

## Belo Monte's tribal-protection efforts questioned

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

**B**razilian government agencies and the consortium building the US\$13-billion Belo Monte dam have failed to take numerous steps required of them to minimize the massive, 11,283-megawatt project's impact on nearby Amazon tribes, says the nonprofit Socio-Environmental Institute (ISA).

All but four of the 19 tribal-protection conditions required under the dam's licensing remain unaddressed in whole or in part by project stakeholders, says the Feb. 19 report by ISA, a respected Brazilian environmental group. Those stakeholders include government bodies such as the National Indian Agency (Funai) and ICMBio—the arm of the Environment Ministry that creates and maintains federally protected

areas—as well as the dam consortium, which is called Norte Energia (NESA) and is led by the federal electricity holding company Eletrobras.

Ibama, the licensing and enforcement arm of the Environment Ministry, set the conditions when it issued Belo Monte's preliminary and construction licenses in 2010 and 2011, respectively. The project timeline calls for Belo Monte to receive an operating licence in November 2014—a crucial regulatory step that would allow it to begin generating energy in February 2015. The Xingu River power station, nearly 50% complete, is slated to rank third worldwide in installed power-generation capacity behind China's 22,000-megawatt Three Gorges Dam

[continued on page 9](#) ▶

## Central American forest falling to drug traffickers

**I**n 2011, Kendra McSweeney traveled to the La Mosquitia region of eastern Honduras, where she'd worked as a rainforest researcher in the mid-1990s. The region during her time there was largely pristine, with unbroken expanses of jungle. On her return, huge areas were being cleared for pasture. Animals, including deer, paca and tapirs, fled ahead of the cutting, sometimes right into indigenous villages. "I saw patterns of land use and settlement that were com-

pletely unlike anything else I'd seen before," says McSweeney, a geography professor at Ohio State University. "Clear-cutting, ranching and agriculture were utterly transforming communities once surrounded by tens, if not hundreds, of kilometers of pristine rainforest."

Experts say the drug trade, in large part, is driving the trend. In the last seven years, the Mosquito coast of Honduras and the Petén region of Guatemala have become principal destinations for U.S.-bound Colombian cocaine. Powerful drug gangs have taken root, displacing indigenous peoples from their homes and clearing huge areas of wilderness to launder their profits in land speculation, cattle ranching and African-palm cultivation.

"... [T]he trafficking of drugs [principally cocaine] has become a crucial—and overlooked—accelerant of forest loss [in Central America]," says an article, published Jan. 31 in *Science* magazine, by McSweeney

[continued on page 10](#) ▶



Eastern Honduran protected areas deforested by drug traffickers. (Photo courtesy of Robert Hyman)

February 2014

Vol. 16 - No. 4

## Inside

Around the region 2

Costa Rica falls in 2014 Environmental Performance Index 3

In Uruguay, whale deaths spurring oil-exploration concern 4

Monsanto plans for seed plant touch a nerve in Argentina 5

### CENTERPIECE:

Pressure builds on monarch butterfly, and one of nature's great migrations 6

### Q&A:

[R]evolution leader sees big potential for Latin American renewable energy 12

## Belo Monte continued from page 1

and Brazil's 14,600-megawatt Itaipú Dam.

"The government and NESA want to keep Belo Monte on schedule to receive its Ibama operational license even if it means not complying with the conditions of the two [previously issued] licenses, including protection of the territorial rights of Indians in the region," says Biviany Rojas, an ISA lawyer. "Noncompliance puts their survival at risk."

The dam consortium responded on Feb. 24, saying: "Belo Monte is a project based on the principles of sustainability, with low social and environmental impact and extensive social outreach. One of Norte Energia's most important commitments is respect for the rights of the populations that live around the dam."

Opposition to the two-decade-old Belo Monte plan, particularly from indigenous peoples, forced the government in 1994 to scale down the planned reservoir from the original 472 square miles (1,222 sq kms) of rainforest to the current 199 square miles (515 sq kms).

But environmentalists and indigenous-rights advocates argue that even if trimmed, the dam will still cause extensive ecological damage that would impact Indian lands and livelihoods. They point in particular to the planned diversion of 80% of the Xingu River's water past a 62-mile (100-kilometer) bend in the river, called the Volta Grande do Xingu, or Big Bend of the Xingu. This will reduce the fish population and navigability of the Big Bend area, along whose banks several tribes live.

