



News Release

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Bolivian Indigenous Autonomous Government Declares Second Largest Conservation Area in the Gran Chaco

A new law enacted by the Indigenous Autonomous Government of the Charagua district in Bolivia declares three million acres as a conservation area. The approval of this law allows for the protection of a continuous conservation area of more than 15 million acres in the Gran Chaco region. It is the first protected area that was created by an autonomous indigenous government in Bolivia.

“The law formalizes the protection of the Ñembi Guasu area, which together with National Parks Kaa Iya in Bolivia and Defensores del Chaco in Paraguay, forms the biggest conservation area of the Chaco region with more than 15 million acres,” confirms Ivan Arnold, the director of Nativa, the non-governmental organization who supported the process with the Charagua government.

Furthermore, the law creates the second largest conservation area in the Gran Chaco, spanning three million acres. This area is critical for the territory of Charagua Iyambae and the entire Gran Chaco ecoregion.

Conserving for future generations

“The delimitation and consolidation of Ñembi Guasu is not just about conservation, it is also about the wellbeing of the Indigenous Guaraní people. We are conserving our home, home of our children and future generations,” said Adhemar Flores, a member of the Indigenous Autonomous Government of Charagua, when he announced the approval of the law.

“The protected areas in Charagua were designed to maintain their subsistence. Kaa Iya National Park was created in accordance with the Guaraní people’s vision. Ñembi Guasu will protect their natural resources, tradition, culture and other values,” said Jose Avila from the Indigenous Autonomous Government.

Ñembi Guasu will also maintain land for the Ayoreo population, thought to be the only uncontacted indigenous people south of the Amazon. Traditionally hunter-gatherers, the small group is increasingly threatened by loss of territory.

Ñembi Guasu is located in the former municipality of Charagua, home to an indigenous Guaraní population. After occupying parts of eastern Bolivia for hundreds of years, the Guaraní population of Charagua achieved autonomy in 2017.

Ñembi Guasu thereby becomes the first protected area created under the Indigenous autonomy framework in Bolivia. It will be managed by the Autonomous Indigenous Campesino Government of Charagua (GAIOC), the governing body within Charagua. They intend to create a system of protected areas to protect their land and the wellbeing of the Guaraní people.

More support needed

An impressive 68% (more than 12 million acres) of the Charagua Iyambae territory has now been declared as protected areas, and two additional conservation areas are in the process of being approved, the Guanaco conservation area and the “Serranía de charagua”. However, protecting these areas is not enough. Additional support is needed to ensure the local conservation vision becomes a reality.

International organizations IUCN National Committee of The Netherlands, World Land Trust and Nature and Culture International assisted Nativa Bolivia and the GAIOC in establishing Ñembi Guasu. Now, they call on the international community to support the Indigenous Autonomous Government to protect additional areas and with management of those areas.

Gran Chaco Ecoregion

Stretching across Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia and a bit of Brazil, the Gran Chaco Americano constitutes the largest forest mass in South America, after the Amazon. It consists mostly of semi-arid lowlands forests and wetlands encompassing a total of around 250 million acres. The ecoregion holds huge reserves of water, energy and cultivable land, and a great diversity of indigenous peoples

It is home to an abundance of wildlife, including anteaters, tapirs and jaguars. Despite its natural richness and socio-cultural diversity, the Gran Chaco is one of the most neglected areas in South America. Its diversity, land and resources are increasingly threatened by climate change and an expanding agricultural frontier. These threats endanger the existence of various indigenous communities, whose main livelihoods are hunting, small-scale fishing and forestry.

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