

# MAAP #115: Illegal Gold Mining in the Amazon, part 1: Peru

January 17, 2020



(<https://www.maaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/maaproject.org-maap-115-illegal-gold-mining-frontiers-part-1-peru-BaseMap-MiningPeru-200dp-v2-Eng.jpg>)

*Base Map. The main illegal gold mining areas in the Peruvian Amazon. Data: MAAP.*

In a new series, we highlight the main **illegal gold mining** frontiers in the **Amazon**.

Here, in part 1, we focus on **Peru**. In the upcoming part 2, we will look at **Brazil**.

The **Base Map** indicates our focus areas in Peru\*:

- **Southern Peru** (A. La Pampa, B. Alto Malinowski, C. Camanti, D. Pariamanu);
- **Central Peru** (E. El Sira).

Notably, we found an important **reduction** in gold mining deforestation in **La Pampa** (Peru's worst gold mining area) following the government's launch of **Operation Mercury** in February 2019.

**Illegal gold mining continues**, however, in three other major areas of the southern Peruvian Amazon (Alto Malinowski, Camanti, and Pariamanu), where we estimate the mining deforestation of **5,300 acres** (2,150 hectares) since 2017.

Of that total, 22% (1,162 acres) occurred in **2019**, indicating that displaced miners from Operation Mercury have **NOT** caused a surge in these three areas.

Below, we show a series of **satellite videos** of the recent gold mining deforestation (2017-19) in each area.

\*Recent press reports indicate the increase in illegal gold mining activity in northern Peru (Loreto region), along the Nanay and Napo Rivers, but we have not yet detected associated deforestation.

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## A. La Pampa (Southern Peru)

In **MAAP #104** ([https://www.maaprogram.org/2019/lapampa\\_opermercury/](https://www.maaprogram.org/2019/lapampa_opermercury/)), we reported a major reduction (92%) of gold mining deforestation in La Pampa during the first four months of **Operation Mercury**, a governmental mega-operation to confront the illegal mining crisis in this area.

The following video shows how gold mining deforestation has declined considerably since February 2019, the beginning of the operation. Note the rapid deforestation during the years 2016-18, followed by a sudden stop in 2019.



(<https://www.maaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/maaproject.org-maap-115-illegal-gold-mining-frontiers-part-1-peruvian-amazon-ezgif.com-gif-maker-LP-eng.gif>)

## B. Alto Malinowski (Southern Peru)

The following video shows gold mining deforestation in a section of the upper Malinowski River (Madre de Dios region). We estimate the mining deforestation of **4,120 acres** (1,668 hectares) throughout the Alto Malinowski area during the 2017 – 2019 period.

Of that total, 20% (865 acres) occurred in **2019**, indicating that displaced miners from Operation Mercury have **not** caused a surge in this area adjacent to La Pampa.





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According to our analysis of governmental information (see Annex 2), the recent mining activity is likely **illegal** because: a) much of it occurs outside of titled mining concessions, b) and all of it occurs outside of the mining corridor established for legal mining activity (see Annex 1).

Note that the mining deforestation is within the Kotsimba Indigenous Community territory. However, it has not penetrated **Bahuaja Sonene National Park**, in part due to the actions of the Peruvian Protected Areas Service (SERNANP).

## C. Camanti (Southern Peru)

The following video shows the gold mining deforestation of **944 acres** (382 hectares) in the Camanti district (Cusco region), during the 2017 – 2019 period.

Of that total, 21% (198 acres) occurred in **2019**, indicating that there has been **no increase** in mining activity in this area since the beginning of Operation Mercury in February (in contrast to press reports that have suggested that many displaced miners have moved to this area).



(<https://www.maaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/maaproject.org-maap-115-illegal-gold-mining-frontiers-part-1-peruvian-amazon-ezgif.com-gif-maker-Camanti-eng.gif>)

According to governmental information (see Annex 2), this mining activity is likely **illegal** because: a) much of it occurs outside of titled mining concessions, b) all occurs outside of the mining corridor, and c) all occurs inside both a protected forest (Bosque Protector) and buffer zone of the **Amarakaeri Communal Reserve**.

**SERNANP** (Peruvian Protected Areas Service) informed us that in December 2019, as part of Operation Mercury, the Public Ministry (Ministerio Público) led an interdiction with the support of law enforcement. Machinery, mining camps, and mercury were destroyed or removed during the raid. In 2020, as part of an extension of Operation Mercury, the Environmental Prosecutor's Office (FEMA) of the Public Ministry announced that the buffer zone of the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve will be constantly monitored.

## D. Pariamanu (Southern Peru)

The following video shows gold mining activity along a section of the Pariamanu River (Madre de Dios region). We estimate the gold mining deforestation of **245 acres** (99 hectares) in the Pariamanu area, during the 2017 – 2019 period.



