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**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

**CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE
WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

**Twenty-third session
Marrakesh, Morocco**

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Information Document: Report of the Mission to Sangay National Park (Ecuador), 10-14 June 1999

SUMMARY

Following the invitation of the authorities of Ecuador to field a site visit to Sangay National Park and in accordance with the decision of the World Heritage Committee at its twenty-second session, a mission has been undertaken from 10-14 June 1999. The Bureau may wish to recall that the Committee (Kyoto, 1998) had noted with satisfaction the view of IUCN that conditions for strengthening the conservation of this site were improving and that the planned mission in 1999 may recommend its removal from the List of World Heritage in Danger. The Committee decided to retain this site in the List of World Heritage in Danger and thanked the Delegate of Ecuador for inviting a Centre/IUCN mission in 1999 to review the state of conservation of Sangay National Park. The Committee requested the Centre and IUCN to co-operate with the State Party and with other partners such as WWF to field such a mission as soon as possible in 1999 with a view to submitting an up-to-date state of conservation report to the twenty-third session of the Committee.

Action by the Committee: The Committee may wish to take note of the report and the recommendations made.

Sangay National Park World Heritage Site Visit Report

Country: Ecuador

Dates of the visit: 10 – 14 June, 1999

This mission was carried out by the IUCN Regional Office for South America -IUCN -SUR- based in Quito, Ecuador. The field visit was led by Bernardo Ortiz-von Halle from IUCN-SUR, who was accompanied by Jorge Rivas, Head of the WWF/Fundación Natura Sangay Project, and Vicente Alvarez, Head of the Andean (Western) portion of Sangay National Park.

The objective of the mission was to inspect the extension of the Guamote-Macas road to evaluate the impact of the existing portions of the road inside the National Park, and the potential impact of the 12 kilometres yet to be constructed.

Visit Schedule:

June 10 : Drive Quito - Riobamba - Sangay National Park (Atillo entrance)

June 11 : Walk from Atillo (3.400 meters above sea level (masl)) to San Vicente (2.100 masl)

June 12: Walk from San Vicente to the limits of the Sangay National Park, then drive to Macas

June 13: Meetings in Macas with WWF/Fundacion Natura Project and the Head of the Sangay National Park in its Amazonian (Eastern) sector

June 14: Flight to Quito

Scheduled visits to the villages of indigenous communities near the Sangay Eastern border were not possible due to petrol shortages in Macas.

Meetings were held with the following persons:

Maria Primo, UNESCO, Ecuador

Juan Martinez, Head of the IUCN National Members' Committee

Isidro Gutierrez, Ministry of the Environment

Miguel Carvajal, Ministry of the Environment

Jorge Rivas, Fundación Natura

Pablo Suarez, Dutch Cooperation Agency

Maria Amparo Alban, Centro Ecuatoriano de Derecho Ambiental - CEDA (NGO)

Campo Elias Játiva, Environmental Impacts Office of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure (Ministerio de Obras Públicas).

Crsistobal Shancay, Fundación Tsantsa (local NGO from Macas).

Institutional and legal situation in Ecuador and Sangay National Park

Several important institutional and legal developments have taken place recently in Ecuador. These are:

- 1) In 1998 a new Political Constitution was formulated for the country with the first explicit mention of environmental issues in its text. The new Constitution allows for the participation of local communities and indigenous groups in decision-making processes

that affect their livelihoods. The 5th Chapter, Second Section of the Constitution, declares the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, the sustainable management of resources and the prevention of pollution as areas of public interest. The establishment of a national system of protected areas is also declared of public interest in the Constitution.

