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Indio Maiz bio-preserve, ancestral lands in Nicaragua threatened by colonists - Costa Rica Star News

In far southeastern Nicaragua, on the banks of the San Juan River, which forms the boundary with Costa Rica, is the Indio Maiz biological preserve, one of Central America's most important tropical rainforest areas where in recent years colonists have been moving in.

Inhabited on 70 percent of its territory by the Rama and Kriol indigenous communities, the ancestral owners of the virgin jungle, the bio-preserve is home to a wide variety of representative Central American species, including green and red parrots that are in danger of extinction.

To protect the birds – and the other fauna – from the colonists who are taking possession of the area, which totals about 2,640 square kilometers (about 1,000 square miles), the Rama and Kriol communities, organized into the Rama Kriol Territorial Government, or GTRK, decided to delineate and clearly mark the limits of their lands by installing signs and markers.

“The idea to delimit our territory is to preserve the reservation for our descendants, and not only for them but for all Nicaraguans, because these forests are everyone's,” one of the territorial forest rangers in the zone, Margarito MacCree, told EFE.

Several ecological organizations in Rio San Juan province – subsumed under the Union of Environmentalist Organizations for the Defense of the Indio Maiz Biological Preserve – decided to support the GTRK and organized a “joint project of peasants and Ramas” with the aim of preserving the rainforest, which was declared a biosphere preserve by Unesco in 2003.

The organizations estimate that about 1,000 families from the Northern Caribbean and central zones of Nicaragua have settled within the preserve, attracted by land sellers who have been placing them in 30-50 hectare (75-125 acre) tracts.

In addition, they say that local officials have been promoting the colonists' invasion in exchange for political support and funding.

The land sales have been so unorganized that the same parcels have been sold to several different people, sparking conflict that has resulted in at least one death, the head of the environmental Rio Foundation, Saul Obregon, told EFE.

He added that with “the pace of current colonization, in about 20 years the tropical rainforest in the entire preserve will have been fragmented and destroyed.” EFE