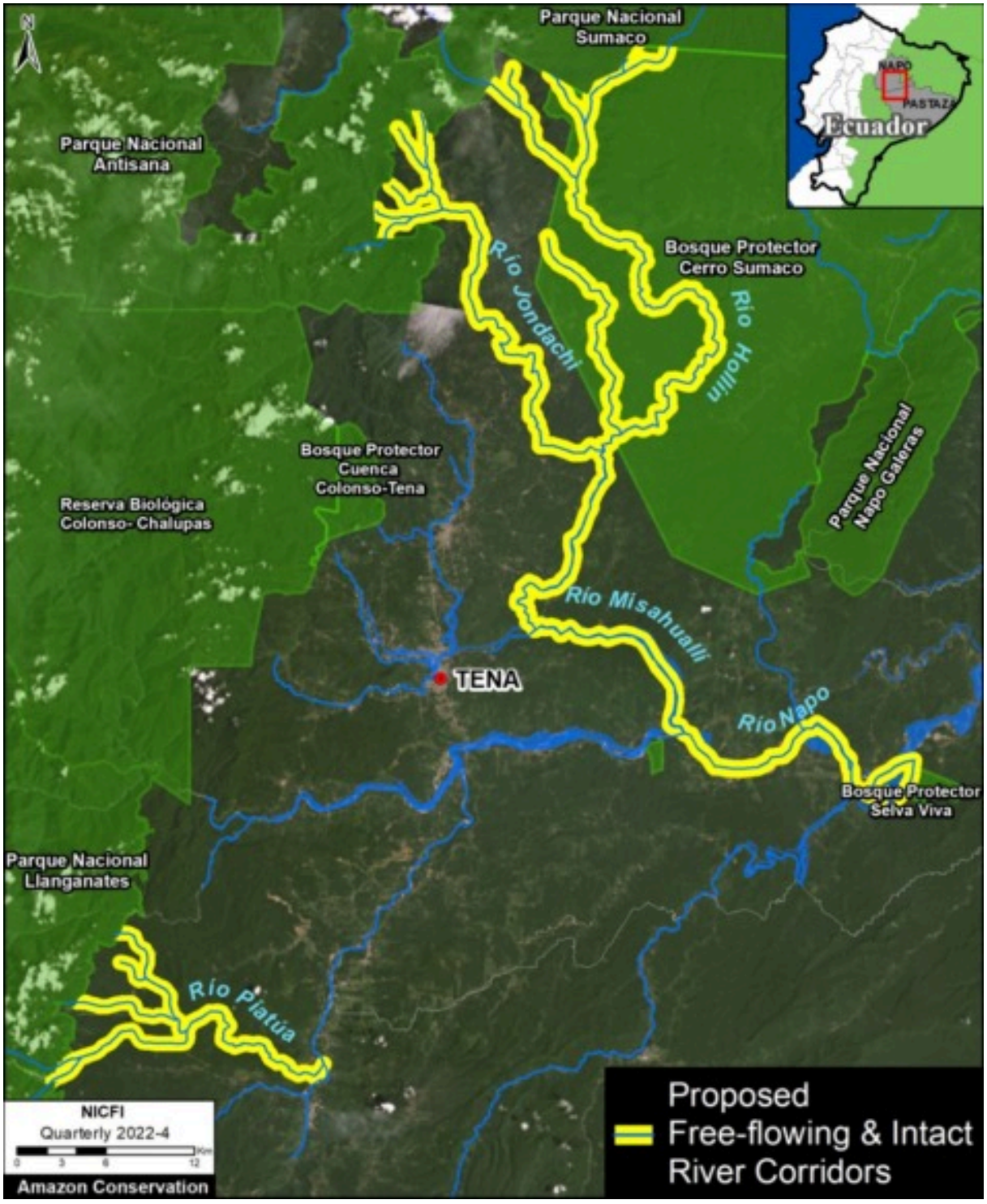
MAAP #191: Protecting Free-flowing & Intact River Corridors in the Ecuadorian Amazon

September 5, 2023



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Base Map. Proposal of free-flowing and intact riparian forest corridors in the northern Ecuadorian Amazon.

Here, we present a **model conservation strategy**, developed by the Ecuadorian Rivers Institute, that aims to protect **river corridors that are both free-flowing and maintain riparian forest cover** in the critical transition zone between the Andes mountains and the Amazon lowlands.

There are few remaining intact **Andes-Amazon corridors**, so this initiative is urgently needed in Ecuador and throughout the region.

The proposal targets strategic corridors that have **three major characteristics**:

1) **Free-flowing**, that is no major dams completely disrupting water flow from its source in the Andes down to the Amazon lowlands.

2) **Intact riparian forest** that extends at least 500 meters on each side of river.

3) **No mining activity** in the river or adjacent riparian zone.

