

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The Lely and Nassau Plateaus are located in north-eastern Suriname and range in elevation from 500-700 m. They are covered mostly by high dryland rainforest on the plateaus and slopes and mountain savannah forest on the plateau. The Brownsberg Plateau is a third major plateau in this area, part of which is protected by the Brownsberg Nature Park (11,800 ha). The 2002 Guayana Shield Priority-Setting Workshop determined that these three plateaus are all important for biodiversity but that we lack essential biodiversity data, particularly for Lely and Nassau (Huber and Foster 2003). The plateaus provide many watershed services for local and coastal communities, as well as important sources of employment (principally small-scale gold mining), food, medicine and building materials for local communities. Lely and Nassau are still relatively intact owing to low human population density, which presents many unique opportunities for conservation over a relatively large landscape area. However, they all face a number of current and potential threats, including logging, hunting/poaching and small-scale (gold) and large-scale (bauxite and gold) mining.

Conservation International's Rapid Assessment Program (RAP)

RAP is an innovative biological inventory program designed to use scientific information to catalyze conservation action. RAP methods are designed to rapidly assess the biodiversity of highly diverse areas and to train local scientists in biodiversity survey techniques. Since 1990, RAP's teams of expert and host-country scientists have conducted 56 terrestrial, freshwater aquatic (AquaRAP), and marine biodiversity surveys and have contributed to building local scientific capacity for scientists in 26 countries. Biological information from previous RAP surveys has resulted in the protection of millions of hectares of tropical forest, including the declaration of protected areas in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil and the identification of biodiversity priorities in numerous countries.

Project Initiation

Alcoa, through its successful partnership with Conservation International (CI) conducting a RAP survey in Guinea, suggested to the Suralco/BHPB Joint Venture that a similar exercise would be worthwhile in Suriname. Thus in June 2005, BHP-Billiton Maatschappij Suriname (BMS) invited CI to present recommendations on how its Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) could contribute to a greater understanding of the fauna and flora of the Lely, Nassau and Brownsberg plateaus. Suriname Aluminium Company LLC (Suralco) holds mining concessions on these three plateaus and has formed a Mining Joint Venture with BMS. The joint venture divides the mining process between the two companies: BMS to first carry out exploration on the plateaus and then if sufficient bauxite is found, BMS is to do the mining and then Suralco will refine the bauxite.

CI proposed that a strategic partnership be formed with the Mining Joint Venture of BMS and Suralco. A central component of this partnership involves utilizing CI's Initial Biodiversity Assessment Planning (IBAP) methodology to both increase understanding of