**Peace Parks in the Cordillera del Cóndor**
**Mountain Range and Biodiversity Conservation Corridor**

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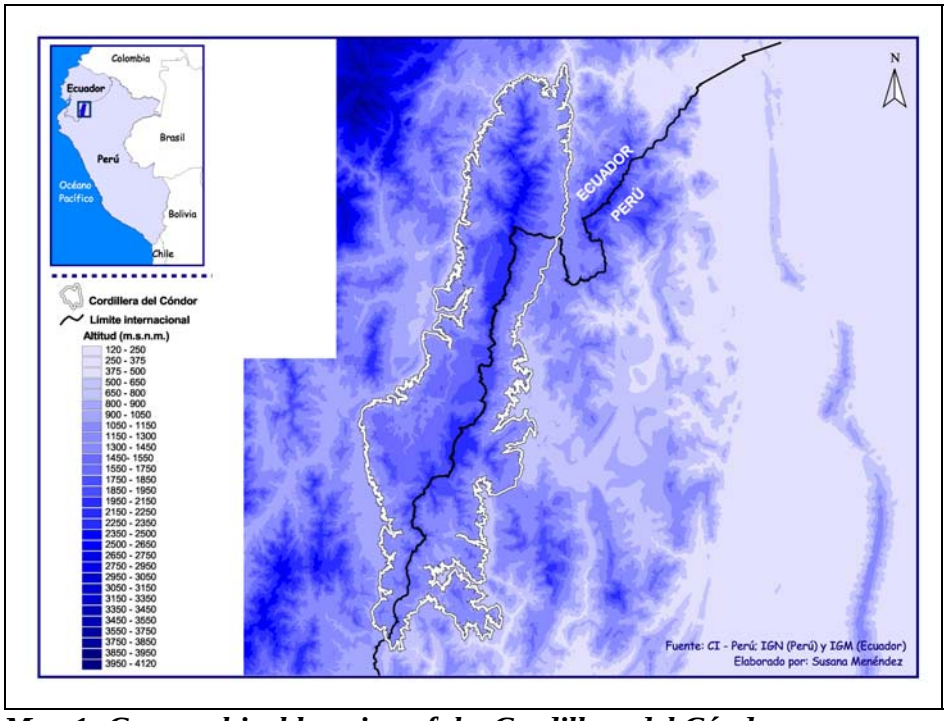
## Abstract

The Cordillera del Cóndor, a relatively isolated mountain range that straddles the Peru-Ecuador border, lies in a highly significant global conservation zone. Thanks to an abundance of water throughout the year, the region hosts the world's most diverse plant communities and serves as a key element in the great hydrological cycle linking the Andes with the Amazon. The Cordillera del Cóndor is culturally important for the indigenous Shuar and Ashuar communities from Ecuador and the Awajún and Wampis from Peru. For decades this mountain range has been the scene of border conflicts between the two countries. But today, peace and integration is replacing strife. This article highlights the biodiversity conservation efforts conducted under the Ecuador-Peru peace agreement and the progress achieved since the creation of "ecological protection zones" or "Peace Parks."

## The Cordillera del Cóndor




***Map 1: Geographical location of the Cordillera del Cóndor***

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Physically, the Cordillera del Cóndor mountain range is made up of a diverse mix of geological formations, creating a geological "mosaic." This unique geology, and its isolation far from the main ranges of the Andes Mountains, has contributed to the development of the region's extraordinary flora and fauna.

***Conservation Significance***

The Cordillera del Condor is located in the Tropical Andes Hotspot**,** one of the richest and most diverse hotspots on the planet, according to Mittermeir (1999; 2004). In 1993 and 1994, Conservation International (CI, 1997) worked with government agencies and local scientists to carry out a Rapid Assessment that confirmed the high biological diversity of the Cordillera del Cóndor zone and its role as a habitat for numerous endemic species, some of which were newly discovered. The scientists who took part in the assessment recommended slating this area for conservation.