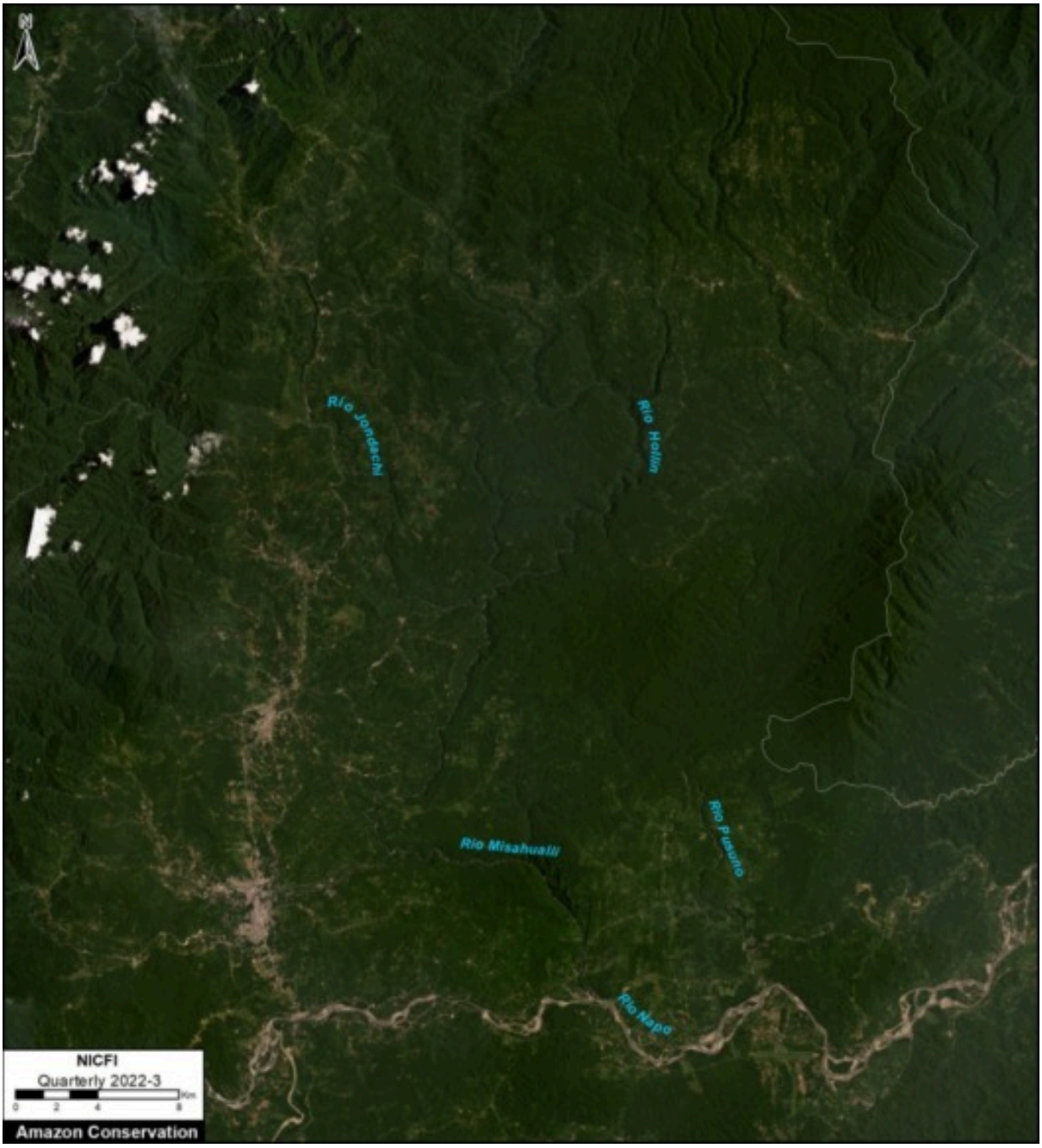
This combination is estimated to be the minimum criteria needed to preserve the integrity of the biodiversity, aquatic ecosystems, and scenic landscapes of key river corridors in the tropical Andes.

The **Base Map** illustrates the first **two proposed corridors in Ecuador**.

The first is the **Jondachi-Hollín-Misahuallí-Napo Ecological Corridor**. This multi-pronged corridor flows from the headwaters of the Jondachi and Hollin rivers (which originate in a series of protected areas, including Sumaco and Antisana National Parks), ultimately down to an intact stretch of the Napo River. This corridor totals 193 km of river and 18,675 hectares (46,145 acres) of riparian forest.

The second is the **Piatua River Ecological Corridor**, which channels water originating in Llanganates National Park. This corridor is shorter, totaling 46 km of river and 4,378 hectares (10,818 acres) of riparian forest.

Below is a recent satellite image of the Jondachi-Hollín-Misahuallí-Napo Ecological Corridor. Note the intact river and forest core to the east of the major road network, and north of the Napo River.



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Recent satellite image of the Jondachi-Hollín-Misahuallí-Napo Ecological Corridor

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Social Component

This proposal would be accompanied by efforts to generate **sustainable economic revenues** for inhabitants of the region through low-impact tourism activities (such as kayaking, rafting, mountain biking, bird watching, and hiking) and financial incentives (such as land grants and carbon credits) to take pressure off of the increasing encroachment into riparian forests for wood harvesting and agricultural expansion.

There would also be programs to promote intensive reforestation in the degraded areas outside of the corridor as a way of creating employment opportunities for the local communities.

Below is an aerial photo of a section of the corridor, highlighting some of the key components of the proposal: free-flowing river, intact riparian corridor, and sustainable, low-impact tourism.

Citation

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