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The Past, Present and the Future of
the Amazon

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The Hidden Cost: Environmental Devastation and Human Suffering

In the heart of the Amazon rainforest, an environmental crisis unfolds that affects both the land and the people who call it home. This is not just a story about oil drilling or corporate greed; it's about the silent toll that pollution and environmental degradation have on communities.

The Amazon, often called the "lungs of the Earth," is one of the most biodiverse places on the planet. It is home to countless species of animals, plants, and Indigenous communities who have lived in the forest for centuries. The forest's health is critical not just to the local communities but to the entire planet. It absorbs carbon, stabilizes the climate, and provides oxygen to the world.

However, this paradise is being slowly poisoned by oil extraction. For decades, companies have drilled into the forest's depths, extracting oil with little regard for the environment. Instead of taking measures to protect the land, the companies have left behind waste pits, chemical runoff, and devastated ecosystems.

Source: BBC Science Focus Magazine



The pollution has seeped into rivers, poisoning water sources, and leaving the land barren. The once-rich biodiversity is fading, with countless species now struggling to survive in this toxic environment.

In areas heavily impacted by oil operations, the rivers, which once provided clean drinking water, have become contaminated with oil. The toxic runoff from drilling operations seeps into the water, making it undrinkable. Communities that depend on these rivers for survival face a stark reality: the lifeblood of the forest is now a source of harm.

For local people, this means increased health problems. Skin rashes, respiratory issues, and gastrointestinal diseases have become common. The people who once thrived in the forest are now battling illnesses that are linked directly to pollution. Children, in particular, are most vulnerable to the toxic exposure. The chemicals in the water and air cause long-term damage to their developing bodies, leading to a rise in cancer and birth defects in the affected regions.

For many Indigenous communities, the forest is not just a home—it is their cultural identity. Their traditions, stories, and way of life are tied to the land they live on. But as the forest is destroyed, so too is their connection to their heritage. The loss of their ancestral lands means the loss of their identity.

While some have tried to speak out, the fight for justice remains uphill. Legal battles are often drawn out, and many of the companies responsible for the damage are powerful enough to avoid accountability. Despite this, the people who live in the affected areas continue to resist, organizing protests and spreading awareness of the destruction happening to their land.

The damage inflicted on the Amazon is not just an isolated incident—it's a global issue. The degradation of the environment impacts everyone. The Amazon plays a critical role in regulating the global climate. Its destruction accelerates global warming and contributes to biodiversity loss, which affects ecosystems around the world.

The situation demands immediate action. The health of the Amazon is inextricably linked to the health of the planet. The time to act is now.

**Articles written and edited by: Pavla Faltová
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A Wounded Forest: Toxic Legacy in the Ecuadorian Amazon



Source: Green is the New Black



In the northeastern Ecuadorian Amazon, communities continue to live amid a devastating environmental disaster. For decades, massive oil extraction left behind hundreds of toxic waste pits, contaminated rivers, and damaged ecosystems. Though the drills have long gone silent, the toxic legacy lives on—both in the land and in the lives of those who depend on it.

In the decades between 1964 and 1992, extractive operations deliberately dumped more than 16 billion gallons of toxic wastewater into rivers and streams. More than 350 oil wells were drilled, and over 1,000 waste pits were left unlined and uncovered—leaching toxins into surrounding areas. This reckless disposal was done to cut costs, with full knowledge of its consequences.

These practices violated both industry norms and Ecuadorian environmental laws. Many of the pits were simply covered with palm fronds and soil to mask the damage. But the pollution didn't stay hidden—it entered the water, the soil, and the bodies of people who lived nearby.

Health and Human Rights Crisis

This contamination has triggered a public health crisis. Local communities have seen increased rates of cancer, birth defects, miscarriages, and skin diseases. Rivers that once provided drinking water and food now carry poison. Yet, for many communities, these remain the only available sources.

Residents have built rainwater catchment systems and community health workshops in an effort to survive. However, with no formal clean-up of the contaminated sites, these are only temporary solutions.

In 2011, after nearly two decades of litigation, an Ecuadorian court ruled in favor of the affected communities and ordered \$9.5 billion in damages to be paid for environmental remediation. But that compensation was never delivered. The case continues internationally as plaintiffs pursue justice in Canada, Brazil, and Argentina—where the responsible company still holds assets.

Meanwhile, those living in the Amazon have become global advocates, using their story to push for corporate accountability and environmental justice on an international scale. Their voices have reached the United Nations, human rights organizations, and climate justice platforms.

Source: The New York Times



The Present is Still Toxic

The contamination persists today. Satellite images and field visits confirm that hundreds of waste pits remain open, seeping into groundwater and vegetation. The clean-up never happened.

Amazonian communities continue to live in daily contact with oil sludge, flaring gas fields, and poisoned rivers. Yet they are not passive victims. They are organizers, educators, and environmental defenders.