Of that total, 40% (99 acres) occurred in **2019**, indicating that there has been a slight **increase** in mining activity since the beginning of Operation Mercury in February. This finding suggests that displaced miners may be moving to this area.



(<https://www.maaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/maaproject.org-maap-115-illegal-gold-mining-frontiers-part-1-peruvian-amazon-ezgif.com-gif-maker-par-eng.gif>)

According to governmental information (see Annex 2), this mining activity is likely **illegal** because it is not within active mining concessions and outside the mining corridor. Moreover, the mining deforestation is within Brazil nut forestry concessions.

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## E. El Sira (Central Peru)

The following video shows the gold mining deforestation of **52 acres** (21 hectares) in the buffer zone of El Sira Communal Reserve (Huánuco region), during the 2017 – 2019 period.



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## Annex 1: Mining Corridor

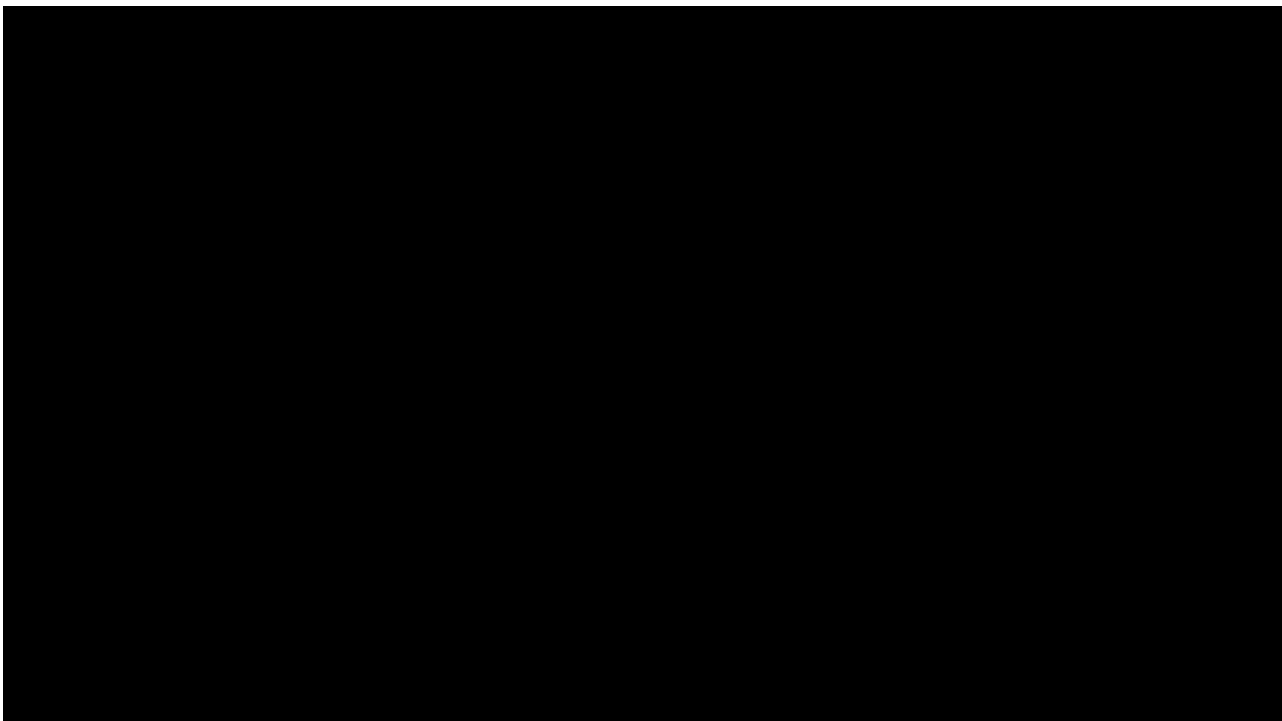
The **mining corridor** is the area that the Peruvian Government has defined as potentially legal for mining activity in the Madre de Dios region via a formalization process. As of 2019, over 100 miners have been formalized in Madre de Dios.

In general, mining activity in the corridor is considered legal, either formally (the formalization process is completed with environmental and operational permits approved) or informally (in the process of formalization). Thus, mining activity within the corridor is not considered illegal since it is not a prohibited area.

The following two videos show examples of gold mining deforestation in the mining corridor during 2019.



