

# Deforestation and Cattle Ranching

## *A Paramilitary Marriage in the Colombian Amazon*

**Summary:** Extensive livestock farming and deforestation are destroying the biodiversity of the Guaviare province in Colombia, including animal and plant species that the Nukak indigenous people need for their survival. We visited the area in search of these species and the paramilitary trail that led cattle ranching to become the main economy of Guaviare and the main driver of deforestation in the country. *\*Spanish version available [here](#).*

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### Species At Risk of Extinction in Guaviare

The Nukak territory has been considerably altered due to deforestation that has consumed the forests of the Guaviare province. Their ancestral foods, such as asaí, guama and cumare, have become extinct by the flames and the action of chainsaws that devastate everything to their path. The settlers justify these actions by having more land cleared to raise cattle, produce meat for domestic consumption and export it mainly to countries in the Middle East. Deforestation is driven by large landowners from other regions of the country who come attracted by the cheap and forgotten lands of Guaviare; with large sums of money, they grab the land, hire people from the area to burn the forest and set large pastures for raising cattle. There, the alliances between cattle ranching and paramilitarism have been historical.

Deforestation has consumed the forests of the Guaviare province, altering the Nukak territory severely. Their ancestral foods, such as asaí, guama and cumare, have become extinct by the flames and the action of chainsaws that devastate everything to their path. The settlers justify these actions by having more land cleared to raise cattle, produce meat for domestic consumption and export it mainly to countries in the Middle East. Deforestation driven by large landowners from other regions of the country who come with large sums of money attracted by the cheap and forgotten lands of Guaviare, grab the land, and hire people from the area to burn the forest and set large pastures for raising cattle. Over there, the alliances between cattle ranching and paramilitarism have been historical.

We visited the region known as the northern gateway to the Colombian Amazon, where biodiversity loss is evident. Different animal species have lost their natural habitat and, therefore, the connectivity in order to move around. Besides, the depletion of the soil's agricultural capacity is also evident. The capital of Guaviare, San José, and the Nukak National Nature Reserve (*'resguardo'*) is some 93 miles away. In the *resguardo*, species facing extinction, such as the jaguar, can be found.

Jaguars are umbrella species needing free movement through large extensions of land and forests so they can find their food. They are important mammals in the Amazon that help controlling populations and maintaining and protecting the ecosystems they inhabit. The jaguar

is a sacred animal in the indigenous cosmovision and regarded as a symbol of power, life and fertility. According to the Nukak and peasants in Guaviare, the feline has become an enemy for many as their natural habitat has shrunk and forced to enter populated areas or farms in search for food. Thus, jaguars have often eaten cattle and are therefore, shot.



*The aotus monkey is a direct victim of extensive cattle ranching and deforestation. A mammal that needs wide mobility corridors but that has lost its habitat due to the disproportionate deforestation to make way for cattle ranches. Photos and video: Rafael Zuñiga*

The harpy eagle is one of the 1,900 bird species identified in the Colombian Amazon, and is also in risk of extinction. Like the jaguar and the aotus monkey, this species is running out of food sources. “As a result of deforestation and habitat loss, all these species come into conflict with people because they eat the chickens and cows, and we end up competing with them for food,” says Angélica Rojas, coordinator of the Conservation and Sustainable Development Foundation (FCDS) in Guaviare, based in San José.

The “Trocha Ganadera” is a road more than 118 miles long that runs through the north-east of San José del Guaviare, connecting it with 23 villages and five Nukak indigenous settlements. The road is winding, narrow and rocky; the soil is clay. Its landscape is similar at first glance: burnt forests, logs piled up, fallen trees, hundreds of cows and a few crops. There, like a tiny dot in the middle of vast extensions of land, the last Nukak Makú survive in the settlements of Guanapalo, Caño Tigre, La Esperanza, Cumare and Caño Makú. We visited the last three communities for this research.



*The Trocha Ganadera is a road more than 190 kilometers long that runs northeast of San José del Guaviare. Its landscape is similar at first glance: burnt forests, logs in rows, fallen trees, hundreds of cows, and few crops.*

The Nukak people, considered the last nomadic tribe in Colombia, have also based their diet on Amazonic fruits. However, their food security is in danger. One of the most consumed by them is the guama, whose plant is adapted to the tropical climate conditions and offers them a fleshy, sweet-tasting pulp. This species is also used by the Nukak for medicinal purposes and cultural value, taking advantage of its wood, leaves, and seeds to prepare different drinks and to light fires or build their malocas. Likewise, asaí is used for preparing different beverages and is very popular among the Nukak. The palm's trunk is used in construction for building their houses and malocas.