The most diverse communities of flora known to science can be found in this region, due to the abundance of water throughout the year. On most days, clouds lie low and wet on the flat, table top-like peaks of the Cordillera del Cóndor. Here, many of the Amazonian rivulets merge into streams, which coalesce into rivers. The area has many waterfalls, whose waters filter through the vegetation of the mountainous cloud forest. The sandy plateaus are dotted by orchids, bromeliads, and baby palm trees (CI, 1997). An endemic marsupial—*Caenolestes Cóndorensis*—is unique to the region. Other species of note are the rare carnivore plant (*Drosera sp.*) and the vulnerable Andean bear (*Tremarctos omatus*).

***Indigenous Cultures and Cultural Value***

For hundreds of years the Cordillera del Cóndor has been a sacred place for the indigenous Shuar and Ashuar communities from Ecuador and the Awajún and Wampis of Perú. These indigenous populations use their traditional knowledge of natural resources to survive and have developed sustainable methods of fishing, hunting, farming, and extracting forest products (Regan, 2003). They believe the region's waters are sacred and the source of life for the whole environment (Guallart, 1997).

***Conflicts Between Peru and Ecuador***

For more than 150 years after independence from Spanish rule, the border of Perú and Ecuador has witnessed territorial conflict initiated by both countries. By 1941, the prolonged tension triggered a military encounter that lead to the adoption of the Rio de Janeiro Protocol in 1942. New armed conflicts arose in 1981 and in 1995. In 1998, after intense negotiation and the intervention of other countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States), a final agreement—the Acta Presidencial de Brasilia**—**was signed**,** finally resolving the border conflicts between the two countries. The agreement recognized the need to update and improve existing mechanisms to promote bilateral cooperation and integration between Perú and Ecuador. Likewise, it emphasized that such

mechanisms must lead to economic and social development and strengthen the cultural identity of native populations, as well as aid the conservation of biological biodiversity and the sustainable use of the ecosystems of the common border.

**Peace and Conservation in the Cordillera del Cóndor**

It is worth mentioning that there have been several attempts by the conservation community to find ways to preserve the exceptional biodiversity of the Cordillera del Cóndor. However, only the Acta Presidencial de Brasilia brought bilateral cooperation and a peaceful environment for conservation to both countries.

The Peace Agreement officially established two protected zones governed by the same treaty. These new Ecological Protection Areas include the 2,540-hectare "El Cóndor" in Ecuador. In Perú, in addition to the 5,440-hectare Ecological Protection Area, the Peruvian government established the Santiago-Comaina Reserved Area, with a surface area of 1,642,570 hectares. Conservationists commonly call these protected areas "peace parks."

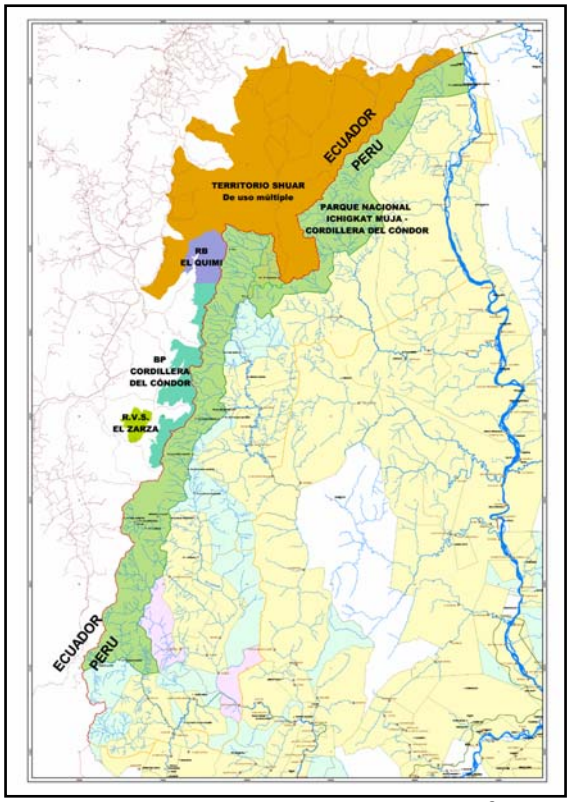
These actions created a space for cooperation between both countries and ultimately led to bi-national initiatives (ITTO et al., 2000). Perhaps the most important joint conservation initiative in this region was the "Peace and Bi-national Conservation in the Cordillera del Cóndor, Ecuador-Perú" project, which was financed by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and included governmental agencies, representatives from indigenous communities, and domestic and international NGOs. This project, which was developed between 2002 and 2004, stood out for its contribution to the peace agreement and overall biodiversity conservation. Among the most noteworthy aspects of this project are the following:

1. **Bi-national technical coordination:** Using an integrated vision, a group of Peruvian and Ecuadorian specialists jointly prepared proposals and designed a planning and implementing process.