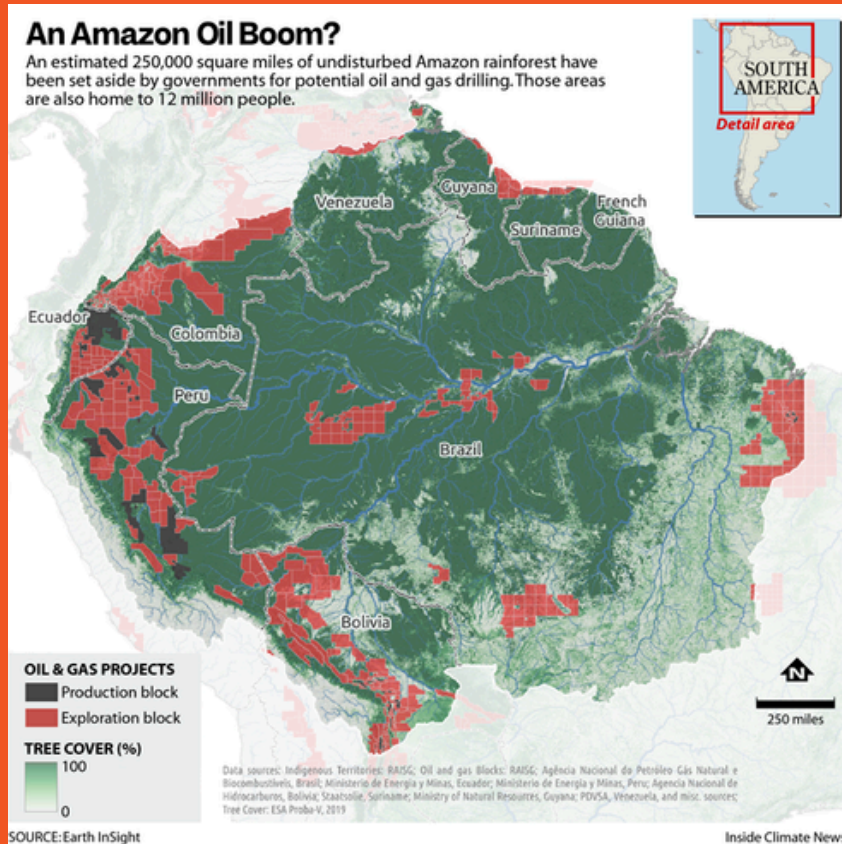
Source: Peoples Dispatch

The Amazon rainforest plays a critical role in climate regulation, biodiversity, and the survival of Indigenous cultures. The region's destruction is not an isolated event—it affects the global climate and ecological balance.

Those standing up for justice in Ecuador are not only defending their territory—they are defending one of the planet's last great lungs. As deforestation and fossil fuel extraction continue worldwide, their resistance is a call to action for us all.

The people of the Ecuadorian Amazon have endured an environmental crime with lasting impacts. They continue to fight not only for clean water and land but for truth, healing, and accountability. Their struggle reminds us that justice must reach even the most remote corners of the world—and that the survival of the Amazon is a shared responsibility.

Brazil's Oil Ambitions at the Edge of the Amazon: Promise and Peril



Source: Inside Climate News

In early 2025, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva reignited a national and international debate by supporting exploratory oil drilling near the mouth of the Amazon River. The initiative, led by the state-run oil giant Petrobras, targets the Equatorial Margin—a vast offshore area stretching across approximately 350,000 square kilometers off Brazil's northern coast. With estimates suggesting potential reserves of up to 10 billion barrels of oil, the project could transform Brazil's energy landscape.

President Lula argues that tapping into these reserves is essential for financing Brazil's ambitious transition to renewable energy. With wind and solar capacity on the rise and Brazil aiming to meet global climate commitments, he frames the project not as a contradiction, but as a means to an end—securing short-term revenue to fuel long-term sustainability. "We are not abandoning our environmental commitments," Lula said in January, "but we must also ensure that Brazil has the resources to lead a just energy transition."

However, environmentalists, scientists, and Indigenous advocates have sounded the alarm. The mouth of the Amazon River is not only a fragile ecosystem but also a crucial biodiversity hotspot. It hosts coral reefs, manatees, turtles, and countless fish species, many of which remain undocumented. Environmental groups like Greenpeace and Instituto Socioambiental warn that any drilling in this sensitive region could cause irreversible damage. Oil spills, even small ones, could devastate marine and coastal ecosystems, and would be especially difficult to contain given the complex ocean currents and seasonal flooding in the area.

In May 2024, Brazil's environmental agency IBAMA denied Petrobras's initial request for a license to drill in the region, citing "insufficient data on potential environmental risks." Yet pressure has mounted since then, with Petrobras submitting revised plans and increased political backing. Lula's stance has sparked criticism from both domestic and international actors who point to a growing contradiction between his environmental rhetoric and fossil fuel expansion.



