MEMO

June 3, 2024
TO: Editors and Journalists
RE: Rainforest Trust Celebrates World Environment Day with 50 Million Acres Protected Milestone

This year on World Environment Day, Rainforest Trust announced a massive milestone of 50 million acres of habitat protected to date, an area 40 times the size of Grand Canyon National Park. For over 36 years, Rainforest Trust has worked to safeguard critical habitat to protect species, and less than 1% of the forest area within these 50 million acres has been lost to deforestation.

Rainforest Trust saves endangered wildlife and protects the planet by creating rainforest reserves through partnerships, community engagement and donor support. The organization has protected more than 50 million acres by establishing protected areas in partnership with Indigenous and local organizations and engaged communities across more than 62 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia-Pacific.

Rainforest Trust establishes protected areas through direct land purchase; designation in cooperation with governments and communities; and community-managed areas that secure the ancestral lands of Indigenous Peoples that depend on the land for their survival.

Protecting the environment is critical to all life on Earth. One of the leading drivers of environmental destruction is deforestation. Tropical primary forest loss in 2023 was equivalent to losing almost 10 football (soccer) fields of forest per minute. Yet, in spite of this destruction, the tropical forests that remain are critically important in removing carbon from the atmosphere each year.

Tropical forests store carbon and actively remove it from the air, and 50% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity is found in rainforest habitat. The protection of standing forests is critical.

Below are a few highlights from projects that contributed to this accomplishment:

- **Brazil - Preserve the Amazon's Coastal Gem in Brazil** - The Amazon River Estuary holds 80% of Brazil's mangroves in the largest continuous belt of mangroves in the world. Rainforest Trust supported our partner, RARE Brazil, to safeguard over 180,000 acres of this globally important ecosystem, home to at least 40 globally threatened species, including American Manatee and Atlantic Goliath Grouper. This is a stunning win for the Amazon, for sustainable fisheries and for traditional coastal fishing communities of over 10,000 people. And for the climate—the intact mangrove forests in this project store over 40 million metric tons of CO_2 equivalents (an amount comparable to emissions from driving 9.5 million gas-powered vehicles for one year). The new federal designations signed into law by President Lula on March 21 will empower local communities to co-manage the reserves and legally defend them from destructive coastal

development. This project was funded in part by Rainforest Trust's Brazilian Amazon Fund, created in 2023 to permanently safeguard 20 million acres by December 2026.

- **Bolivia - Save Bolivia's Blue-throated Macaw from Extinction**. Blue-throated Macaws are among the most endangered parrots in the world. Recent estimates place the wild population at only 200-300 mature adults, all of whom live in the Beni Savannas in Bolivia. These highly intelligent, colorful birds are nearing extinction due to habitat loss for cattle ranching and soy production, and the illegal pet trade. Rainforest Trust and our partner, Asociación Armonía, began working together in 2020 to expand the Laney Rickman Reserve for Critically Endangered Blue-throated Macaws by 4,293-acres, bringing its total size to 5,982 acres. Full protection was achieved in August 2023. Rainforest Trust has also supported Asociación Armonía's nest box program, which led to 18 breeding attempts and recorded 15 chicks fledged during the 2023 breeding season—a record for the program and a sign of hope for the species as a whole.

- **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) - Protect Forest Elephants and Lowland Gorillas of Africa's Biodiversity Hotspot**. In an effort to stop deforestation in the Congo Rainforest and increase the population of Critically Endangered Grauer's Gorilla, Rainforest Trust is working with local partner Strong Roots in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to protect 1,174,727 acres of critical habitat against the persistent threat of mining. Since 2000, populations of the Grauer's Gorilla have declined by a heartbreaking 77%. Extreme habitat loss has broken up their rich forest habitat, forcing them to survive in small, isolated groups in forest fragments where they are highly vulnerable to poachers. Our project with Strong Roots will secure land tenure rights for traditional communities through government designation of community forest concessions. To date, 636,309 acres have been designated, with 538,418 acres in process. This project connects gorilla habitat between Kahuzi-Biega National Park and Itombwe Nature Reserve and protects against mining. These dense rainforests function as carbon sinks to mitigate climate change and regulate the global climate.

- **Dominique Bikaba, Founder and Executive Director of Strong Roots**, has recently joined Rainforest Trust's Advisory Council. Strong Roots is a grassroots conservation and sustainable development organization operating in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The organization works to empower communities to use scientifically grounded conservation strategies alongside traditional knowledge and practices. Dominique Bikaba's bio can be found here.

Rainforest Trust's long-term commitment to these vulnerable forests has resulted in protecting over fifty million acres to date.

To learn more about Rainforest Trust, visit www.rainforesttrust.org.

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About Rainforest Trust
Since 1988, Rainforest Trust has been safeguarding imperiled tropical habitats and saving endangered species by establishing protected areas in partnership with local organizations and communities. With its partners, Rainforest Trust has safeguarded more than 50 million acres of vital habitat across Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia–Pacific. Rainforest Trust is a nonprofit organization that relies upon the generous support of the public to successfully implement its important conservation action. The organization is proud of earning a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator. Learn more about the work of Rainforest Trust by visiting RainforestTrust.org, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or LinkedIn.