

Gold Fever Destroys The Jungle

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The story deals with the situation of illegal gold mining and its environmental and social consequences in the Caura River Basin, one of the last pristine watershed regions and with greatest biodiversity in the country. The region (which covers only 5% of the national territory) is home to 17 percent of the national flora and 32 percent of the animal species recorded. It is a chronic problem in the state of Bolivar that continues to worsen, and even has an impact on hydropower generation for the country.

Following a military operation to evict the miners, the report delves into the illegal mining both in the west (Caura area) and the south (on the border with Brazil) and describes its operations and finances. It also portrays the devastating effects of this activity on the population and the environment. For one, there are cultural changes in indigenous ethnic groups (Yekuana and Sanema), but also there is indiscriminate logging, smuggling of gasoline and pollution of soil and water, a situation that impacts the country's power generation.

Interviews with miners, residents living in areas near the mines, environmental experts, anthropologists, and members of the military, produced a portrayal of the economic system that sustains the phenomenon: a network of extortion, financing and assistance involving members of the National Armed Forces from Operation Command No. 5 and the National Guard, "Zamoran" cooperatives, small local entrepreneurs and politicians in the area. Also, we dwell on the issue of "mining conversion," a government policy to reverse the illegal mining that has yet to yield results; and constant military plans to evict miners.