*The Nukak indigenous women cook for the community while the men go hunting.*

Cumare is the other Nukak food that is becoming extinct. We learned about it when we arrived at the settlement of the same name. It is responsible for the production of fibre in the Amazon thanks to its resistance, flexibility and durability. The Nukak use its leaves to make hammocks, bags, necklaces and dresses. The settlement consists of six malocas, a kitchen and a classroom, where the Nukak children learn to read and write in Spanish and in their own language, maku-puinave. All that surrounds it are cattle herds of more than 500 hectares, where cattle grow in huge pastures.

“The whites come with their cattle and take up more territory, and we don’t want it because it devastates the land. We are taking care of the forest, but these people limit it by putting electric wire and depriving us Nukak people of hunting, fishing, or gathering. We used to hunt pigs in the bush, but they are no longer there; they are gone because the animals are going far away as the cattle territory expands”, says Manuel Joonide, one of the spokespersons of the Nukak reservation. He says the solution would be to move away from the settlers and into the forest to strengthen their culture and traditions.



*Cumare settlement of the Nukak community, named after an Amazonian tree that the indigenous people use to make hammocks, bags, necklaces, and dresses.*



*Indigenous women from the Cumare settlement, the same name as the village visited for this research. Cattle farms surround this settlement in this area of the Guaviare province.*

According to the Ministry of Environment, the construction of unplanned roads, such as the “Trocha Ganadera,” constitutes the main driver of deforestation in the province. These access roads facilitate the transformation of forests into large pastures, enabling land grabbing and the expansion of unsustainable cattle ranching practices, which is the main economic activity in the region. According to the Guaviare Provincial Assembly, in 2020, extensive cattle ranching in this region was recognized as an unsustainable model “due to the low efficiency of pastures for animal feed, where, on average, there are two hectares per animal.”

Livestock farming is a phenomenon that has been growing since 2016, after the signing of the peace agreement between the Colombian state and the FARC guerrillas. The departure of the insurgents from the Amazon jungle, paradoxically, marked a historic milestone in the advance of livestock farming given that, during the armed conflict, it was the guerrillas who controlled the indiscriminate deforestation, as they imposed severe fines which, if not complied with, were punished by the insurgents with banishment. The figures prove us right: according to the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA), in Guaviare, in 2016, there were 264,564 head of cattle on 2,981 farms; in 2023, that figure rose to 549,246 cows on 5,431 farms. That is 2,450 new livestock farms and 284,682 new heads of cattle.



*According to the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA), currently, there are 549,246 cows in Guaviare distributed among 5,431 farms.*

“We must highlight that the FARC controlled deforestation and told peasants and settlers how many hectares of land they could cut down. Then, after the signing of the peace agreement in 2016, many actors came in to fell trees, without any problem, to expand their production areas,” says Nelder Parra, Guaviare’s Secretary of Agriculture. The same approach has been supported by Angélica Rojas, regional coordinator of the FCDS Foundation: “after the guerrillas left, there was reduction of extortions and many outsiders took advantage of the moment to bring in more cattle and take over large tracts of land, even inside the indigenous reserves.”

The turning point for deforestation in Guaviare was undoubtedly 2017 when deforestation went from 11,456 hectares in 2016 to 38,221 hectares precisely one year after the guerrillas left the jungle. From then on, the figures continued to rise. According to deforestation data from the Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (IDEAM), in 2018, 34,527 hectares were deforested, around 24,220 in 2019, a total of 25,021 in 2020, and some 25,021 hectares in 2021. However, the curve has been falling more steeply in the last year. While in 2022, 15,171 hectares were deforested, between January and September 2023, the figure dropped to 6,193 hectares, a reduction of almost 60%. Despite this, the Ministry of Environment said that the main center of deforestation in Colombia continues to be Guaviare, which accounts for 12.3 percent of the country’s deforestation.



