

RAINFOREST LABORATORY

It has been called a "laboratory for the world:" approximately 360,000 hectares of Amazon rainforest in Guyana, set aside for an experiment in tropical forest management. This Commonwealth project is called the Iwokrama Rain Forest Program, after the Iwokrama mountain range which lies in the area.

About a third of the site will be protected as a wilderness area. The rest will be used for experiments. Researchers will try out ways to use the forest's resources without destroying them forever. This is called sustainable forestry.

Rainforests produce oxygen that is important for the atmosphere, that is why they are called the "lungs of the planet." Rainforests are also home to more than 50 percent of the species of plants and animals in the world. One aim of the project is to conserve the diversity of plant and animal life here.

Experts from several Commonwealth countries have helped to organize the program. Besides the rainforest site, there will be an International Centre for Research and Training in Sustainable Management of Rainforests at the University of Guyana in Georgetown.

The Amerindians who live near the area are also involved, and have been helping scientists identify plants. Their traditional methods of using the forest will be included in the studies. They will also be employed as forest rangers and administrators.

Canadian consultants have

played a large role in planning the project. Canadians have also been involved in site surveys.

Until recently, aerial surveys of tropical rainforests have been difficult. Clouds and rain frequently hide the trees. In 1995, Canada plans to launch RADARSAT, its first radar satellite. This satellite will carry equipment, designed by Canada's Centre for Remote Sensing, that can penetrate both clouds and darkness, and produce images of the forest. These images can tell researchers about the state of the forest, the rivers, the land forms, and the types of

vegetation. They will also show what impact human activities, such as agricultural clearing or tree cutting, have on the forest.

Canadian government experts installed this radar equipment in a plane that can fly six kilometres above the earth. "In order to develop applications and users for the data from the satellite, we have been flying our airborne radar in areas of the world such as tropical regions," says a spokesperson for the remote sensing centre. "We had projects in Venezuela, Brazil, and Guyana: we flew various areas for them, then worked with the people in those countries to train them to analyze and interpret the data. Once RADARSAT is launched, they will have a core of trained users and applications."

Meanwhile on the ground at Iwokrama, teams organized by British researchers employed more traditional survey methods: using trails and rivers to get into the forest, they observed the soil, vegetation and geology. Scientists need this kind of detailed information to help interpret the radar data.

Canada's International Development Research Centre is also helping to set up an international communications centre within the Iwokrama program. The centre will spread the knowledge gained about methods for sustainable use of tropical rainforests. It will also help the public and politicians understand that healthy forests are necessary for a good quality of life around the world. 22

NEW NGO

The Commonwealth's newest NGO, scheduled to hold its first conference this summer in Charlottetown, is designed to meet some very modern problems. The Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management will bring together bureaucrats and university people who study public administration. Says organizer George Post: "The notion is that running government is quite similar around the world, particularly in countries which have the British common law tradition."

Today, all governments are faced with the need to reorganize in order to run more efficiently, with less money. Public servants from countries which have already started this process, such as New Zealand, can share their experiences with others.