

**Masisa**  
**The Forestal Argentina natural  
reserve system**



**Overview**

Over the last 10 years, Forestal Argentina has created nine protected areas along the Uruguay River and its tributaries.

**Background**

Forestal Argentina, part-owned by Chilean forest products company Masisa, manages more than 70,000 hectares in the Argentine provinces of Entre Ríos and Corrientes. The land has suffered from a history of agricultural and livestock use, with natural forest being cleared and grasslands becoming degraded as a result of overgrazing. In Entre Ríos, most of the land consisted of livestock or citrus farms, while the land in Corrientes was used for extensive livestock or rice farming. Some areas were already planted with eucalyptus and pine when Forestal Argentina acquired them.

By contrast, wetlands and riparian forests had remained largely unspoilt, with human impact limited to a single rice farm. The subtropical vegetation of these forests, unusual this far south, is due to the microclimates and biological corridors formed by the Uruguay and Parana rivers. In the case of the Uruguay River, however, this natural corridor has been interrupted by the construction of the Salto Grande dam, isolating the southern sector from its source. Wetlands and riparian forests are poorly protected in Argentina, with only one national park in the Uruguay river basin.

**The project**

In partnership with Argentine NGO the Hábitat y Desarrollo (Habitat and Development) Foundation, Forestal Argentina created a network of nine protected areas to conserve the wetlands and associated forests on its land. In total, these reserves cover nearly 4,000 hectares – a major contribution to maintaining this relatively small but significant habitat. One of the reserves includes an area previously used for rice farming: a large dam that held water to flood the rice fields now forms a lake.

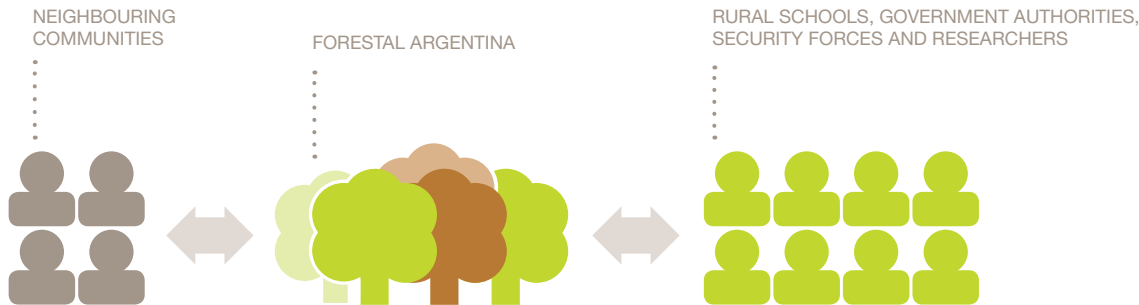
Forestal Argentina has fostered good relationships with neighbouring communities, and the reserves are visited by various groups including rural schools, government authorities, security forces and researchers. Activities include:

- regular visits by school groups
- teacher training courses on environmental education
- workshops on animal trafficking control for members of local, regional and national security forces.

In Entre Rios, Forestal Argentina has concluded agreements with four municipalities to form a conservation corridor in Arroyo Ayuí Grande.



School groups regularly visit Forestal Argentina's nature reserves.



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**Benefits**

Conserving riverside forests south of the Salte Grande dam can make a significant contribution to maintaining biodiversity. Sightings of a number of species, including mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, have become more common since the reserves were established. The nature reserves also provide a haven for wildlife threatened by poaching, including capybaras, foxes, corzuelas, small river wolves, marsh deer and alligators.

Scientific knowledge of local wildlife has also increased. For example, research at the Tres Cerros reserve found two bird species not previously recorded in Corrientes province (*Atajacaminos coludo* and *Loica pampeana*). A three-year study into amphibians in the Forestal Argentina reserves was presented at the Argentine Congress of Herpetology in 2008.

Biodiversity awareness among company personnel and nearby communities has increased too. As an example, a worker found an endangered aguará-guazú (maned wolf) on the company's property. Forestal Argentina created a 70-hectare wildlife corridor for the species, and held workshops in local schools to explain that the aguará-guazú is harmless and is protected by a provincial law.

The company has also incorporated biodiversity best practices into its land management – for example, it avoids the controlled burning of grassland during bird nesting season (September to March).

**Next steps**

In 2010, Forestal Argentina launched a 10-year management plan to cover its whole nature reserve system. It addresses a number of conservation challenges and issues such as:

- coping with flooding periods, which limit access and damage facilities
- tackling poaching, particularly of capybaras and corzuelas
- removing invasive plant species
- limiting damage from fires and vandalism
- monitoring biodiversity
- building contacts with local stakeholders, including school directors, rural police, firefighters and municipal delegations.

The company is also sharing its experiences with other producers in the basin who wish to run similar programmes. Forestal Argentina is working with nine companies in the Uruguay River Forest Consortium which are exploring their own private conservation initiatives.



Sightings of maned wolves (above) and capybaras (below) have become more common since Forestal Argentina established its nature reserves.

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