*The Guaviare province is the principal deforestation hotspot in Colombia, accounting for 12.3% of the country's deforestation.*

#### Climate Change: Amid the Nukak and Cattle Herds

According to the “Departmental Inventory of Greenhouse Gases and Black Carbon 2018”, Guaviare was the fourth province in the country with the highest number of Greenhouse Gases (GHG), with a total of 19,703 emissions, which translated into 7% of the national total. These are the most up-to-date provincial figures on this problem, according to the state-run Corporation for the Sustainable Development of the North and East Amazon (CDA), which is responsible for monitoring environmental issues in the Amazon. According to this entity, 95 percent of these emissions have been caused by logging and burning natural forests.

“Although vehicle fleets have grown in the last ten years in Guaviare, we do not have an industry that produces too many gas emissions. Therefore, the present study showed that the biggest source of gas emissions is deforestation, related to the felling and burning of forests for the introduction of extensive cattle farms. We are looking for resources to implement strategies that will allow us to measure greenhouse gases accurately in the region. But we still don’t have them, and we didn’t start with that yet,” says Jhon Jairo Moreno, a forestry engineer at the CDA. Meta is the third largest cattle-producing province in the country, on the border with Guaviare, ranked first with 32,694 emissions, representing 24% of the national total in 2018.

There is a dense atmosphere at the northern gateway to the Amazon. Settler farmers know that burning forests would cause a catastrophe, so what is burnt stays burnt, so they try to stop this practice. The problem is that the soils of deforested and cleared land are losing vitality, so burning is increasing to clear new land and sow pasture. This practice is called ‘overgrazing,’ and agricultural practices cause it. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has explained: “The death of organisms due to the lack of water, air, and

nutrients, as well as the decrease in biodiversity, can lead to the depletion of organic matter, contamination, and compaction, putting food chains at risk.”

Pablo José Hernández lives in the village of Charras (Guaviare), where we arrived after a two-and-a-half-hour drive on the “Trocha Ganadera” (cattle trail). He is a peasant farmer and a medium-sized cattle rancher with 79 cows on his farm La Florida. Like his colleagues (small, medium, and large ranchers), Pablo has also cleared the jungle to expand the land for cattle. Although Hernández does not know how many hectares he has cleared nor how many hectares he owns, he does recognize that forest burning to clear the forest is common practice in the area. A method that starts with fencing off a specific piece of land then comes the burning of trees, grasses, and bushes, and then turns into a cattle ranch: “We do it in a controlled way because we don’t want the forest to burn down, but we do it out of need because it is for our livelihood. We live in the forest, so we can’t do what other people do: go to San José or Villavicencio to buy bananas or cassava. We take benefit from the land to grow crops or have a chicken, a pig, or some cows because we are hungry every day”, he says.



*The farm of Pablo Hernandez, a settler farmer and medium-sized cattle rancher who owns 79 cows on his farm La Florida.*

On the surface, this phenomenon seems controllable by appealing to the conscience of the farmers. However, the burning of large landowners’ land is getting out of control to bring in more cattle. These Amazonian lands, located in the heart of Nukak territory, are attractive to large landowners because they can be bought relatively cheaply compared to other regions. One of their ways of occupying the territory is by hiring people from the region to burn forests and then install pastures for cattle. Finding those responsible for slashing and burning forests is



an almost impossible task, says the environmental authority CDA. Even with the coordinates of the burned land, it is impossible to establish the owner of the land, as the land is either uncultivated land belonging to the state or is protected territory because of its environmental importance.

RAYA Magazine found in documents of the Attorney General’s Office unpublished details that reveal this practice of taking care of cattle for third parties, for which there are those captured. For example, on 3 February 2021, Carlos René Reyes Guzmán, Cristian Arley Forero Porras, Jose Eider Muñoz Castaño, Nelson Fernando Perez, Miguel Dario Aguilera Sanabria and Jose Adonai Lesmes Paez, who were invading and making improper use of the Nukak Nature Reserve, were arrested on various plots of land: “staying temporarily in this area, obtaining an economic benefit from this activity that translates into the payment received for the work of taking care of livestock inside the reserve,” says the official document.

Most of the freshwater sources that the Nukak have near their settlements are already fenced off for the cows to drink. They need to walk several hours to find a well after hunting. Tackling deforestation remains beyond the reach of the regional authorities. According to the forestry engineer of the state-owned CDA, “so far, they have intervened 500 hectares, but, for example, in the “Trocha Ganadera,” more than 20,000 hectares have been deforested. So, the amount of resources arriving is meager compared to the realities on the ground and the magnitude of the problem.



