

Cocaine production increases destruction of Colombia's rainforests

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Cultivating coca bushes, the source of cocaine, is speeding up destruction of rainforests in Colombia and threatening the region's "hotspots" of plant and animal diversity, scientists are reporting in a new study. The findings, which they say underscore the need for establishing larger protected areas to help preserve biodiversity, appear in ACS' journal *Environmental Science & Technology*.

Liliana M. Dávalos and colleagues note that the pace of [deforestation](#) in [Colombia](#) has accelerated over the past 20 years, even as population growth has slowed and the economy has shifted from agriculture to other revenue sources. Colombia's increase in deforestation overlaps with an increase in the cultivation of coca for cocaine production, and the country accounted for 75 percent of the world's coca in 2000. But direct deforestation from coca is what the authors described as relatively small, with as little as 58 square miles of forests replaced by coca each year by 2005. Since rainforests contain about 10 percent of the world's plant and animal species — some of which become the basis of new medicines — deforestation represents a serious threat to global biodiversity. With studies suggesting that coca cultivation contributes to deforestation indirectly, the scientists set out to further document this impact.

Their analysis of data from 2002-2007 on the effects of coca cultivation on deforestation of rainforests in Colombia identified several factors that boosted the likelihood that rainforest would be destroyed. In southern Colombia forest close to newly developed coca farms, for instance, was likely to be cut, as was land in areas where much of the

farmland was devoted to coca. This is the first time the indirect impact on deforestation from cultivation destined for the global [cocaine](#) market has been quantified across South America's biodiversity hotspots. They also showed that designating [protected areas](#), regions that are set aside for special protection for environmental reasons, reduced forest destruction in coca-growing areas. Establishing larger protected areas in the region could help control deforestation and preserve biodiversity, the report suggests.

More information: "Forests and Drugs: Coca-Driven Deforestation in Tropical Biodiversity Hotspots" *Environmental Science & Technology*.

Provided by American Chemical Society

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