- 2) A peace agreement has been signed between Ecuador and Peru ending 50 years of conflict along the Southern Amazonian border which has produced several armed clashes and permanent instability between these two countries as well as high levels of public spending on defence. The peace agreement frees the armed forces from their permanent presence in the conflict zone and the implementation of a national defence strategy. This may allow for the future involvement of the army in the management of Sangay National Park.
- 3) The Ministry for the Environment was established in early 1999 and has taken over the responsibilities of the INEFAN (Instituto Ecuatoriano Forestal y de Areas Naturales y Vida Silvestre). The Ministry is being developed as an institution that would respond to national priorities on environmental protection. A new decentralisation programme is being implemented to devolve more management responsibilities to the regions. Proposals for new legislation on forest and protected areas management are currently being circulated and discussed. The role and degree of involvement of the private sector in protected area management is one of the main issues of the proposals. The potential involvement of the private sector has raised questions about the compatibility of the interests of the private sector with those of biodiversity conservation.
- 4) In compliance with Article 6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the development of the National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS) began in May 1999. This is expected to give a framework for the integration of protected areas into the wider socio-economic realm of the country as the core of *in situ* conservation in Ecuador. The role of protected areas in land-use planning, environmental services valuation and rural development is expected to be dealt with within the NBS.
- 5) In June 1999 Congress approved a Law for the Environment (after 16 years of discussion). At the time of writing the Law had not been signed by the President but it is expected to be signed shortly. This Law will give the Ministry of the Environment a stronger role and increased authority in inter-institutional co-ordination and planning on issues relating to the environment. This will be a “stronger” law that makes an EIA compulsory before the commencement of any activity that may affect the environment.
- 6) A new Management Plan for the Sangay National Park was presented in October 1998 by INEFAN. The development of the plan was funded by the INEFAN/GEF-Biodiversity Project and involved a two year process of consultation and development of thematic consultancies that produced analysis and recommendation documents on issues that include wildlife (fauna and flora), land tenure, land-use, and socio-economic components.
- 7) The WWF/Fundación Natura Sangay Project (proyecto “Conservación de la Biodiversidad y Manejo Participativo del Parque Nacional Sangay”) is in full development and is working closely with communities that live in the buffer zone and inside Sangay National Park. This US\$ 1.5 million project is funded by the Dutch Cooperation Agency and will last until December 2001.

- 8) President Jamil Mahuad announced last month to the local authorities of the Chimborazo and Morona-Santiago Provinces (where the towns of Guamote and Macas are located respectively) that 2,000 million Sucres (approximately US\$ 200,000) were to be assigned for the conclusion of the Guamote-Macas road. The President is fulfilling a presidential campaign promise to the authorities and influential sectors of these two Provinces. The army engineers are expected to finish the road by December of 2000. This announcement from the President was unexpected as many Ecuadorians felt that given the current economic situation, there are other projects of higher priority for public spending.

Results of the Mission

a) Assessment of the Existing Portion of the Guamote-Macas Road

Some 8 km of the existing portion of the Guamote-Macas road crosses the World Heritage designated portion of the Sangay National Park. The true magnitude of the environmental damage caused by the construction of the Guamote-Macas road can only be assessed by an on-the-ground inspection of the road.

Harsh weather conditions during the site mission made inspection difficult, but allowed the mission team to observe the magnitude of landslides along the length of the existing road (approximately one landslide every 50 meters). The Army Engineer Corps personnel and machinery were observed cleaning up portions of the road blocked by landslides in order to get to the site where the last portion of the road will be built.

Millions of cubic meters of rocks and soil appear to be dislodged with every rain shower causing widespread destruction of vegetation cover and extensive silting of the Upano River (the whole track of the road follows the left margin of the River). These are the impacts of a road that has already been built. It is estimated that it will take decades before the slopes, which were cut seven years ago to build the road, stabilise and stop collapsing. In some areas, with more stable geological and soil characteristics, slopes have already stabilised and the process of natural regeneration of the vegetation cover has begun. In parts this process has allowed the growth of stable forests of "aliso" tree *Alnus acuminata* that effectively mask the recent movement of soils and landslides, and will surely give way to an ecological succession towards a more heterogeneous vegetation cover in the future. The stabilization dynamic of the road will surely have a heavy toll on human lives and property in the region.

