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Saving rain forests

The tiny Del Mar nonprofit that roared

Congratulations to Nature and Culture International of Del Mar for saving yet another rain forest.

This one, in southern Ecuador, is 2.8 million acres, about the size of San Diego County. In cooperation with a United Nations agency, it has been designated Podocarpus-El Condor Biosphere Reserve, giving it international recognition and cooperation in preservation.

What's that? You've never heard of NCI and its efforts to address global warming?

Formed in 1997, NCI avoids intermediaries and hires people in Third World, not First World, countries. The tiny nonprofit with a prestigious board has two U.S. employees and about 70 in Latin America. Half of the \$3 million annual budget comes from foreign governments and foundations. The other half comes from San Diegans and area foundations, most in the \$50,000-a-year club.

Nature and Culture was the

brainchild of Ivan Gayler, an original partner in the Del Mar Plaza. He became appalled at what slash-and-burn tactics were doing to Latin American forests — both rain and dry — and to the atmosphere.

Today, it has arranged for a string of preserves in Ecuador and Peru, mainly, and one in Mexico. The organization's scientific field station has generated more than 200 peer-reviewed scientific articles.

NCI's approach is to boost local economies, taking some pressure off the forests, as well as arranging reserve status. It is a buyer of key parcels as a last resort.

Not familiar with NCI? That may change. Its Web site, natureandculture.org, has a carbon footprint calculator. Plug in a few facts about your household, and learn how many metric tons of carbon you generate each year. By the way, 32 metric tons can be mitigated by preserving one acre of forest. And, an \$80 donation can do just that.