**2. Formulating proposals for the establishment of Bordering Protected Areas (BPA):** The table below outlines the proposed Protected Areas (PAs) on either side the border.

| Country/ Name of the Proposed Protected Area | Equivalent Category IUCN | Size |
|---|---|---|
| **Ecuador** | | |
| Ecological Reserve "El Quimi" | Category I | 9,266 hectares |
| Wild Life Shelter "El Zarza" | Category I | 3,743 hectares |
| **Perú** | | |
| National Park Ichigkat Muja – Cordillera del Cóndor | Category II | 150,000 hectares (approximate) |

In addition, Ecuador proposed conserving natural resources in an area outside the protected areas system. Established in 2005, the protected forest “El Cóndor” spans an area of 17,953 hectares and safeguards the Nangaritza basin.




***Map 2**: Protected Areas and Zones of Ecological Protection in the Cordillera del Cóndor*

***Box: Protected Areas and Ecological Protection Zones in the Cordillera del Cóndor Region***

***Ecuador***

**Protected Areas (proposed)**

- Ecological Reserve: "El Quimi" (9,266 hectares)
- Wild Life Shelter: “El Zarza” (3,743 hectares)

**Ecological Protection Zone:** “Parque El Cóndor” (approx. 2,540 hectares)

***Peru***

**Protected Areas (proposed)**

- National Park Ichigkat Muja: Cordillera del Cóndor (approx. 150,000 hectares)

**Ecological Protection Zone**: (approx. 5,440 hectares)

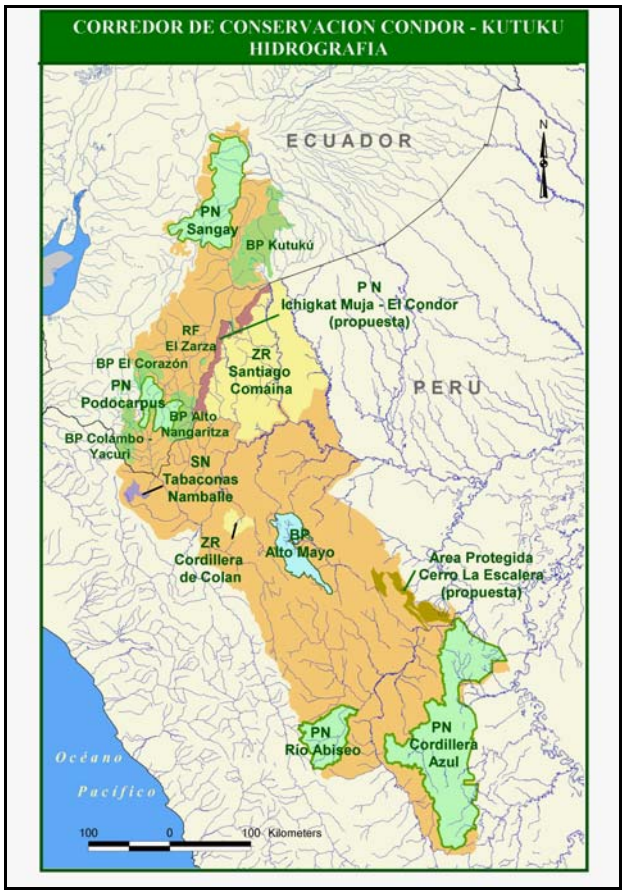
**3. Indigenous territories:** In Ecuador, the organization Circunscripción Territorial Shuar Arutam (CTSHA) helped prepare a proposal to create a 230,287-hectare indigenous territory named the “Multiple Use Shuar Territory.” In Perú, when the national park was established, an alliance of real estate institutions provided technical assistance to clear the title for indigenous lands, requesting title deeds and land grants for the indigenous communities of the Cenepa River basin, an area spanning approximately 100,000 hectares.

