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The building of oil roads into the Amazon has led to unsustainable indigenous hunting, fed an illegal bushmeat market, possibly facilitated the pet trade, and is emptying rainforests of wildlife.

- Oil companies build extensive road systems to service drilling operations in Ecuador, and they often offer gifts of vehicles, canoes, outboard motors and guns to indigenous people, enabling hunters to hunt more efficiently to feed the illegal bushmeat trade.

- Studies in Ecuador show that roads create exposure to a market economy, upsetting the equilibrium that exists in indigenous cultures. Hunting becomes a commercial pursuit, and wildlife populations quickly plummet.

- A study of the Maxus road that penetrates Yasuni National Park, found that it resulted in new indigenous settlements along the road and a shift of Waorani hunters from sustainable hunting practices to unsustainable commercial hunting. Both prey and predator wildlife species numbers dropped precipitously near the oil road.

Ecuador's troubled relationship with oil began in 1964, when Texaco first discovered 'black gold' in the Eastern Amazon. That discovery led to some times violent cultural clashes between modern society and indigenous people, who were forcibly removed from isolation, and uprooted from their homes and traditional ways of life.

Today, the Ecuadorian Amazon makes up 80% of the country's remaining forest cover, but oil exploitation, which depends heavily on new road construction, continues to threaten previously untouched rainforest. New roads continue to impact indigenous culture as well, making sustainable hunting practices unsustainable and gravely threatening endemic wildlife.

The slow degradation of Yasuni National Park, established in July 1979, is a case in point. Located in far eastern Ecuador, Yasuni was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1989, and when combined with the adjacent Waorani Ethnic Reserve covers about 6,500 square miles. It is a treasure house of global biodiversity; researchers have counted nearly as many tree species on just 2.5 acres inside the preserve, as are found in the entire U.S. and

Canada combined. The region also happens to be underlain by an estimated 850 million barrels of crude oil, some 20% of Ecuador's reserve.

In 1992, the Maxus Oil Company cut a road into Yasuni, penetrating Ecuador's northeast Amazon. The road triggered a series of cascading events that, according to one study, culminated in members of the previously semi-nomadic Waorani tribe becoming settled commercial hunters — turning a sustainable hunting lifestyle into an unsustainable one that is depleting wildlife.

Oil road to declining biodiversity

Although the Maxus road was closed to the public, the Waorani could legally pass freely along it. This gave the tribe easy access to hunting grounds previously reachable only on foot and with great difficulty. This enabled them to hunt more efficiently and kill more animals over a bigger area than ever before. The Waorani, intensely proud hunters and warriors, located new settlements near the Maxus Road to maximize their access.