*Deforestation and cattle ranching are depleting the natural resources of Guaviare. For example, most freshwater sources near the Nukak, can’t be accessed as cattle ranchers fence them off to provide water to their cows.*



*Nukak at home. They are considered the last nomadic tribe of Colombia. They have based their diet on the fruits offered by the Amazon, which are now in short supply.*

Nélder Parra, Guaviare's Secretary of Agriculture, mentions one way of counteracting this problem: "We need to make payment for environmental services a constant feature so that the community changes its mind and does not have to deforest to earn a living. We can also make the sale of carbon credits a reality. That's an issue handled like the stock market, but few people know about it. We know there is a market there, but we don't yet know how communities can access it," he said. It is the same possibility that has been raised by the progressive government of Gustavo Petro, even to be paid with resources obtained by the state amid the international negotiation of foreign debt swap for climate action.

The Amazonian Institute for Scientific Research (Sinchi) has argued that the agricultural production in these soils, should be changed through knowledge transmission to the peasant settlers who currently raise livestock.

But deforestation is not just an important issue in Colombia. At the United Nations Climate Change Conference, during COP28 held in Dubai (United Arab Emirates) recently, an announcement was made that the country will receive 34 million dollars from the United Kingdom, Norway, and Germany to make the Amazon the first region with zero deforestation by 2030. "We must maintain constant work and demonstrate that the Colombian Amazon will be the first region with zero deforestation by 2030, working hand in hand with the communities to

contain deforestation and develop an economy of ecological restoration and biodiversity that works in the long term with the forest and not against the forest,” said Minister Susana Muhamad.

The National Government intends to use these economic resources to strengthen the program Plan to Contain Deforestation in the Amazon, which focuses on the region’s productive reconversion, conservation, and restoration. The UK Minister for Energy Security and Carbon Neutrality, Graham Stuart, said in relation to deforestation in the country: “We are focusing on helping Colombia address the key drivers by building the capacity of key institutions, indigenous peoples and local communities in the Colombian Amazon”.

The Norwegian government highlighted Colombia’s peace with illegal groups to curb deforestation in strategic regions such as the Amazon: “The links between deforestation and the peace process are crucial. Achieving peace is fundamental to protect forests and vice versa. Providing forest-friendly livelihoods and reforms is important to achieve lasting peace in Colombia,” said Andreas Bjelland, Norway’s Minister for Climate and Environment.

#### Cattle Ranching: A Harmful Business Promoted by Paramilitaries and Politicians

Cattle ranching is a business that has been marked not only by the blood of cattle but also by the blood of innocent peasants who died defending these jungles that were later deforested and occupied by cattle. A clear example was what happened in the municipality of Mapiripán, located between Guaviare and Meta, on 12th July 1997, when around 120 paramilitaries from the United Self-Defence Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU) arrived in San José del Guaviare in two military planes. For a week, they dragged peasants and indigenous people from their homes and took them to the town’s slaughterhouse. They were tortured and shot or slit their throats. The armed men left the municipality on Sunday, July 20th, while security forces arrived only three days later. On September 15th, 2005, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights condemned the Colombian State for the violation of the rights to life, integrity, and freedom of victims, noting that the massacre left 45 fatal victims.

From then on, the consolidation and expansion of paramilitarism in Guaviare continued until 2005. On the orders of the Castaño brothers, leaders of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), the Centauros Bloc was established under the command of Miguel Arroyave, alias “Arcángel.” Since its creation, this bloc became one of the most powerful in the country, with an army of 4,000 men spread across seven neighboring departments. The financial and administrative commander of this paramilitary structure was Daniel Rendón Herrera, alias “Don Mario,” who, before the Justice and Peace Law, assured that this bloc organized the dispossession and massive purchase of 12,000 hectares of land to consolidate its political and economic fortress in the Amazon region.

Alias “Don Mario” also mentioned that the AUC received support from politicians in the region before the Colombian justice system. Specifically, he said that the former governor of Guaviare, during the periods 2001–2003 and 2016–2019, Nebio Echeverry Cadavid, supported the self-defence groups. He claimed he contributed \$400 million to the illegal group’s coffers. The

Attorney General’s Office accused Nebio Echeverry of having links with legal representatives of the construction companies of several roads in the province, which used to be trochas, also accused of massive purchase and dispossession of land. Journalistic investigations by Zona Franca and El Espectador have indicated that Echeverry participated in the paving of the road linking the municipalities of Guaviare, Calamar and Miraflores. “This could become the spearhead to encourage the massive deforestation of the primary forest,” reads a report by the Attorney General’s Office, in which they analysed the relations between Nebio Echeverry and the road construction companies.



