LETTER FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

This year’s annual report holds special significance because 2020 brought on worldwide challenges of new magnitudes. At the time of writing this report in 2021, we still face these obstacles, but continue to find ways to adjust our efforts to achieve the conservation needed in the Amazon. In 2020, we had to temporarily close all of our biological stations while the COVID-19 pandemic raged and the lockdowns wreaked havoc on global and local economies, and on the lives of people whom we work closely with every day. Being a lean organization also meant that we had to seriously consider how we could weather this unprecedented global emergency.

But, if working in one of the most threatened areas of the natural world for over two decades has taught us one thing, it is that our supporters – you – always come through. Instead of seeing support to protect the Amazon Rainforest dwindle, which can sometimes feel out-of-sight out-of-mind for many people, we saw an incredible outpouring of help. You understood that without a healthy Amazon, we, as a species, cannot be healthy and thrive.

Thank you. You were – and continue to be – our glimmer of hope for the survival of this iconic forest.

Despite all of the challenges, we made some important strides for the Amazon this year. We helped establish four new conservation areas, provided governments and local communities with the tools and information needed to protect their natural resources, garnered data to help stop the expansion of deforestation, and even developed a new Wildlife Conservation Laboratory that will provide key data that may help prevent future pandemics.

2020 also marked our 20th anniversary – a proud and humbling milestone for any charitable organization, made even sweeter this year by what we’ve just been through. The pandemic has made clear the connections between the environment’s health, human health, social justice, and economic security. Our mission has never felt more urgent, and we will double down on our efforts to conserve even more of our shared planet.

Recognizing this, 2020 also saw the launch of our new holistic strategy that addresses the major needs for maintaining a healthy Amazon, today and in the future: protecting wild places, empowering people, and putting science and technology to work. But, we can only be as ambitious and stretch as far as our donor support will carry us. As we chart our course for the next twenty years, your loyal support will play a major role in our success and our ability to achieve a thriving Amazon together.

Thank you for standing by Amazon Conservation and protecting the greatest wild forest left on Earth. Now it’s time to get back to work building the healthy, sustainable, and just Amazon we all need.

Sincerely,

Jim Brumm
Chair of the Board of Directors

John Beavers
Executive Director

Jim Brumm
Chair of the Board of Directors
MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Established 4 new protected areas in the Amazon, safeguarding nearly 650,000 acres of forests from development and deforestation.

Supported 157 indigenous families in improving the sustainable management of their forests in key protected areas spanning 1.95 million acres spanning 1.95 million acres across the Bolivian and Peruvian Amazon.

Exposed over 2,500 major fires in real-time across over 5 million acres with data from our novel fire tracking app.

Partnered with local forest user organizations to improve the monitoring capacity of 12 current concessionaires, which better secured the protection of 440,500 acres of forests.

Exposed over 2,500 major fires in real-time across over 5 million acres with data from our novel fire tracking app.

Increased the capacity of government authorities to process 267 reports of illegal deforestation filed by community forest users in Peru.

Helped the Peruvian government stop 2 new fronts of illegal gold mining deforestation using our remote satellite monitoring technology.

Provided monitoring across 83% of the Amazon basin for deforestation and fires in real-time.

Helped community-based forest producers improve the monitoring, patrolling of, and protection of over 440,000 acres.

Trained 60 journalists in Bolivia with an innovative curriculum on how to report biodiversity and climate news.

Adapted our conservation programs to be held virtually to keep conservation efforts moving forward amid quarantine restrictions, training thousands of people through our 86 online events.

Increased the capacity of government authorities to process 267 reports of illegal deforestation filed by community forest users in Peru.

Supported 157 indigenous families in improving the sustainable management of their forests in key protected areas spanning 1.95 million acres spanning 1.95 million acres across the Bolivian and Peruvian Amazon.

Helped the Peruvian government stop 2 new fronts of illegal gold mining deforestation using our remote satellite monitoring technology.

The image to the left is a base map that shows the location of illegal gold mining along the Pariamanu River, in the southern Peruvian Amazon. We provide reports with maps like this one to the Peruvian government so they can take action on the ground against illegal deforestation.

Increased the capacity of government authorities to process 267 reports of illegal deforestation filed by community forest users in Peru.

Adapted our conservation programs to be held virtually to keep conservation efforts moving forward amid quarantine restrictions, training thousands of people through our 86 online events.

Reached 250,000 people in more than 20 countries through our first virtual AmazonTEC event.

