Paradise Lost

Can the Amazon Rain Forest Be Saved From Destruction?

Bright-colored scarlet **macaws** rest on forest branches. Howler monkeys leap from tree to tree. Endangered jaguars slink through the thick brush. Those are just a few of the thousands of animals that call the Amazon rain forest home.

In a tropical rain forest, such as the Amazon, the region is warm and has heavy rainfall. The Amazon is the largest rain forest in the world. It covers most of northern Brazil, in South America.

Farmers, however, are rapidly destroying this lush landscape. They are cutting and burning trees to make room for their soybean fields and cattle ranches.

In 2004, **deforestation** in the Amazon was the second-worst ever, according to Brazil's government. Deforestation occurs when loggers cut down trees for farms, homes, or roads. The government said loggers destroyed an area of land slightly larger than New Hampshire.

Cause for Concern

Why should we worry about a rain forest in South America? Deforestation reduces the rain forest's **biodiversity**, or the variety of plants and animals in a particular area. The Amazon is one of the richest areas of the world in animal and plant variety. It is home to the biggest flower in the world, a bird-eating spider, and a monkey the size of a toothbrush.

Scientists have identified only a small number of all species that live in the rain forest. As loggers and farmers destroy the forest, animals and plants may become extinct before they are discovered.

Deforestation affects people, too. Many of the foods, spices, and medicines people need come from the rain forest.

Without the Amazon rain forest, life on Earth would have a hard time existing. The Amazon's plants and trees clean the air by breathing in carbon dioxide and exhaling oxygen. Too much carbon dioxide in the air is harmful to humans. Carbon dioxide is also a **greenhouse gas**. Greenhouse gases trap the sun's heat close to Earth. Without the trees in the rain forest, Earth's climate would get much hotter.
Why Now?

Human activity is mainly to blame for the destruction of the rain forest. Loggers illegally chop down trees for timber. Construction workers burn vast portions of the jungle to build new roads and farms.

"The single most important factor contributing to forest loss is population growth in Brazil," scientist Jim Bowyer told Senior Edition. "Almost 2 million people make the forest their home. All these people need land for farming and wood for heat and cooking. They are looking for a way to survive."

Fixing the Problem

Stopping the destruction of the rain forest is not an easy task. Some people think that Brazil's government is not doing enough to stop deforestation. Ranchers and farmers think it is unfair for others to tell them that they can't use the rain forest for their own livelihood. Scientists predict that if deforestation continues at its current rate, the rain forest may survive only another 40 to 50 years.

"We need to address the real causes of deforestation, like poverty and population growth," says Bowyer. "Solutions need to involve the very people who destroy the forest."
Name: ___________________________ Date: ________________

1. When Bower says, "Solutions need to involve the very people who destroy the forest," he is referring to
   A. the government.
   B. ranchers and farmers.
   C. the reader.
   D. scientists.

2. In order to stop deforestation, the government of Brazil could
   A. gather up all the rain forest animals put them in the zoo.
   B. create laws that prohibit cutting down trees.
   C. encourage more people to live in the rain forest.
   D. build more ranches and farms.

3. The types of human activity that endanger rainforests include
   A. breathing and eating.
   B. trapping the sun's heat.
   C. farming, logging, road building.
   D. making medicines and foods.

4. People that live in the rain forest probably eat
   A. small amounts because they are poor.
   B. food brought in from other countries.
   C. at the many restaurants being built.
   D. the plants and animals of the rain forest.

5. Using the map, list the countries that include part of the Amazon rain forest.
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   Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana