

Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation
Brownsberg Declaration
13 June 2008

DECLARATION TO ESTABLISH PERMANENT PROTECTED STATUS AND
PRESERVATION GUIDELINES FOR BROWNSBERG, NASSAU
AND LELY MOUNTAINS IN SURINAME

WHEREAS Suriname along with Guyana, French Guiana, eastern Venezuela, and northern Brazil lies in a unique region referred to as the Guiana Shield, is one of the world's least disturbed regions, has the lowest population density of any country in the world, and may represent one of the very few areas where extensive tracts of natural forests and other ecosystems can be conserved for future generations.

WHEREAS Suriname has been a pioneer and leader in nature conservation since the mid 20th century and has established the Central Suriname Nature Reserve, which, in 2000, was declared a United Nations World Heritage Natural site in recognition of the importance of the country's unique habitats.

WHEREAS the bauxite mountains of northeastern Suriname - Brownsberg, Lely, Nassau – are part of an endangered and rare landscape type that represents < 0.5% of the Suriname land surface and harbors the highest tree diversity currently known in Suriname and several specific plant groups (e.g., bromeliads and orchids).

WHEREAS Nassau has several species of unique fauna including two endemic fish species in upper Paramakka Creek and an endemic *Atelopus* frog.

WHEREAS the Nassau, Lely and Brownsberg mountains are included in the Maroni Area that was designated by 200 scientists as a high priority conservation area at the 2002 Priority Setting Workshop in Paramaribo, Suriname.

WHEREAS Brownsberg Nature Park, the only publicly accessible nature park in Suriname, contains a nearly complete complement of vertebrate species including 125 species of mammals, 374 species of birds, 83 species of reptiles, 43 species of amphibians, and 52 species of fish despite a long history of disturbance related to mining activities.

WHEREAS Brownsberg Nature Park consists of 8,418 ha, including most of the Brownsberg (elev. 507 m), and has in part been leased and in part been given in concession to STINASU, the Foundation for Nature Conservation in Suriname, an organization linked to the National Forest Service, which is in charge of the conservation of forest resources.

WHEREAS Brownsberg Nature Park contains a set of unique Precolumbian archeological sites, attesting to its historical value to Amerindian peoples, and is of historical and cultural importance to the Maroon peoples living near it.

WHEREAS the Brownsberg Nature Park is the destination of more than 10,000 national and international visitors each year since 2000, including tourists, school children, and researchers, and thus represent an important recreational, educational and economic asset for Surinamese people.

WHEREAS there has been an alarming increase, since the late 1990s, in the number and size of illegal gold mining operations and hunting in and around the Brownsberg, Nassau and the Lely mountains, and which represents a serious threat to the integrity of these mountains, forests and wildlife.

WHEREAS small- and medium-scale gold mining involves the use of mercury, a toxic metal that remains indefinitely in soils and sediment of creeks and rivers, and carries a tragic cost in loss of human health and life; causes widespread destruction of riparian habitats; increases the incidence of diseases, like malaria and HIV-AIDS; and disrupts the social and cultural fabric of local communities due to the influx of migratory miners.

WHEREAS STINASU, and other concerned parties, have voiced their concern, but lack the enforcement capacity and authority to effectively remove illegal miners from the Brownsberg Nature Park, and repeated attempts by enforcement agencies of the Government of Suriname to remove miners from within the park have failed to keep miners from resuming operations.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation, respectfully requests the Government of the Republic of Suriname to urgently take necessary and comprehensive steps to protect the unique heritage of the Brownsberg, the Lely, and the Nassau mountains as national and international treasures:

- 1) establish the exact location of Brownsberg park boundaries and make these boundaries known to the public;
- 2) remove all illegal gold mining operations from the park, effectively close and guard illegal access routes into the park from Brownsweg village, and monitor potential access routes near the park;
- 3) enforce existing regulations already established by STINASU for care and maintenance of Brownsberg Nature Park; initiate a system for training and funding park guards as well as a system for reporting problems in the park (e.g., presence of miners and hunters); endeavor to integrate and employ the people of the villages of Brownsweg into park management and protection activities; and enforce existing park rules regarding visitor behavior (including restrictions on the collection of plants and animals);
- 4) institute a ban on large- and small-scale mining of gold or bauxite from the Nassau and Lely mountains;
- 5) designate the Nassau and Lely mountains as National Protected Areas and establish guidelines for use of their natural resources.