Trained 60 journalists in Bolivia with an innovative curriculum on how to report biodiversity and climate news.
This year we witnessed how unchecked deforestation is bringing the Amazon closer to its “tipping point” where it will no longer be able to sustain its rainforest ecosystems. Nearly 5 million acres of primary forest were lost across the basin in 2020, continuing the dangerous spiral towards the tipping point. Although the global COVID-19 pandemic made our work on the ground more challenging, we were able to move our conservation efforts forward across our three principal strategic areas:

**PROTECTING WILD PLACES**

Safeguarding threatened ecosystems - and the wildlife and plant life that inhabit them - is at the core of everything we do. We work together with governments and communities to create, manage, and strengthen conservation areas that keep forests standing. Keeping these forests intact is essential to helping prevent species extinction, mitigating the effects of climate change, and providing the vital natural resources for all who call these forests home.

**EMPOWERING PEOPLE**

People are the key to ensuring the long-term conservation of nature. That’s why we partner with local communities, indigenous groups, governments, and other NGOs to build sustainable and fire-free economic alternatives that reduce dependence on practices that degrade and destroy forests. We also empower local people to protect their lands from environmental crimes through improving their ability to apply the law and employing game-changing satellite and drone technology that helps them defend their resources in a safer, more cost-effective way.

**PUTTING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO WORK**

Science is in our DNA. Our network of Conservation Hubs, located along the altitudinal gradient where the Andes Mountains meet the Amazon Rainforest, are living laboratories where we carry out and host robust scientific research as well as facilitate learning opportunities for the next generation of conservationists. We also pilot and employ the latest technology on the ground to enhance forest conservation locally and across the Amazon.

The next pages highlight how these mutually reinforcing innovative approaches made a difference for the Amazon in 2020.
PROTECT WILD PLACES

PROTECTING OVER 650,000 ACRES OF FORESTS IN BOLIVIA
Porvenir and Puerto Rico Conservation Areas

By working closely with local communities and governments, we helped establish four new protected areas in 2020. Two areas in Bolivia and two in Peru together safeguard over 650,000 acres of irreplaceable wild places.

In Bolivia, we supported the establishment of the Puerto Rico and Porvenir conservation areas - protecting 513,000 and 78,000 acres respectively - by providing the legal and technical support needed by local communities and municipal governments to officially declare these areas.

Puerto Rico Conservation Area
Declaration of this vast swath of forest helps connect three important conservation areas in Bolivia - Manuripi-Heath National Reserve, Multilingual Indigenous Territory (TIM II), and the Santa Rosa del Abuná conservation area, which we helped establish in 2017. With the addition of the new Puerto Rico conservation area, this biodiversity corridor now covers nearly 1.5 million acres. This region includes the territories of 20 native communities, many of them members of the Tacana indigenous people who rely on the forests for their livelihoods. Iconic species that benefit from the creation of this massive biological corridor include the giant armadillo, giant anteater, jaguar, crested eagle, the endangered Coelfid's monkey, and the South American tapir.

Porvenir Conservation Area
This new protected area will ensure the health of these very productive forests with the development of a long-term plan to help communities sustainably manage their natural resources, primarily Brazil nuts and açaí berries. The area is home to hundreds of families, more than 1,000 species of plants, and more than 800 species of vertebrates. Its proximity to the region’s urban center, Cobija, combined with its beauty and biological diversity, provides great ecotourism potential.

To be able to establish these areas during the global pandemic, we had to adapt our approach - relying more heavily on our GIS and remote sensing technology to produce the ecological information the government required to declare these areas. We also stepped up to help communities get access to and participate in online meetings so that their voices could be heard throughout the process.

All in all, these types of large-scale conservation achievements are crucial for keeping the Amazon from reaching its tipping point. By supporting a sustainable forest-based economy and creating the network of interconnected protected areas needed to maintain climate resilience, healthy habitats for species, and functional ecosystems that provide the goods and services vital for our survival, we can achieve a thriving Amazon.
We helped establish two new protected areas to safeguard nearly 50,000 acres from deforestation and unsustainable development in one of the most biodiverse areas in the Peruvian Amazon. Señor de la Cumbre now protects 7,800 acres of forest in Madre de Dios, an area heavily affected by deforestation from illegal gold mining. The second supports indigenous communities in the Cusco region, where we helped establish the Ccollasuyo Agrobiodiversity Zone. This innovative type of protected area focuses on rescuing ancient agricultural practices capable of growing a wide variety of native crops sustainably. One of the first of its kind in the country, this area conserves over 35,000 acres of forest and the unique species that inhabit it.

Señor de la Cumbre
Small but mighty, this conservation area contains highly-biodiverse forests, important water sources, and has a high tourism potential thanks to its abundant wildlife. Due to its particular habitat and climate, Señor de la Cumbre is inhabited by several threatened species as well as species endemic to Peru, such as the saddle-back tamarin. To help protect this vital area and its important species, we provided the local community and government with the continuous legal and technical support needed, throughout the arduous 8-year process, to achieve its declaration.