Though only two houses were observed on the roadside, one of them inhabited by a family, the other empty, the whole area parallel to the road is in the hands of private owners. Many landowners possess ownership titles granted by the government colonization institution (IERAC) before Sangay National Park was created. Small abandoned fields can be seen that are rapidly being covered by secondary vegetation and very little ongoing agriculture or livestock husbandry can be observed. Private property extends two to three miles up-slope from the road and down-slope to the Upano River. The area is extremely steep, making almost any kind of agricultural activity - especially cattle breeding - unsustainable and a source of erosion.

The majority of landowners are likely to come back and put their properties into production once it is economically viable to do so, and the road has been completed and in use. The

returning population will most likely convert many hectares of primary and secondary old growth forest to agricultural use and extract wildlife resources from the National Park.

b) Assessment of the Planned Portion of the Guamote-Macas Road

Experts conclude that the remaining 12 km of the planned road will be the most vulnerable to landslides and erosion due to soil, slope and geological characteristics. Land is so fragile in some parts, that there are already landslides produced by its current use. The existing mule track has been used for the past four centuries to connect Macas with the highlands. All the surrounding lands of this portion are in the hands of individuals, although many do not hold legal titles. In many cases, illegal settlers have been working holdings for decades and are often in conflict with the absentee legal owners. The area is used by the inhabitants of the village of San Vicente (2,400m above sea level; 33 families) that plant corn and grass for livestock in the steep slopes of the Upano Valley in a slash-and-burn agriculture dynamic. The people in San Vicente cannot transport their goods to Macas, and so all their economic activities are for subsistence. Their access to Macas is hindered by the bad condition of the second half of the mule track, absence of bridges to cross several rivers and creeks, and the many landslides that occur in the eastern portion of the Guamote-Macas road that has been built for several years.

The completion of the road will open markets for their products, an element that will surely increase deforestation in the area.

The last part of this portion of the track, in proximity to Macas, is under the influence of the “9 de Octubre” community who sell their products in Macas. This is a bigger community than San Vicente (some 55 families) and more complicated to work with because of internal divisions, according to the WWF/Fundacion Natura project leader.

c. Management of other problems in the Sangay National Park

Oil exploration

There is no threat from oil exploration in the Sangay area as no oil company was interested in the concession which included the northern corner of the protected area.

Mining

There are no reports of mining inside or around the area.

Timber extraction

The army post at the entrance of the National Park in the highlands is effectively preventing any timber extraction from that sector of the Park, so the existing road is not currently providing a route for extracting resources. The community in this area (Atillo) is determined to protect local resources (wildlife, timber, fish from the lakes) from exploitation by outsiders. They have erected signs warning that all natural resources on their lands belong to the community and that extraction activities are prohibited. It appears that a similar situation exists among the highland communities of the Alao Sector further to the north. The community of San Vicente extracts fuel wood and timber for house construction and repair. There does not seem to be any major points of timber extraction as most of the communities

that live in the buffer zone of the Park are some distance from the National Park boundaries and sources of timber outside the Park.

Poaching

Poaching is a big issue along the eastern border of Sangay as many of the indigenous communities that live nearby have either depleted game stocks in forest remnants outside the Park, or have no legal access to forests for hunting. These communities make hunting excursions of several days into Sangay to hunt the big game they have traditionally used (tapirs, peccaries, bigger primates, deer, guans, curassows, etc.). The WWF/Fundación Natura project is addressing the issue and this report makes specific recommendations to deal more effectively with this problem.

Relationships with communities

Following many difficulties between the protected area staff and the local communities, the situation seems to have significantly improved and an environment of mutual trust, understanding and respect has developed between Sangay National Park staff and local communities. The relationship between people and protected areas in Ecuador has changed in the past few years and a much more productive relationship now exists. This change is due to the work of the Ministry of the Environment that should be commended for its efforts.