Source: OSV News



Source: Plena Mata

Traditional communities and Indigenous peoples living in the region are also voicing concerns. Many depend on the Amazon's riverine ecosystems for fishing, agriculture, and cultural practices. Activists fear that oil development could not only threaten their livelihoods but also undermine land rights and displace vulnerable populations.

The global context adds another layer of complexity. As the world seeks to limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, expanding fossil fuel extraction remains highly controversial. Critics argue that investing in new oil infrastructure now risks creating "stranded assets" in the near future, as climate policies tighten and demand for oil declines.



Source: New Scientist

Despite this, supporters of the project see Brazil as merely leveraging its natural resources like other oil-producing nations. They argue that developing countries should not be penalized for seeking economic growth and energy security—especially when much of the historic responsibility for climate change lies with wealthier nations.

Ultimately, the debate over oil drilling in Brazil's Equatorial Margin highlights the tension between short-term economic gains and long-term environmental stewardship. As pressure mounts from both sides, the path forward will require transparent decision-making, rigorous environmental assessments, and meaningful engagement with local communities. Whether Brazil can balance these competing interests without sacrificing its ecological heritage remains to be seen.

Lake Maracaibo: Neglect and indifference in Venezuela



Lake Maracaibo is a semi-closed salty bay that feeds into the Gulf of Venezuela, which merges into the Caribbean Sea. The great estuary was once a commercially valuable fishery, but that was a resource Venezuela was ready and willing to sacrifice in order to make Maracaibo one of the most productive oil fields in the world. At its height, more than 450 active wells pumped oil to the lake's surface, which was regularly crisscrossed by oil tankers, barges and maintenance boats.

Lake Maracaibo is also a poster child for the economic and environmental collapse that consistently has followed in the wake of the global wave of extractive industry boom, bust and abandonment which has impacted rural communities and ecosystems in the industrial age — whether it be in the played out goldmines or fracked out communities of the American West; the shuttered copper, zinc, and lead smelting plants of the Peruvian Andes; the toxic mine waste tailings ponds along the Rio Doce of Brazil; or the oil soaked and degraded rainforests of Ecuador.

For nearly a century, the petroleum deposits beneath giant Lake Maracaibo served as a cash cow for successive Venezuelan governments. In return, especially in the years since the industry was brought fully under state control by former President Hugo Chavez, it has received little back but neglect.

Today, the 13,200 square kilometer (5,097 square mile) body of water, a graveyard for everything from abandoned pipeline and tires to dreams of Venezuelan prosperity, stands as an emblem of a richly endowed resource nation descending into disarray. Even by the standards of a country as blessed with resource wealth as Venezuela, the Maracaibo basin is a marvel. It has been producing oil for a century, ponying up nearly 43 billion barrels so far. With 19 billion barrels of proven reserves remaining -- more than the total proven reserves for either Brazil or Mexico -- the lake could be providing greater relief to the troubled Venezuela.



Source: ANCA 24 Canada



In 2006, three years after Chavez proclaimed the oil sector securely back under state control, 1.2 million barrels a day was pumped from the Maracaibo basin. But with a large share of proceeds diverted from maintenance and reinvestment to social programs -- gasoline is priced at just 6 cents a gallon, costing PDVSA \$15 billion a year -- output from the Maracaibo basin had slumped to 745,164 barrels a day by 2014, according to oil ministry figures. That amounts to \$8 billion in foregone revenue.

At the same time, the lake has degenerated into a stew of contaminants that include sulphide, fluoride, kjeldahl nitrogen, detergents, residential chlorine and fecal coliform, according to the website of the Institute for the Control and Conservation of Lake Maracaibo, or ICLAM, a Venezuela government entity created in 1981 and charged with care of the lake.



From the deck of a PDVSA service boat, can be seen hundreds of rigs dot the horizon, some idle and others extracting their bounty at a leisurely pace. Oil saturated tree limbs float by. The water is speckled in duckweed, which can choke both the ecosystem and small motorboats.

Twenty-five thousand kilometers of oil and gas pipeline criss-crosses the lake bottom, much of it corroded and leaky. Oil leaching from this underwater labyrinth settles on the surface, looking like vast puddles of motor oil in a driveway after a rainfall.

PDVSA claims that the long-term leakage of crude is the result of “sabotage” to the pipes, though the company offered little evidence for such a claim. While the state run oil company openly admitted to the ongoing daily Lake Maracaibo spills, it also assured journalists and the public that the situation is totally under control.

Experts and the affected communities around Lake Maracaibo note that no serious oil collection effort or bioremediation measures have been undertaken in response to the daily spills. It also seems likely that PDVSA complacency and negligence, compounded by the deepening Venezuelan economic crisis, will be a continuing impediment to the return of Lake Maracaibo to anything like its pre-1914 ecological condition — a time when fishing was good.

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