The establishment of Señor de la Cumbre also helps advance our larger conservation strategy in the Manu-Madidi Conservation Corridor. By creating a mosaic of conservation areas like this one between Manu National Park in Peru and Madidi National Park in Bolivia – the two most biodiverse national parks in the world – we are strengthening habitat connectivity so that wildlife have the needed space to move across uninterrupted swaths of land. Not only that, but bridging large tracts of forest also builds greater climate resilience and adaptation capacity into the region’s forest and aquatic ecosystems.

Ccollasuyo Agrobiodiversity Zone
Another conservation success was the establishment of the Ccollasuyo Agrobiodiversity Zone. This area, located in the Peruvian province of Quispicanchi, is home to a hundred indigenous Quechua families who cultivate more than 100 varieties of native potatoes, 12 types of native corn, and unique root vegetables such as oca, mashua, olluco, quinoa, kiwicha and tarwi. For generations, the families of Ccollasuyo have continued to apply their ancient practices to grow these plants that are important markers of the world’s agricultural genetic diversity.

Complementing the conservation of this region, we also began to help a neighboring Quechua community, Marcapata Ccollana, to establish a conservation area that will protect an additional 50,000 acres. Combined, these agrobiodiversity zones and conservation areas help mitigate the effects of climate change in a unique way by promoting and preserving ancestral forest-friendly and climate-resilient farming practices.
2020 marked an important 5-year milestone in our partnership with the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) to build government and community capacity for real-time deforestation monitoring and to combat illegal deforestation in Peru.

Building on the trust and expertise we established over our 20-year history, we helped the forest service, prosecutors, and police agencies improve their ability to act on illegal deforestation by helping them create the National System for Monitoring and Control, based on our high-tech, real-time, and cost-effective forest monitoring. The past five years have seen the incredible growth of this system—called Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project (MAAP)—which now provides a functional real-time satellite monitoring system not only to Peru but to 83% of the Amazon basin.

In Peru, the game-changing technology employed by MAAP supported the government in crafting Operation Mercury in 2019, which launched a highly-successful crackdown on illegal gold mining deforestation in the region of La Pampa. This year, we continued monitoring the long-term success of the operation, showing the good news that, even a year after, there was still a 78% reduction in gold mining deforestation. Moreover, we identified two “leakage points” of gold mining, that is, instances where gold miners moved their illegal operations to other neighboring areas. By alerting the authorities of these new deforestation cases in real-time, they were able to stop the unlawful activities, limiting the destruction they could have caused.

At the same time, we helped forest concessionaires and other local community groups more effectively patrol and monitor their territories by using satellites, drones, and smartphone apps. We then provided them with the legal tools needed to submit the evidence to the government through the newly-implemented National System, thus enabling them to have a more effective channel to report illegal encroachment and deforestation.

This work laid the foundation for a new partnership with USAID—now in its second year—to help us take forest governance to scale by strengthening the government’s ability to take action across the entire Peruvian Amazon, and empowering hundreds of local people to vastly improve the protection of their forests using the latest in cutting-edge technologies.

The photo above is a satellite image of the Nanay River in the Amazonian forests of northern Peru. It is a tributary of the Amazon River. The photo to the left shows a tract of Amazonian forest in Pariamanu, Peru devastated by illegal gold mining. The unmanaged and illegal gold mining extraction process leaves behind toxic fumes and mercury-contaminated lands and rivers.
In 2020 our Alliance of sister organizations contributed to over 80 virtual events in the United States, Bolivia, and Peru, helping keep conservation efforts moving forward even amid the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adapting our in-person work into a virtual format also came with some benefits: we were able to more efficiently and quickly deliver capacity-building workshops to a wide variety of stakeholders—from local community members participating in our drone training program to international researchers monitoring deforestation from space—as well as expand access for thousands of people.

For instance, to help educate the press and improve their reporting on environmental, biodiversity, and climate news, we developed a rigorous training curriculum and virtual workshop for Bolivian journalists. Our initiative was met with high interest. Of the 140 journalists who applied from a wide variety of news and media organizations, sixty were ultimately selected for the training and will have a chance to visit the Amazon to help tell the stories of those who live there. We aim to expand the program to include journalists from other Amazonian countries and the United States in a future regional curriculum. In Peru, we also converted our annual AmazonTEC conference into a virtual forum that brought together policymakers, technology experts, and forest guardians to discuss how technology can advance environmental policies. With no physical location restrictions, our 5-webinar AmazonTEC event reached over 250,000 people in 20 countries digitally, with presentations from renowned speakers from NASA, USAID, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the governments of Peru, Colombia, Norway, and more.