*Nebio Echeverry Cadavid, former governor of Guaviare during 2001–2003 and 2016–2019, accused by “Don Mario” of supporting self-defence groups. Photo: Colprensa.*

In addition, one of the culprits for paramilitary consolidation in the area was the financing received from the region’s cattle ranchers to carry out massacres and dispossess peasants and indigenous people off their land. The Centro de Memoria Histórica documented that the Centauros Bloc was one of the structures that produced the highest rates of forced displacement and land dispossession, favoring specific sectors, actors, and economic elites in the region, in this case, Guaviare and Meta.

It was not new in the country, though. In 2018, the former president of the most important federation of cattle ranchers in Colombia, Fedegan, Jorge Visbal Martelo, was convicted of aggravated conspiracy to commit a crime for making agreements with the Castaño brothers,

founders of paramilitarism. According to the sentence, he was a regular visitor to the AUC campsite, where he gave ideological and military advice to the paramilitaries.

“Visbal Martelo knew and widely shared the ideology of paramilitary groups, with which he was akin, as he had received multiple requests from the accused on behalf of the cattle ranchers, seeking the presence of Self-Defence Forces in some areas controlled by guerrillas. In a 2009 ruling of the Supreme Court of Justice, he emphasized that he requested it because of the state’s absence in different areas of the country”. Before the trial, Visbal Martelo was ambassador to Canada in the first government of Álvaro Uribe, senator for Partido de la U, and ambassador to Peru during the first government of Juan Manuel Santos.



*Jorge Visbal Martelo, former president of Fedegan, was convicted of aggravated conspiracy to commit a crime for making agreements with the Castaño brothers, founders of paramilitarism.*

*Photo: Colprensa.*

In June 2022, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), which arose from the Peace Agreement with the FARC, rejected Visbal Martelo’s submission to this transitional justice. The Chamber for the Definition of Legal Situations considered that “his level of participation and incidence in matters related to the armed conflict in cattle-raising areas of the country are not commensurate with his limited contribution to the truth”.

In fact, after the paramilitary incursion in 1997, the most cattle entered Guaviare through drug trafficking money, their main source of funding. “The paramilitary entry was a very violent moment when many people were displaced and ended up selling or giving up their land. So, the new appropriators arrived with ‘high-class’ cattle because they had resources from paramilitaries,” says Angélica Rojas, coordinator of the FCDS Foundation.

In addition to the accusations against cattle ranchers of illegally and violently grabbing land and then occupying it with cattle with the support of paramilitary groups, environmentalists have accused the association of having a crucial role in the indiscriminate deforestation of Colombia's jungles for livestock farming. Currently, cattle ranchers, through Fedegan, are protecting their lands and their economic activity through belligerent speeches in which they claim that there is no proof that extensive livestock farming is the main cause of deforestation at a national level. In this sense, they have stated that they have been committed to protecting nature for more than a decade. José Félix Lafaurie, current president of Fedegan, made this clear: "We take on the responsibilities that belong to us in the face of climate change, but we will not accept that we get blamed for climate variability, the felling of forests or the destruction of the Amazon."

The Meta province is near Guaviare and has a longstanding history of livestock farming; this probably played out for livestock making its way into Guaviare's territories which are unsuitable for raising cattle but where it became the main economic activity. One of the traditions acquired from its neighboring department that remains today is that during celebrations (baptisms, birthdays, or graduations), it is common for the honoree to receive a cow or a steer. Thus, having cattle becomes a "cashier's check". "Around 80% of the province's economy comes from livestock, the commercialization of either its meat or dairy products. Livestock farming has gained a lot of strength because it is more profitable than potato, cassava, or pumpkin crops. Today, farmers can sell a head of cattle for five million pesos," says Nélder Parra, Guaviare's Secretary of Agriculture.

This business not only has a significant environmental impact but is also cruel, mainly in the transport and slaughter of animals. Andrea Padilla is an animal rights activist and congresswoman who has denounced these practices: "Extensive livestock farming is extremely inhumane with cattle," she says. Some of the reasons that have led her to have fierce discussions with Fedegan's CEO, Mr. Lafaurie, actually is because she demands better conditions for the cows after being sent as a bargaining chip: "In the country, we have a shortage of slaughterhouses, which means that cattle have to be transported by tertiary roads for eight or twelve hours, exposed to scorching sun or heavy rains", says the congresswoman.



