

A large, dark silhouette of a crane hook hangs from above, dominating the right side of the image. The background shows a wide river reflecting the bright light of a setting or rising sun, creating a shimmering path of light across the water. The sky is a mix of light and dark clouds. In the distance, some small figures of people and structures are visible along the riverbank.

THE AMAZON UNDER THREAT: DAMMING THE MADEIRA

The Amazon is under threat. The Brazilian government is planning to build two massive dams on one of the Amazon's most important tributaries, the Madeira River. The projects would threaten the river's unique biodiversity, destroying habitat for fish, dolphins, parrots and a range of mammal species, and would affect the land and livelihoods of thousands of river bank dwellers and indigenous people. The Madeira River and the array of life it supports could be severely affected. But it is not too late. With your help we can show the Brazilian government that the rivers of Amazonia are worth protecting.

THE MADEIRA RIVER: ASSAULT ON EDEN

Located in the state of Rondônia, the Madeira River is one of the principal tributaries of the Amazon, with its basin covering about one-quarter of the Brazilian Amazon. The river is rich in sediments it carries from the Andes. The region is also a treasure trove of biodiversity. The Madeira supports the life of an estimated 750 fish species, 800 bird species, and other endangered rainforest wildlife, and is home to rubber tappers, Brazil nut gatherers, and fishermen.

In the 1980's, the state of Rondônia was devastated as a result of the Polonoroeste colonization project—financed by the World Bank—which resulted in the destruction of more than 25% of its forests over a 10-year period. The Madeira project will further contribute to the fragmentation of Rondônia's ecosystems and to the clearing of vast areas of the region's remaining forests.

DAM PLANS

Two huge hydroelectric dams are planned for construction on the Madeira River in the Brazilian

Amazon—Santo Antonio (installed generating capacity 3,150 MW) and Jirau (installed capacity 3,300 MW) - at a total cost of between US\$6.5 and \$ 8.7 billion. Construction of these projects—plus two additional dams upstream—would, according to the projects' backers, open a 4,200 km industrial waterway for barge passage, permitting transport of soybeans, timber, and minerals to Atlantic and Pacific ports. The Brazilian government plans to offer the project to private investors in June or July, 2006, if it gets the OK from environmental licensing agencies.

BIODIVERSITY AT RISK

The dams will seriously affect migratory fish and other aquatic species on the Madeira. Several species of large catfish migrate some 4,500 km each year to the upper Madeira to reproduce. Construction of the dams will block these migration routes, affecting the survival of the catfish.

But it is not only aquatic species that are threatened. Thirty-three endangered mammal species are found in the region where the dams would be built. Among these are the Spotted Jaguar, Giant Anteater, Giant

Armadillo, and Giant Otter. Their habitat is under threat. And ornithologists consider the Madeira region one of the world’s premier bird habitats. Among the unique features of the region to be flooded by the dam are barreiros, or exposed riverbanks, where hundreds of parrots flock to eat earth which is vital to their digestive process.

Protected areas, including a reserve used by people who extract natural forest products, will be flooded by the dams.

IIRSA: RIVERS INC

The projects are the cornerstone of the Brazil-Bolivia-Peru hub of the Initiative for the Integration of South American Infrastructure, or IIRSA. IIRSA is a blueprint for 335 large-scale infrastructure projects being proposed by the governments of South America, and supported by the Inter-American Development Bank, the Andean Development Corporation, and Brazil’s National Bank for Economic and Social Development.

The philosophy behind IIRSA is that the continent’s economic development has lagged as a result of what are seen as geographic obstacles, which must be surmounted. These “obstacles” are the Amazon, the Pantanal wetlands, Chaco savannas, and the Andes Mountains, where most of the continent’s cultural and biological diversity is found. A key component of IIRSA is the plan to inter-connect South America’s major river systems, creating a vast inland canal linking the Caribbean to the South Atlantic, via the Orinoco, Amazonas, Madeira, Paraguay, and Paraná Rivers. The environmental impacts of such an audacious scheme could be unprecedented.

CLEARING THE RAINFOREST TO FATTEN CHICKENS AND LIVESTOCK

The project’s proponents say it will not only generate electricity, but will also provide an opportunity for the expansion of soy monocultures in the Amazon rainforest and adjacent savannas by lowering the cost of transporting soybeans to Europe and China, where soybeans are used to feed chickens, pigs, and other livestock. Soy monocultures are currently one of the principal causes of deforestation in Amazonia. According to IIRSA, the project could increase the area cultivated in soy by seven million hectares (27,000 square miles) in the Brazilian rainforest and savannas and affect a similar-sized area in Bolivia.

ADEUS, RIO MADEIRA

According to the project EIA, some 3,000 people will be forced to move from their homes, although judging from past dam projects in Brazil, this number is likely to be an underestimate. The

decline in fisheries will seriously affect commercial and subsistence fishermen. Thousands of people living downstream will face declining crop yields as a result of the loss of the annual deposition of fertile silt on the flood plains.

The Karitiana, Karipuna, and Uru-eu-Wau-Wau indigenous groups will be affected by thousands of migrants arriving in search of work on construction crews.

Public health impacts in a region where malaria and other tropical diseases are endemic are likely to be substantial, with stagnant pools of water providing breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other disease-carrying insects.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR LIFE IN THE MADEIRA RIVER BASIN

Brazil’s Mines and Energy Ministry is publicly pressuring environmental licensing authorities to grant approval for the projects by May of this year. However, civil society networks are organizing meetings in the region to alert the public about the projects’ impacts. Several groups, including IRN, are facilitating independent technical analyses of the EIA



IIRSA RIVER INTERLINKING SCHEME

to help ensure informed decisions can be made regarding the project. And, the members of the Brazilian NGO Forum’s Energy Work Group are actively promoting energy alternatives, such as wind generation and increased energy efficiency. Among the most active groups are Foren (the Rondônia Energy Forum), the Dam-Affected Peoples’ Movement (MAB), and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT).

GET INVOLVED!

Send an e-mail to President Lula telling him that the Madeira River is too valuable a treasure to dam!

Visit the webpage <http://www.planalto.gov.br/falepr/exec/index.cfm?acao=mail.formulario> and send Lula your message.

Contact organizations fighting the Madeira dams!

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