



A Native Amazonian Hunter

Native peoples have lived in the rainforest for about 12,000 years. This man is using a traditional bow and arrow to hunt for game. In recent years, native Amazonians have lost much of their land to loggers, farmers, and ranchers.

12.3 What Native Amazonians Want

Once there were as many as 10 million native people living in the Amazon rainforest, but today the number of native Amazonians is much smaller. Those who remain want one thing above all: to continue their traditional way of life.

A Sustainable Way of Life Native people have lived in the rainforest for about 12,000 years. Most live as they always have, by hunting, fishing, and growing crops on small plots of land that they have cleared in the forest. When a field is no longer fertile, they clear a new field somewhere else. Over time, new forest covers the old field. This is a sustainable way of life that is using the resources of the Amazon rainforest without causing long-term damage.

In the 1960s, the government of Brazil decided that it would open the Amazon basin to development. The government began by building a highway, which farmers, ranchers, and loggers followed into the Amazon region.

The arrival of so many newcomers has hurt native Amazonians. Many of the native people have been driven from their homelands in order to make room for farms and ranches. Some of them have died from diseases brought by newcomers. Other native people have been killed or injured in land use conflicts.

Save the Forest to Save Us Today native Amazonians are fighting to save parts of the rainforest from development, arguing that they have a right to preserve themselves and their way of life. As native leader Davi Kopenawa has said, "I want to live where I really belong, on my own land."

In their struggle to survive, native Amazonians have had to learn new skills. One of these new skills is how to speak Portuguese, which is the official language of Brazil. Another skill is how to work with Brazil's government and legal system. Native groups have called on the Brazilian government to make them the legal owners of their homelands. Only through legal ownership will they be able to keep others from destroying their rainforest home.