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Amazon Park Gets \$215 Million for Biggest Tropical Forest

By Justin Doom May 21, 2014

A group of foundations, environmental groups and private investors created a \$215 million fund to protect a swath of the Amazon larger than California.

The funds will be disbursed over 25 years to support ARPA, the Amazon Region Protected Areas Program, according to a statement today. The network of protected sites is the world's largest tropical forest national park.

Backers include the World Wildlife Fund, Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and Linden Trust for Conservation, said Carter Roberts, WWF's chief executive officer. When the fund is drained, Brazil is expected to assume responsibility for protecting the region, which will eventually expand to about 150 million acres (60.7 million hectares) from 128 million acres.

"We dream of doing things at the scale of the problems we face," Roberts said yesterday in a telephone interview. "When you look at global rates of deforestation and how it contributes to climate change, doing something at this scale matters a lot - - creating a system of parks the size of one-and-a-half Californias."

Brazil created ARPA in 2002 after the nation pledged in 1998 to preserve at least 10 percent of its Amazon lands. Last year, the deforestation rate there increased 28 percent after declining for four straight years.

It took only "a couple of phone calls" to convince initial ARPA supporters to contribute to the the bridge fund, Roberts said.

"We borrowed a page from Wall Street -- you build together the capital to fund the whole thing," he said. "We put together a plan that would help Brazil close the gap over time. It's all about the art of the deal and having a clear, singular vision."

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