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The Golden Amazon documentary

This documentary was put together with the help of a collaborator who used to participate in this illegal work. The slaying of the Amazon rainforest is generally an illegal business that is unfortunately denied by the government. The camera infiltrated an illegal work group who, somehow, began to forget that they were being filmed. Although these men could end up in jail for this work, they proceed regardless, risking everything for instant payment. The illegal loggers hire an expert who picks the highest quality trees for cutting. Although this man is greatly valued, he still does not receive significant pay, regardless of the incalculable profits made from the trees. They destroy the forest habitat and probably don't understand that some tree species depend on others to grow properly. Regardless, they see value only in dead trees. An estimated 150 trees are cut per day. This logging is difficult to intercept as Asian companies have invested about 80 million into the industry. Because of the exhaustion of forests in Japan and Africa, there now seems to be an open invitation to the destruction of the Amazon.

Although there are people who fight for this environmental massacre, many of them disappear. This makes it difficult and frightening to coordinate a movement against the illegal loggers. On the bright side, there are regenerative policies and methods in practice by one legal logging company. Before cutting any tree this company checks how hollow it is and studies the consequences of its removal. After choosing trees, the loggers take steps to prevent splintering of the falling trees, making sure not to waste any of its parts. After the cut, they make sure to always plant three more trees. Then, they are able to sell certified wood, signifying that the wood is not destructive to the Amazon rainforest.

The problem of resource exhaustion in the Amazon doesn't end with the trees. The pirarucú, a fish, is too coveted by the people. Some fishers wait for the allowed season and selectively fish the largest fish they can find. These respectable fishermen have been eating pirarucú for generations, their lives nearly depending on the flesh. Therefore, they do not waste a single part of it. Known as the "pig of the Amazon," they are caught at around 2.5 meters long and weighing 200 kilos. They provide quality meat, bringing many people together over this traditional fish. On the other hand, there is an illegal market for these fish. Although they are not supposed to be caught for trade, some fishermen abide by no rules. This illegal activity is exactly

what is depleting the population of the pirarucú. Although rules are set in place, they are difficult to enforce. Fish is the main protein source in the Amazon, so its market is huge and provides jobs for thousands of people. With the persistence of this illegal hunt, pirarucú will die off, leaving minimal to none for future generations.

Even if there are fish left for the future, they will be too toxic to consume. With the tireless, unsupervised hunt for gold, there is an incessant flow of mercury being dumped into the rivers of the Amazon. Not easily acquired, it must be extracted with mercury through a process called amalgamation. Not only is this toxic and back breaking work, but the consequences are irreparable. On average, the extraction of one gram of gold ruins about one ton of quartz. By the end of the day, the mines manage to extract an average of only four grams of gold. Like a gamble, gold is addictive. The workers endlessly hope that a solid mass of it will appear before their eyes, although they are rare. There are about 40,000 people doing this work in dangerous and toxic conditions. Throughout the Amazon, there are about 2,000 mines, some reaching depths of about 200 meters. An average of about 150 liters of mercury are dumped into the rivers of the Amazon every single day. There is research being done on the effects of mercury on the rivers and everything they provide for. The World Health Organization states that 500 parts per billion (ppb) of mercury is “safe,” yet the fish of the amazon already contain an alarming 1,200 ppb. Being the main source of food for inhabitants, that is a daunting number. Mercury poses many health risks including damage to the central nervous system, insomnia, irritability, and nervousness.

Natural resources are limited, therefore, renewal takes time. I believe that without cooperation and patience, there is no balance, ultimately resulting in the destruction of the earth. The Amazon is an important entity, maintaining climate and biodiversity. Its destruction is alarming, and struggles to come to a halt, despite known consequences. The trees, regardless of beauty and biodiversity, continue to bleed as they fall. The fish, existing as a main food source, are still caught with full disregard to conservative rules. The mercury is still relentlessly dumped into the rivers with no thought on health. Why? How could this continue despite known consequences? Generally, people are uneducated about the consequences of their actions. If they fully understood the complex workings of the environment’s biology, they would probably not be so indifferent. People are trapped in a world where they will do anything for an income: resources seem unimportant to those who financially benefit from them. Between miseducation

and the need for a buck, the future of health and the environment are overlooked. I believe that many generations will feel the effects of this relentless waste. Just like any other resource, people want more, and in getting more, they forget the value of everything else.