



The Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

RESOLUTION OPPOSING INDUSTRIAL MINING DEVELOPMENT AT NASSAU, SURINAME

Whereas small- and large-scale mining operations can have serious impacts on the biodiversity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, cause chronic health problems among local residents, and have negative ‘boom-and-bust’ effects on local communities; and

Whereas Suriname, located in the unique Guiana Shield region, is one of the few remaining tropical nations with a low population density and large expanses of relatively undisturbed rainforest and other rare ecosystems that could be conserved for future generations; and

Whereas Suriname has been a pioneer in nature conservation since the mid-20th century and, in 2000, established the 16,000 square-kilometer Central Suriname Nature Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site; and

Whereas the isolated bauxite plateaus of northeastern Suriname—at Brownsberg, Lely, and Nassau—constitute a rare and imperiled landform (early Tertiary denudation surface or peneplain) that represents less than 0.5% of the Suriname land area and that harbors the highest diversity of trees, bromeliads, orchids, and some other plant groups known in Suriname; and

Whereas, in 2002, an environmental priority-setting workshop in Paramaribo identified the Maroni Area, including Brownsberg, Lely, and Nassau, as having the highest possible biological importance and as being extremely vulnerable to environmental pressures from mining and hunting; and

Whereas the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation previously adopted, during its 2008 annual meeting in Paramaribo, a formal Declaration urging establishment of permanent protected-area status for the Brownsberg, Nassau, and Lely areas; and

Whereas the Nassau Plateau, an area of just 400 square kilometers, is the most threatened of the three bauxite plateaus because of its high accessibility and lack of protected-area status; and

Whereas the Nassau Plateau is in the southern portion of the area projected to be exploited by the massive Merian Gold Project, a venture of Surgold (Suriname Gold Company) managed by Newmont Overseas Exploration, a subsidiary of the USA-based Newmont Mining Corporation and Alcoa Worldwide Alumina; and

Whereas a fact sheet on the Merian Gold Project states that habitats above 100 meters elevation will not be exploited for gold, but provides no indication of measures needed to protect habitats at higher elevations from small-scale mining, hunting, and collecting, all of which can have serious long-term impacts on rainforest ecosystems and wildlife; and

Whereas illegal gold-mining operations and hunting have risen dramatically around the Nassau Plateau since the late 1990s; and

Whereas initial biological surveys in the Nassau area have found several new catfish and frog species previously unknown to science, at least some of them locally endemic to the Nassau Plateau, indicating that knowledge of the region is far from complete, and suggesting that future biological surveys will yield many more rare and endemic species; and

Whereas Nassau's endemic catfishes are restricted in their distribution to the headwaters of a single, pristine mountain stream, Paramaka Creek, fed by perennial springs; and

Whereas the multinational corporation Alcoa (Suralco) has shown renewed interest in mining bauxite at Nassau, despite previously pledging not to mine there because of its limited bauxite deposits, the logistical complications of transporting the bauxite to the Paranam refinery, and serious environmental concerns; and

Whereas mining of Nassau bauxite deposits would (1) destroy the plateau forest in the catchment of Paramaka Creek, which provides critical habitat for endemic aquatic and riparian species at Nassau, thereby degrading stream-water quality via elevated turbidity and sedimentation and (2) remove the aquifer system of porous bauxite-rock, thereby increasing the likelihood of stream failure in the Paramaka Creek in the dry season;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation respectfully requests that the Government of the Republic of Suriname and Alcoa Corporation to urgently take necessary steps to protect the unique natural heritage of Nassau Plateau, including:

- 1) Halting all activities directed toward establishment of a bauxite mine in Nassau Plateau; and
- 2) Instituting a ban on large- and small-scale mining of gold and bauxite from Nassau Plateau and its immediate surroundings; and
- 3) Taking active measures to protect the watershed of Paramaka Creek; and

- 4) Designating the Nassau Plateau area as a National Protected Area and establishing guidelines for management of its natural resources; and
- 5) Encouraging scientists at Anton de Kom University to establish a long-term monitoring project for endangered species in the Nassau area, and to explore the site for new species; and
- 6) Establishing educational programs to inform the Suriname public, particularly those in Paramaribo, about the importance of protecting natural habitats and watersheds for their continued health, recreation, and national heritage.