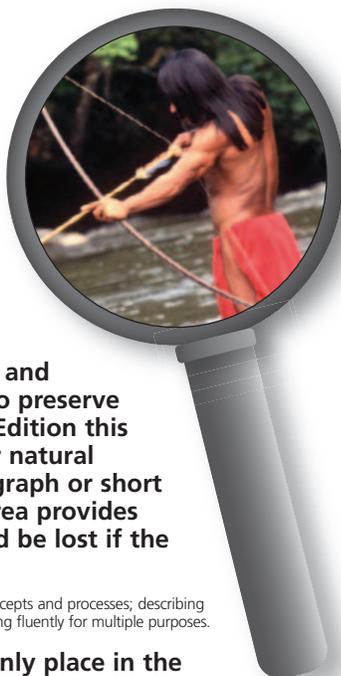
Learning Standards: Understanding and explaining ecosystem concepts and processes; describing positive and negative effects of humans on the environment; writing fluently for multiple purposes.

- The Amazon Rain Forest is not the only place in the world where forests are being cut for development. Across North America, large areas of forest have been cut down to make space for houses, highways or other developments. Look through the e-Edition and find a story about a building project that could affect trees. Make a list of three positive and three negative things about the project.

Learning Standards: Analyzing how humans and the environment interact; describing ways in which humans alter the environment (i.e. agriculture, land use, resource development, resource use, land development, pollution or habitat destruction); writing fluently for multiple purposes.

- Oil companies are exploring the Amazon Rain Forest to find new supplies of fuel to heat houses or power cars. Other companies are trying to develop alternative energy sources such as wind or solar power. In the e-Edition, find stories about alternative energy. Write a paragraph describing the advantages and disadvantages of one alternative source of power.

Learning Standards: Analyzing how science and technology affect society; showing how common themes of science, math and technology apply in real world contexts; posing local, state and national policy issues as questions; acquiring information from multiple sources and then organizing and interpreting it.



How Well Did You Read?

Understanding what you read is a skill that will help you all through life. Review the story about the Amazon Rain Forest by answering the questions below.

1. How many countries are home to parts of the Amazon Rain Forest?
A. 15
B. 10
C. 9
D. 6
2. What is the Amazon River Basin?
A. An area in Africa
B. An area in Peru
C. An area on either side of the Amazon River
D. An area found only in Argentina, Bolivia and Suriname.
3. How many uncontacted groups of people live in the Amazon Rain Forest?
A. About 10
B. About 1,000
C. About 10,000
D. About 100
4. According to the article, human activities that could damage the rain forest are:
A. Gold mining
B. Cutting trees for planting crops
C. Building dams
D. All of the above
5. The Amazon Rain Forest is often called:
A. The Earth's heart
B. The Earth's stomach
C. The Earth's soul
D. The Earth's lungs