Virtual events like these were crucial for us to adapt to the challenges brought on by the pandemic as they enabled us to connect with local communities, indigenous groups, policymakers, the media, and other stakeholders in a new way to continue to advance our conservation efforts together.

AmazonTEC is a premier forum for discussing science and technology’s connection to policy and governance in the Amazon. Developed by Amazon Conservation’s Peruvian sister organization Conservación Amazonía – ACCA, AmazonTEC brings together forest users, technology experts, NGOs, governments, and other stakeholders in a forum to discuss the use of cutting-edge technology (satellites, mobile apps, drones, and more) in the advancement of public policy for environmental protection efforts in the Amazon. This year due to the pandemic restrictions it was held virtually.

The fourth of five sessions of the annual AmazonTEC event, titled “Towards a Regional Agenda for Action in the Amazon” considered the challenges facing the Amazon. Panelists discussed the role of science and technology in advancing its protection and brainstormed the necessities for an actionable agenda for the region.

EMPOWER PEOPLE

ADAPTING TO A NEW REALITY: ADVANCING CONSERVATION VIRTUALLY

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Thanks to the support of Euroclima+ and many others, this year marked two years of working in partnership with local and indigenous communities in Bolivia and Peru to make the management of their forest resources climate-smart across almost 2 million acres of protected areas. This project built their capacity to adapt to changes in climate while taking key steps to build the region’s bioeconomy.

As of 2020, we supported 242 people - a third of whom were women - to improve the sustainable production of Brazil nuts and acai berries, the two main forest products that grow in this part of the Amazon. To achieve this, we first helped communities assess and understand the state and vulnerability of their resources in the face of extreme weather events - like flooding and drought - to plan the best way to manage their forests and their production under climate change. A major part of our efforts have focused on helping them increase the added value of their forest-based products so that a larger share of the income generated would stay in the community.

One example from this year is the new acai processing plant that we helped the local community of Santa Rosa del Abuná build in Bolivia. The plant now enables them to extract pulp from this fragile berry that spoils in a matter of days, package it, and store it under refrigeration. Providing the community the capacity to process berries and not just sell the raw product has improved their local market power and profits, while providing them an incentive for keeping their forest healthy. Along with increasing the income from the community’s acai harvest, we also are helping them diversify and increase their income through developing the production and organic certification of their Brazil nut harvest as well.

Based on the results of this work, we are now prepared to replicate this model and scale it across the Amazonian forests of Bolivia and Peru.
Our Los Amigos Biological Station has long been at the center of cutting-edge scientific research in the Amazon. Now we are taking that role one step further. This year, we launched a new Wildlife Conservation Laboratory there to carry out wildlife health and biodiversity monitoring using the latest technology. This laboratory will be capable of carrying out advanced wildlife tracking, conservation genomics, safe pathogen screening, and toxicology monitoring of key species in the Amazon. This targeted biodiversity monitoring will enable us to gather vital data on zoonotic diseases and transmission risks in the region, generating the information government health agencies need to protect local people - and, in our globalized world, people everywhere - from diseases that cross the human-wildlife interface.

A conservation technology “makerspace” for inventing new technologies and innovating current ones is also being created at the laboratory. This year researchers began working on a customized wildlife GPS tracking device much more lightweight, low-cost, and long-lasting than the ones currently in existence. The device takes advantage of a new long-range network of wildlife microchip reading stations, enabling scientists to track wildlife movement in a similar way that toll roads track cars through the EZ-Pass system. The data produced through this effort will be transformational for understanding how wildlife populations are adapting to climate change.

This new laboratory at Los Amigos, made possible thanks to the support of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, is the first step towards a decentralized and locally based One Health laboratory network, for performing routine wildlife health assessments and in-country pathogen screening that could be replicated in rainforest countries around the world. To foster this, screening systems, protocols, and analyses will be developed to prioritize affordability and ease-of-use.
OUR NOVEL FIRE MONITORING APP DETECTED 2,500 MAJOR FIRES IN THE AMAZON IN 2020

Following 2019’s intense fire season in the Amazon that made international headlines, we recorded an even more severe year of fires in 2020, with over 5 million acres impacted.

Thanks to the support of our donors, in the months preceding the fire season we improved and relaunched our Amazon real-time fire monitoring app, hosted by Google Earth Engine. This proved to be an effective and accessible new tool to detect major fires in real-time throughout the fire season.