**4. Coordinated planning for protected areas management:** The Protected Areas require management plans to administer them and help conserve their existing biodiversity. Together, Peruvian and Ecuadorian experts helped identify the threats to conservation on both sides of the border. The management plans included actions necessary to mitigate such threats, emphasizing the continuous, coordinated management of bordering protected areas; joint investigation proposals; knowledge exchange among Protected Areas managers; and coordinated monitoring of the biodiversity in both countries (IUCN, 2001).

**Cóndor –Kutukú Conservation Corridor**

Biodiversity Conservation Corridors (BCC) are flexible planning tools that offer new ways of combining conservation and sustainable development. They reduce the destruction of biodiversity by connecting land subject to different uses in one corridor, building a mosaic (or matrix) of protected and unprotected land (CI, 2004). Conservation Corridors help link protected areas, ensuring the conservation of ecological and biological processes essential for maintaining the existing level of biodiversity. In addition, the corridors will help insert the protected areas into the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the region.

The Conservation Corridor Cóndor-Kutukú (CCCK), a large region of approximately 16 million hectares, shelters a number of species with scientific value and unique importance for national and international conservation. The region is inhabited mainly by Andean indigenous groups (Quichuas and Quechuas) and Amazonian indigenous populations, such as the Jivaroan people. These populations have developed diverse, productive livelihoods, from hunting and subsistence (in the case of the Amazonian indigenous populations) to internationally financed mining and hydrocarbon extraction. The situation offers an opportunity to build and plan beyond frontiers, allowing real integration between both countries.



*Map 3: Cóndor-Kutukú Conservation Corridor*

## Conclusions

The Peace Agreement and the conservation efforts to date have helped create an environment for long-lasting peace in the region. The agreement has helped reestablish centuries-old relationships between the indigenous populations living in the zone, and improved relationships between the states and between the professionals from both countries who work together to conserve this exceptional biological richness.

The Protected Areas—those already established and those yet to be created—on both sides of the Peruvian-Ecuadorian border help conserve the ecosystems shared by the countries. The successful coordination and cooperation that takes place beyond the frontiers highlight how Border Protected Areas act as real "links" connecting peace and conservation.

The evolution began with the adoption of the peace agreement that ended Peru and Ecuador's conflict and created Ecological Protection Zones, or "Peace Parks." The coordinated efforts to establish indigenous territories and technical cooperation set the stage for progress in the development of the Cóndor-Kutukú Conservation Corridor. Nevertheless, for this to be successful, we feel it is necessary to:

**1. Strengthen the planning processes and consolidate a bi-national vision:** Get involved in the planning process at the local government level, and create a chain reaction encouraging Conservation Corridors on varying levels and among varying stakeholders within the bi-national scope.

**2. Promote an information network between Protected Areas within the Cóndor-Kutukú Conservation Corridor:** Information management is a very valuable tool for Protected Areas management. It would be helpful to create a bi-national network that facilitates information exchange for the coordinated management of Protected Areas in the Conservation Corridor. This network could help identify lessons learned in the countries and, thus, promote the participation of different institutions involved in the Cóndor-Kutukú Conservation Corridor.

**3. Generate social, economic, and biodiversity data to help prioritize conservation actions and sustainable development:** To prioritize conservation and sustainable development and help direct future investments, we need socioeconomic information and data measuring the negative impacts on natural resources. This process could be aided by governmental support from both countries. For example, the current Bi-national Plan Ecuador-Perú, an institution that plays an important role in bilateral efforts, could offer support. Similarly, civil society involvement will be key.

**4. Encourage a participatory process for the Cóndor-Kutukú Conservation Corridor:** It is important to identify and involve key stakeholders within the scope of the CCCK. This will spread the concept of Conservation Corridors and promote the development of a planning process for a bi-national strategy. The strategy should include specific actions by each country and encourage coordinating efforts between institutions

of both countries, by integrating local planning processes, tourism, and private conservation areas, as well as existing and projected investments for the region.

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