The conditions placed on the preliminary and construction licenses call for the government in particular and NESA to a lesser extent to mitigate or compensate for the dam's impact on various indigenous tribes in the region.

Most affected are the Arara da Volta Grande and the Paquiçamba tribes, whose combined 300 members live on 30,000 hectares (74,000 acres) of reserve land on the Big Bend of the Xingu, and, not far from them, the 750-member Trincheira Bacajá tribe, which inhabits 1.65 million hectares (4.08 million acres). Squatters have already settled near the Arara da Volta Grande, and analysts warn that once the dam is finished, workers and other migrants to the area will move permanently onto traditional tribal lands, deforesting as they do.

Also affected are the 4,000 members of seven tribes that live in "The Middle Land," a 7.9-million-hectare (19.5-million-acre) mosaic of indigenous reserves and protected areas, 50 kilometers (31 miles) east of the dam. Over 600 families have illegally settled near two tribes in this area. "Ibama targeted the protection of the Big Bend of the Xingu and the Middle Land in its [licensing] conditions because 30% of the dam's 25,000 workers are expected to settle in

the area after the dam is completed, and these are the indigenous reserves that are the closest to the dam and thus the most vulnerable to being invaded and exploited," Rojas says. "The government is mainly to blame for noncompliance, but NESA is also at fault."

Among the key tribal-protection conditions that ISA says have gone unaddressed in whole or in part:

- expansion of the reserves of the Arara da Volta Grande and the Paquiçamba tribes to include two islands in the middle of the Big Bend of the Xingu to facilitate fishing;

- creation by ICMBio of a corridor of protected areas around the Arara da Volta Grande, Paquiçamba and Trincheira Bacajá tribes to better protect and interconnect them;

- expulsion of illegal settlers;

- rerouting of two Amazon highways, one planned and one existing, to minimize impact on indigenous areas;

- long-term monitoring to guard against squatters, using satellite images and field patrols based in field stations and lookout posts to be built in the area;

- expansion and improved equipment for the Funai office in Altamira, the city nearest to and most impacted by the dam;

- guarantees by NESA that it has funds to mitigate or compensate for dam impacts on Indian lands during the 35-year length of its operating concession.

"The ISA report shows that government agencies and NESA have been negligent in complying with the conditions in the Ibama licenses to protect Indian lands and livelihoods," says Brent Millikan, Brazil representative of International Rivers, an environmental and human rights group. "Without full compliance, these indigenous peoples are left unprotected against the invasion of illegal loggers, squatters, and land speculators who want to exploit their natural resources."

Federal prosecutors in Pará state, where the dam is located, contend in a lawsuit now before the Supreme Court that when Congress authorized Belo Monte in 2005, it failed to consult with indigenous populations, as required by Brazil's constitution and International Labor Organization Convention 169.

"The Indians impacted by Belo Monte are no longer naïve about the government acting within the law when it makes building an Amazon dam a priority," says Thaís Santi, a Pará state federal prosecutor. "Nor do they trust the courts to protect them. By the time the Supreme Court rules on our lawsuit... the dam likely will have already been built."

—Michael Kepp

## Contacts

### Biviany Rojas

Attorney  
Socio-Environmental  
Institute (ISA)  
Brasília, Brazil  
Tel: +(55 61) 3035-5118  
[biviany.rojas@socioambiental.org.br](mailto:biviany.rojas@socioambiental.org.br)

### Brent Millikan

Brazil Representative  
International Rivers  
Brasília, Brazil  
Tel: +(55 61) 8153-7009  
[brent@internationalrivers.org](mailto:brent@internationalrivers.org)

### Thaís Santi

Prosecutor  
Federal Prosecutor's Office  
Altamira, Pará state  
Tel: +(55 93) 3515-2526  
[thaisanti@mpf.gov.br](mailto:thaisanti@mpf.gov.br)

## Documents & Resources

The ISA report on partial compliance with licensing conditions affecting Indian tribes impacted by the dam, is available, in Portuguese, at: [www.socioambiental.org](http://www.socioambiental.org).