Threats to the World Heritage Site

The general situation of the Sangay National Park appears to be stable and the conservation status of the area is under no major threats, apart from the Guamote-Macas road. In fact, Sangay is well conserved over much of its area and the current situation is far better than many other protected areas in Ecuador. Even though the road affects no more than a fraction of the World Heritage site (2% to 5% of the entire area of the Park at most), it has the following characteristics:

- 1) The road physically cuts the Sangay area in two, reducing the ecological and biological viability of the World Heritage site.
- 2) The road is causing severe destruction of forest cover and the river system adjacent to the road. These impacts will persist for many decades and will be a permanent source of erosion and habitat destruction. The road and its environs will remain a serious barrier for the dispersal of many wildlife species.
- 3) The road will give access to colonisers that could result in increased deforestation over an area stretching an estimated 5 to 10 km on either side of the road. This intensity of deforestation will threaten the integrity of the World Heritage site. Although still manageable at present, human population will certainly increase and extraction of timber, non-timber forest products and wildlife will turn into a major management problem.
- 4) The road will have a high visual impact on the World Heritage site.

The construction of a road through a Protected Area, directly impacting on a World Heritage Site, is in violation of existing Protected Areas legislation in Ecuador, as well as legislation which demands the completion of an EIA prior to road construction. IUCN considers that the

construction of the Guamote-Macas Road sets a very negative precedent for protected areas and the conservation of biodiversity in Ecuador. It is also difficult to understand the technical and economic viability of this road, if an objective cost-benefit analysis takes into account the environmental costs (locally, regionally, nationally and globally) versus the amount of people that will benefit from its construction and operation.

Recommendations to the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee

The mission would like to propose that the Bureau recommends to the World Heritage Committee:

- 1) That Sangay National Park should remain on the List of World Heritage in Danger as the construction of the Guamote-Macas road is about to recommence. Construction activities as well as the completion of the road will have many direct and indirect impacts on the World Heritage site. In addition, it appears that an EIA will not be carried out as recommended repeatedly by the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee.
- 2) To write a letter to the Government of Ecuador requesting that all construction or rehabilitation activities on the road are halted until an emergency EIA is carried out. The EIA would: be carried out quickly; be transparent; contain the required instruments to monitor progress; and have the necessary powers to redirect building schedules and plans.
- 3) To write a letter to the Ministry of the Environment expressing its concern over the seriousness of the situation and requesting the Ministry's leadership in the urgent actions that should be taken to curb the damage.
- 4) To recommend the creation of an inter-institutional committee chaired by the Ministry of the Environment, to monitor the construction of the road, the implementation of the requested EIA, and any future actions to limit the damage caused by the construction of the road. Membership of such a committee should include representatives of UNESCO, IUCN Ecuadorian Members' Committee, WWF/Fundación Natura Sangay Project, Sangay area NGOs, local communities, Army Corps of Engineers, and the Ministry of Public Buildings.
- 5) That the existing Management Plan for the Sangay National Park specifically address the Guamote-Macas road and its present and future impacts. Specifically, the Management Plan should address: the magnitude of the problem; conflicts in land tenure; expansion of agricultural activities; and the increased extraction of natural resources the completion of the road will cause.
- 6) To call on bilateral and multilateral donors to fund the priority activities identified in the Sangay Management Plan, following the example of the Dutch Co-operation Agency. The following actions require urgent attention: 1) reduction of poaching through the management of hunting intensity in buffer zones; 2) development of alternative sources of income for local communities that alleviate poverty and reduce the need for deforestation and other unsustainable uses of resources; and 3) definition of property titles along the Guamote-Macas road to eliminate access by new colonists to zones where land ownership is unclear.

- 7) To distribute more widely the key recommendations of the Management Plan through the production of a brief version in non-technical language targeted at local authorities, communities and institutions. This will raise the awareness of the people with regard to the situation of the protected area, the proposed solutions and the different roles associated with the proposed activities.
- 8) The State Party should pursue the full involvement of the army in the control of encroachment, poaching and other resources extraction along the Guamote-Macas road, in support of the Sangay National Park staff.