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# New Indigenous Reserve Aims To Save A Fading Culture

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A bright, cloudless day. A remote village in the heart of a vast Amazon wilderness. The head of his tribe moved to tears -- tears of joy, pride and gratitude.

It was February 4th, 2012, and Romero Ríos Ushiñahua, leader of his people and one of the last members of the Maijuna tribe was witnessing a ceremony to declare the nearly 1-million acre [Maijuna Reserve](#).

I was privileged to be on hand that day, and to see history in the making.

The Maijuna Reserve declaration was the culmination of years of efforts by the Maijuna People, in conjunction with conservationists and the government of Loreto, Peru.

This heroic conservation success happened because the Maijuna People made it happen. They recognized the unbreakable bond between their ancient culture and their natural environment - and acted to preserve both.

Romero Ríos Ushiñahua and the remaining 200 adult members of the Maijuna People approached the group I work for, [Nature and Culture International](#), in a bid to protect their ancestral land.

The result--an astounding new protected area that is 22% bigger than Yosemite National Park--is one of a growing catalog of South American indigenous reserves that aim to conserve the environment, as well as cultural identity.

For many of these native groups, the stakes are extremely high.

While in more industrial parts of the globe, we have the luxury (and, to some extent the misfortune) of living "apart" from "the environment," native subsistence dwellers of the Amazon Basin make no such imaginary distinction.

A healthy ecosystem is essential to all of our livelihoods, but for indigenous groups, many of whom have suffered slave-like treatment at the hands of (in historical succession) missionaries, robber barons, loggers, miners, industrial farmers and drug gangs, protecting their environment means saving themselves from utter obliteration.

Consider, for example, the story of Amadeo García.

Amadeo lives on the upper reaches of the Tigre River in the northern tip of the Peruvian Amazon, only 150 miles from the new Maijuna Reserve. He speaks the Taushiro language, a tongue that no one else in the world can understand.

You see, Amadeo is the last member of his tribe.

His story epitomizes the tragedy of Amazon indigenous peoples.

For thousands of years Amadeo's people inhabited the forests between the Tigre and Corrientes Rivers. The arrival of loggers was the last of a succession of misfortunes for the Taushiro, who suffered terrible exploitation with the arrival of each new economic boom. Their villages were converted to timber camps and their people conscripted and scattered.

And while the Taushiro still count as one of the 28 remaining indigenous groups in Peru's massive Loreto province (which is nearly the size of California), when Amadeo is gone, so too will go millennia of cultural knowledge, of ancestral wisdom, and of beautiful stories.

The Taushiro will have been extinguished.

But this will not be the fate of another of Loreto's remaining tribes: The Maijuna.

They have developed a long-term conservation plan with Nature and Culture International - making a strong commitment to protecting their forest home, now and in the future. They have taken the first steps toward recovering and preserving their ancient culture, along with the incredible biodiversity of their native lands.

The Maijuna have gone from lamenting their historic decline to enthusiastically controlling their own future.

It is a hopeful sign.

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