MAAP #206: Rapid expansion of illegal mining in Ecuadorian Amazon

Base Map. Mining in the Punino area. Data: Planet-NICFI, EcoCiencia.

In a series of previous reports, we warned about the emergence of alluvial **mining in the Ecuadorian Amazon**, specifically in the area around the **Punino River**, located between the provinces of Napo and Orellana (MAAP #151, MAAP #182).

Here, we highlight the rapid growth of mining activity in the Punino area: **784 hectares in 2023**, which represents a striking increase of 261%.

This mining activity is mainly dedicated to the extraction of gold.

The vast majority of the detected activity is **illegal mining**, as it is outside the limits of the areas authorized for mining. For example, note the threat that illegal mining represents for the newly created El Chaco Municipal Conservation Area (see **Base Map**).

Rapid expansion of mining deforestation in 2023

Image 1 emphasizes the rapid expansion of mining deforestation in the Punino area in **2023 (red)**, relative to the previous three years (yellow).

The yellow indicates the mining deforestation of 217 hectares between November 2019 and December 2022, while the red shows the rapid expansion of **784 hectares (1,937 acres)** from January to December 2023.

Thus, in total, the forest area affected by mining activity is **1,001 hectares (2,474 acres)**, from 2019 to the present.

Moreover, Image 1 clearly shows that the majority of mining deforestation is located outside the limits of authorized mining areas (purple). Specifically, we estimate that **90.4%** of the total affected area (904 hectares, or 2,234 acres) represent **illegal mining**.

2016. This PDF was generated from MAAPROJECT.org MAAP is developed by Amazon Conservation Association (ACA) and Conservación Amazónica (ACCA) All use is Open-Access, but must contain an attribution link back to maaproject.org or the citation at the end of the article.

Image 1. Dynamics of mining activity between 2019 and 2023 in the Punino area. Data: Planet-NICFI, EcoCiencia.

Graph 1 shows the rapid escalation of mining deforestation in 2023 (bars 2, 3 and 4) relative to the previous three years (bar 1).

Graph 1. Deforestation due to mining in the Punino area between 2019 and 2023

Image 2 shows, with **high-resolution satellite images**, the expansion of mining deforestation in the Punino area between December 2022 (left panel) and December 2023 (right panel). The red arrows indicate the main areas of mining expansion.

Image 2.

2016. This PDF was generated from MAAPROJECT.org MAAP is developed by Amazon Conservation Association (ACA) and Conservación Amazónica (ACCA) All use is Open-Access, but must contain an attribution link back to maaproject.org or the citation at the end of the article.

Acknowledgments

This report is part of a series focused on the Ecuadorian Amazon through a strategic collaboration between the organizations **EcoCiencia Foundation** and Amazon Conservation, with the support of the Norwegian Development Cooperation Agency (**Norad**).

2016. This PDF was generated from MAAPROJECT.org MAAP is developed by Amazon Conservation Association (ACA) and Conservación Amazónica (ACCA) All use is Open-Access, but must contain an attribution link back to maaproject.org or the citation at the end of the article.