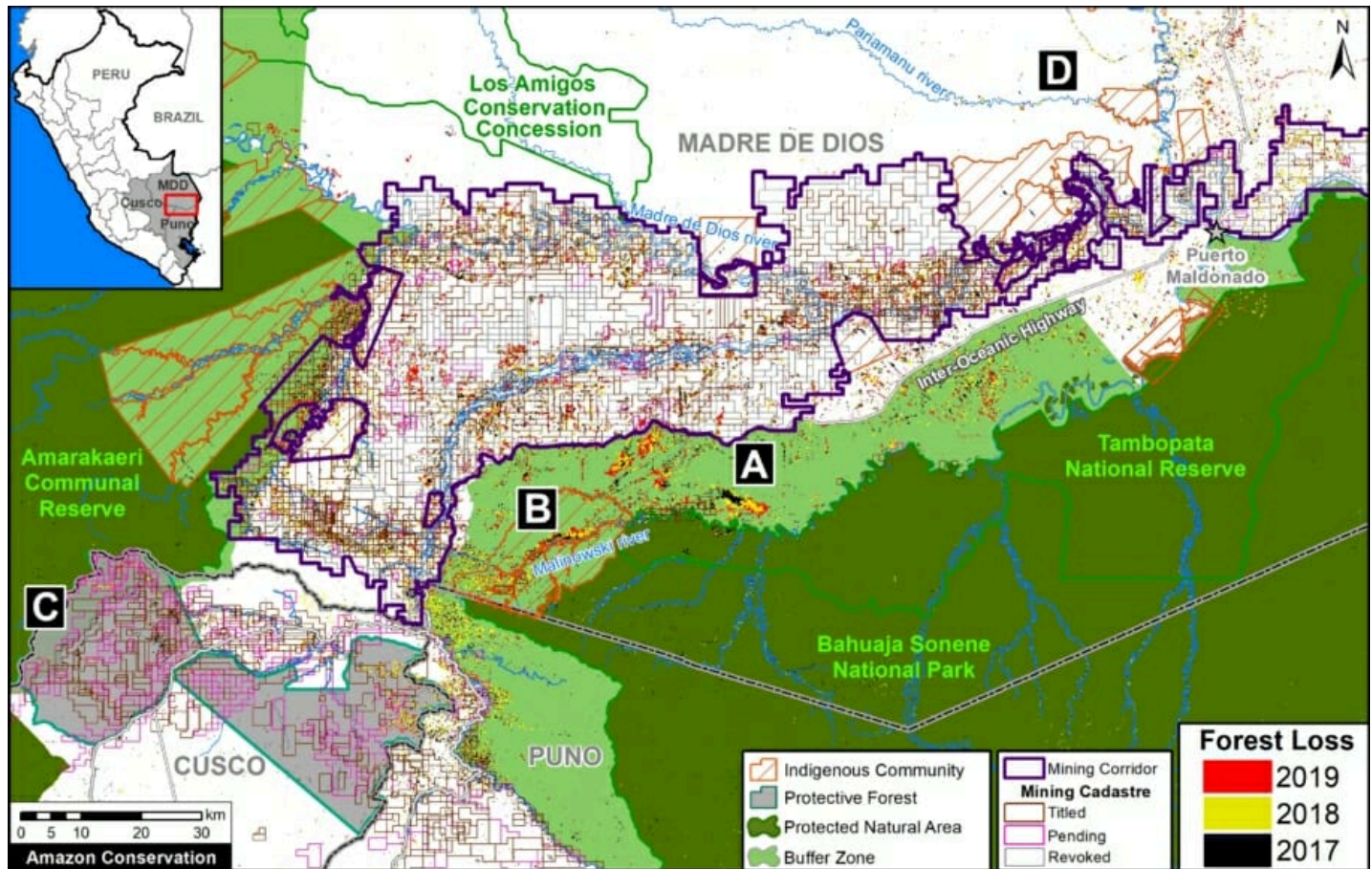
(<https://www.maaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/maaproject.org-maap-115-illegal-gold-mining-frontiers-part-1-peruvian-amazon-ezgif.com-gif-maker-la-eng.gif>)





## Annex 2: Land Use Map

For greater context, we present a map of qualifying titles directly related to the mining sector, in southern Peru. Layers include the mining corridor (see above), mining concession status (titled, pending, revoked), indigenous territories, and protected areas.



(<https://www.maaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/maaproject.org-maap-115-illegal-gold-mining-frontiers-part-1-peru-BM-Derechos-Deforestacion2017-2019-300dpi-Eng-scaled.jpg>)

*Land use map for southern Peruvian Amazon mining areas. Data: GEOCATMIN/INGEMMET. Click to enlarge.*

## Acknowledgements

We thank E. Ortiz (AAF), A. Flórez (SERNANP), P. Rengifo (ACCA), A. Condor (ACCA), A. Folhadella (Amazon Conservation), and G. Palacios for helpful comments to earlier versions of this report.

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