By combining aerosol emissions data with traditional fire alerts, we can now create comprehensive maps that identify the major fires in the Amazon on a daily basis. Through our app, we identified the first major fire of 2020 on May 28, in the Mato Grosso state in Brazil, and throughout the season documented over 2,500 major fires affecting forests mainly in Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru.

Based on our extensive analysis, we determined that, like in 2019, the majority of the burning this year took place in Brazil, in areas that had been recently deforested for agricultural and cattle-ranching purposes. In contrast, the main source of fires in the Bolivian Amazon took place in standing forests, especially in the dry forests of the Chiquitania. The vast majority of the fires across Bolivia, Brazil, and Peru were identified to be likely human-caused and illegal, in violation of government-implemented fire management regulations and moratoriums.

Being able to produce this information in real-time - as the fires began burning - allowed us to provide the government, local communities, and the media with the precise data needed to take action on the ground. This is one of the many ways we are expanding our fire management work, in addition to furthering fire prevention efforts by promoting fire-free, sustainable development in the region.

“This fire season was even more severe than 2019, though last year was more widely publicized.”
- Dr. Matt Finer, our Senior Research Specialist & Director of MAAP

When fires burn, they emit gases and aerosols. The Sentinel-5P satellite from the European Space Agency detects these aerosol emissions. The major feature of our fire tracker app is the user-friendly and real-time identification of major fires across the Amazon, based on these emissions. The app also cross-references commonly-used “fire alerts,” which are satellite-based data of temperature anomalies.

Thus, we combine data from the atmosphere (aerosol) with data from the ground (temperature) to pinpoint the source of major fires across the entire Amazon.

Since the data updates daily and is not impacted by clouds, real-time monitoring is possible, and we are able to track these fires efficiently, reliably, and in a cost-effective manner.
Our donors and supporters went above and beyond in 2020 to make our conservation work possible. We are eternally grateful for each and every one of them, whose generosity, especially during the pandemic, is helping us make strides towards a thriving Amazon. The changemakers below (listed alphabetically) contributed $100 and above to protect wild places, empower people, and put science and technology to work for conservation.
Financials

We are grateful for the generous support we have received this year and are especially humbled at those who chose to make a contribution during this global health pandemic. In the face of this historically difficult year across the globe, your compassion, resilience and caring has helped us keep fighting to protect our planet.

Your investment in our work is empowering local people, protecting some of the last wild places on Earth, and driving the use of science and technology that underpins our work. As you’ll see here, we are a lean organization, with only a small portion of contributions being used to support the operations needed to make our conservation work on the ground possible. We are also proud to note that our finances, continually earning top ratings by the most respected charity watchdogs (see bottom right). Your investment is much appreciated and making a real impact in the Amazon.

REVENUE AND SUPPORT

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85% of our funds go toward our conservation solutions.

Only 5% goes towards management, core infrastructure, and fundraising combined. The industry standard is 20%.* Your donations go further with us.

*Please note that expenses appear larger than the organization’s 2020 income due to Amazon Conservation being awarded multi-year grants that fund activities in previous years they are received. For our complete audited financial information, please see our webpage at www.amazonconservation.org/about/financials.html. Please contact info@amazonconservation.org if you have any questions.

Acknowledgements

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: John Beavers

HONORARY BOARD MEMBERS

SARAH DUPONT
Honorary Board Member
Founder, Amazon Aid Foundation
Charlottesville, VA

KATHY RUTTENBERG
Honorary Board Member
Charlottesville, VA

*Affiliations are for identification purposes only.

PROGRAM EXPENSES

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: John Beavers

TOTAL STAFF: 106 (among all Amazon Conservation’s Alliance of sister organizations, listed below)

OFFICES

Washington, D.C., USA (Amazon Conservation): 11 staff
  • Lima, Peru (Conservación Amazonía-ACEAA): 17 staff
  • Cusco, Peru (Conservación Amazonía-ACEAA): 15 staff
  • Puerto Maldonado, Peru (Amazon Journeys’ ecolodge): 12 staff
  • Madre de Dios, Peru (Conservación Amazonía-ACEAA) (includes Los Amigos): 26 staff
  • La Paz, Bolivia (Conservación Amazonía-ACEAA): 19 staff
  • Cobija, Bolivia (Conservación Amazonía-ACEAA): 6 staff

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

Page 1: Front Cover, Back Cover, and Page 2: Pedro Laguna
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Page 10: [top] Ronald Catpo, [vegetables] Unknown
Page 12: Monitoring of the Amazonian Project
Page 14: [infographic] Maria Teresa Galindo
Page 16: Ana Carolina de Lima
Page 17: Zander Nasikson
Page 20: Monitoring of the Amazonian Project