

Loggers Zero in on Guyana's Rainforests

Cable News Network • Copyright 1997, CNN
October 21, 1997 • by Correspondent Gary Striker

PORT KAITUMA, Guyana (CNN) — **It's happening in the Central African rain forest, it's happening in the Amazon rain forest and now it's happening in Guyana's virgin rain forest: logging.**

Conservationists said it would happen, and it has. **Logging companies from Asia, having devastated their own tropical forests, are now searching for new sources of timber.**

A company called Barama, a joint venture between Malaysians and Koreans, has won a vast logging concession in Guyana that **is half the size of Belgium.**

Barama's operations have tripled the volume of logging in Guyana, and there are plans to expand production even more.

"It's a low-value forest," says Mark Lawrence of the Edinburgh Center for Tropical Forests. "The trees are small. Barama has to take out a high volume."

Barama needs the logs to feed a huge plywood mill, but the company says it is practicing sustainable forestry and has no interest in devastating the forest.

"We want production, we want to get logs, but at the same time we want to do it in a more skillful way," says Deonarine Ramautar of Barama.

Company says it cuts only 2 trees an acre

The company says it is cutting an average of only two trees an acre and doing what it can to minimize the damage that occurs when the logs are taken out of the forest. The latter is a skill, the company admits, that its workers are having some difficulty mastering.

If the company sticks to its plan, then in theory the forest would regenerate itself, and Barama could harvest each area again in 25 years.

The problem is, no one knows how much time is needed for the trees to grow.

"Who knows how quickly you can really get back in there to harvest again?" says former logger Frank

Alphonso. "It's a guess."

Barama says it plans to stay in Guyana for at least 50 years, the length of its concession, and that it has invested millions in a plant and equipment.

"Barama is trying to pick out the best way to make the forestry operations here sustainable for a long-term future," says Lawrence of the forestry center.

As part of its deal with Guyana's government, Barama's operations are monitored by an independent research center that carries out studies to assess growth rates and logging damage.

Government puts new concessions on hold

Government officials say Barama has made Guyana a major player in the timber business, taking notice of the country when no one else did.

"Barama came here at a time when nobody wanted to invest in Guyana, and they took risks," says Clayton Hall, the commissioner of forests.

But now more Asian companies are trying to negotiate timber deals, and the government has decided to put new concessions on hold until they have the resources to enforce the laws on sustainable logging.

"We certainly would not allow what was done in other areas that was not sustainable to be repeated here in Guyana," says Sam Hinds, the president of Guyana.

But doubters say that timber companies came to Guyana only because they are interested in exploiting its resources and see the country as an easy victim. They question whether the timber companies will actually practice sustainable forestry, or ransack the forest for the best trees and then leave. *[see other Rainforest Relief handouts]*

One thing is certain: In one of the few nations left on the planet with a forest cover still largely undisturbed, the age of innocence is over. The age of commercial logging has begun.

(EMPHASIS ADDED) • REPRINTED BY:

R A I N F O R E S T R E L I E F
Sparing the World's Rainforests from Consumption

Brooklyn, NY: ph/fx: 718/398-3760 • Portland, OR: 503/236-3031

relief@igc.org • www.rainforestrelief.org

P.O. Box 150 566 • Brooklyn, NY 11215-0566 • Original Printed on Recycled or Salvaged Paper