*Extensive livestock farming is extremely inhumane to cattle. Cattle travel to the center of the country by tertiary roads for eight to twelve hours.*

Regarding the companies transporting and slaughtering the animals, she indicated that it is one of the best signs of the precarity of the Colombian State: “It has been incapable of organizing itself around having traceability of the meat chain. What happens between the raising of the animal and its slaughter is a terrible phenomenon of intermediaries since it is almost impossible to know who the owner of the cow is when it arrives at the slaughterhouse”.

Research by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), “*Contaminated Meat: How Cattle Supply Chains are Destroying the Colombian Amazon,*” supports the senator’s statement and details that meat traceability is very complex because too many actors are involved, preventing information on whether the cattle marketed in the country came from deforested areas. The process of cattle production has three phases: breeding begins when the female is pregnant and ends when the calf is 18 months old. The raising phase starts at weaning and ends when the animal reaches 24 months, and the fattening phase extends from 24 months until 36 months when they are sent for slaughter.



*Cattle branding process carried out by ranchers to prevent cows from being stolen.*

Each of these processes can be carried out on the same farm, and if so, it is called a full-cycle farm. When farms perform only one or two of these phases, they are called partial-cycle farms. EIA researchers warned in their report: “Intermediation is poorly regulated and generates inefficiencies and high levels of informality in the supply chain. These factors make traceability and monitoring difficult, especially for suppliers that do not carry out the complete cycle in the production process”.

Regarding the effects suffered by cattle when living in unsuitable lands, Senator Padilla states that the cows’ hooves rot when they step on clay soils, such as those in Guaviare, from which an endless number of bugs emerge. She says that the real pain for the animals occurs when they are transported in trucks or boats because they are not used to treading on such hard surfaces. “These animals are sent by ship mostly to Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan or Egypt, through a *‘free board’* model; here, the “owner of the cow” puts it in the port of Cartagena on unfit vessels and animals must endure 25 or 30 days traveling at sea until they reach their final destination. These are countries where there are no animal protection laws and where they are slaughtered.”





*Cattle in the Amazon suffer consequences in their hooves, as they rot when treading on clay soil, such as those found in Guaviare.*

Currently, it is impossible to know if the meat arriving in the center of the country and then distributed to big cities and countries of the world comes from deforested areas. Consequently, three congressmen, Andrea Padilla, Juan Carlos Lozada, and Julia Miranda, processed a bill to implement a National System of Animal Identification, Information and Traceability (SNIITA) and a National System of Identification and Information of Bovine Cattle (SINIGAN), two instruments that would be strategic for the fight against deforestation in the country.

The project known as “Meat-free of deforestation” finally collapsed in Congress, confirming that cattle rancher’s power in politics is a harsh reality in Colombia: “There is a lot of opposition to regulating the whole chain because, in the end, there are many people who benefit from illegality and absence of State. In Colombia, you try to present improvements for the animal’s conditions, but they sink because this is a cattle rancher’s Congress. “In this country, cattle ranchers hold huge political and economic power,” says Senator Padilla.



*Senator Andrea Padilla. She was the spokesperson for the NGO AnimaNaturalis International, an Ibero-American organization for the defense of animals. In March 2021, she received the “Woman Animal Defenders” award from the Peta Latino organization.*

For the time being, the Nukak do not know what will happen to their territory as they are further and further away from their culture and food security. The cattle ranchers continue to fight so that the justice system does not continue to link them to the paramilitaries as part of this network, despite the obvious historical relationships described in this document. Meanwhile, the Congress of the Republic, very close to the power of the cattle ranchers, continues to break the regulation of a chain that deforests, mistreats the animals and sacrifices them after many days of suffering.

VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbKSgaWV4PU>

*Caption: Extensive cattle ranching and deforestation are destroying the species on which the Nukak Peoples of Guaviare survive. We traveled through these lands, in search of these species and the paramilitary trail that led cattle to be the main economy of this department, but also, the main deforester of the country.*

*\*\*The reporting of this story was supported by Brighter Green’s ([www.brightergreen.org](http://www.brightergreen.org)) Animals and Biodiversity Reporting Fund.*