



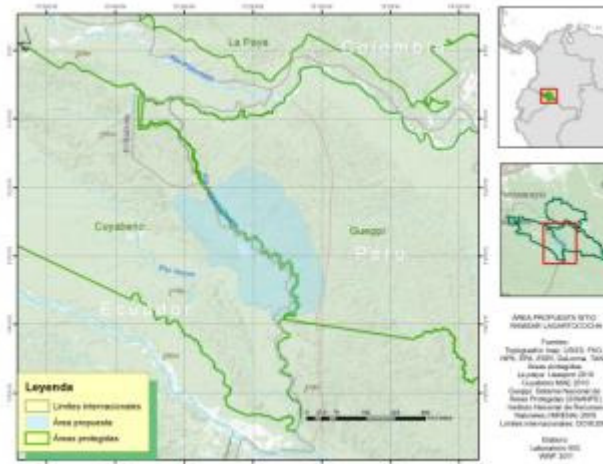
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# RIVER TOURISM

## DEVELOPING AN ALTERNATIVE FOR AMAZON COMMUNITIES

To talk about the Amazon is to refer to one of the richest places in the world. The Amazon region encompasses nearly 7 million square kilometers of rainforest dissected by wetlands, lakes and rivers. As well as the need for continued conservation, the Amazon offers significant potential for sustainable development.

Supported by Funds from the BBC Wildlife Fund, WWF and Fundación Omacha are have just begun a project surrounding a series of large lagoons spanning the border between Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. This area contains very high levels of biodiversity and a huge potential for river tourism. The pink river dolphin, the largest freshwater dolphin in the world, is regularly seen in the area and is a major tourist attraction for anyone who intends to visit the Amazon.



PROPOSED AREA FOR LAGARTOCOCHA'S RAMSAR SITE

According to Saulo Usma at WWF Colombia, there is a great opportunity to work with emblematic species such as river dolphins, giant otters and alligators to provide environmental, social and financial benefits for the local communities. The WWF and Omacha Foundation led project will develop materials and tools so that communities are themselves able to manage and implement sustainable tourism projects. As a first step, WWF visited a number of communities in August and talked about the importance of river dolphin conservation as a potential source of income from tourism. Local community members expressed huge levels of interest in the project and will receive further visits and training sessions over the next few months. Local community members are already well versed in how to attract the attention of river dolphins. Through the help of

### Proyecto Putumayo Tres Fronteras

WWF, the Omacha Foundation and the BBC Wildlife Funds, locals will be taught how to attract and manage tourists - enabling them to share with others the close bond they already have with this charismatic species.

“During our first visit it was great to see the strong bond local people already had with the river dolphins and their desire to learn more and to develop tourism projects that can benefit themselves as well as the environment. And through this project we aim to go beyond just dolphin watching by training local people to talk to visitors about all the natural dynamics of the area; the relationship between forests and water, how fish disperse seeds for the trees and about the cultural heritage of the Amazon”, said WWF’s Saulo Usma.



*Communities desire to learn more and to develop tourism projects that can benefit themselves.*

This project is also an important part of the conservation strategy of WWF towards river dolphins. Despite their charismatic appearance, river dolphins are threatened by fishermen who see them as both a threat to their own fish stocks and, in some parts of the Amazon, are used as bait to attract high value fish species. Yet studies have shown that valuable fish species such as Arawana and Paiche are not part of the diet of these mammals and also that live dolphins can generate much more from tourism than used as bait.

According to Fernando Trujillo of the Omacha Foundation Director “First we need to work with fishermen to dispel the myths about river dolphins eating commercial fish. Then we need to work with communities to develop sustainable tourism systems that can generate real financial benefits. Communities like Martinique have already developed very successful models of this.”



*“...we need to work with communities to develop sustainable tourism systems that can generate real financial benefits”*

As a final part of this work, WWF and Omacha will work with environmental authorities in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru to establish a RAMSAR site in the area which would provide greater environmental protection and would be likely to help attract tourists to the region.

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