

Chapter 1

Importance of Conserving Southeastern Suriname

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As the greenest country on Earth, Suriname has long protected its forest resources through sound conservation management. Suriname's status as a high forest low deforestation (HFLD) country, its immense freshwater resources, its high biodiversity, rich tropical ecosystems, and low population density place the country in a truly unique position to become a global model for sustainable development and to take advantage of emerging ecosystem service markets and natural capital valuation schemes.

Natural and Cultural Resources of Suriname

- Suriname is located within a global treasure: the largest tract of pristine rainforest on Earth
- Suriname has extensive freshwater resources that are essential for the country and are a future resource for the region and the world
- Many Indigenous and Maroon communities in Suriname rely on the forest and freshwater resources for their livelihood and survival

Suriname is located within the Guiana Shield, a vast tropical wilderness covering over 2.2 million square kilometers in northern South America and containing over 25% of the world's tropical rainforests in the largest tract of pristine rainforest on Earth. With most of its 539,000 human inhabitants residing along the coast, Suriname maintains 95% of its original forest cover, comprising 148,000 km² of pristine lowland rainforest, savanna, and montane ecosystems. Nowhere else on Earth exist such extensive, unaltered forests filled with an incredible diversity of animals and plants, inhabited by few human beings. Suriname and its forests contain high biodiversity with over 740 species of birds (Ribot 2013), 207 species of mammals (IUCN 2013), 104 species of amphibians (Ouboter 2012) and 481 currently known fresh- and brackish-water fish species (Mol et al. 2012). Suriname is also blessed with plentiful supplies of high quality ground and surface freshwater, ranking

globally among the top 10 nations of the world in renewable freshwater resources (FAO Aquasat Data, The World Bank 2012). Seven major watersheds capture and carry freshwater throughout the country (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1. The 7 major watersheds of Suriname.

Surface area of watershed (km ²)	Average discharge (m ³ /sec)		
Corantijn	67,600	1,597	Joint estuary: 1,771
Nickerie	10,100	174	
Coppename	21,700	565	Joint estuary: 882
Saramacca	9,400	257	
Suriname	16,500	422	Joint estuary: 591
Commewijne	6,600	169	
Marowijne	68,700	1,791	

In addition to natural resources, Suriname is also rich in cultural diversity. A great diversity of people live along the coast, with origins from India, the Netherlands, Indonesia, China, several African countries, and many other nationalities. The interior of Suriname is inhabited principally by several indigenous groups, including the Wayana and Trio, and Maroon tribes, descendants of escaped African slaves who live mostly in the country's interior.

Suriname is one of the last places on Earth where an opportunity still exists to conserve extensive tracts of pristine diverse tropical forests and freshwater. Suriname has an annual deforestation rate of 0.02%, exhibits the lowest population density of any moist tropical region on Earth (0.2 people/ha), has few roads in the forested part of the country (which can be accessed only by small boat, small plane, or on foot), has 29.6 hectares of forest per capita and virtually all of the lands are public and under the control of the national government or indigenous and Maroon communities.

However, the isolation that has protected Suriname's ecosystems, natural resources, and indigenous cultures is disappearing at an increasing rate, and the opportunity to act to preserve these remarkable resources will soon be gone. Record high commodity prices have encouraged the rapid growth of small-scale gold mining activities as illustrated by