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LightHawk's monthly update, WayPoint, was created to share some of the good news we on staff learn about daily. These success stories illustrate the critical role we play in conservation efforts throughout North and Central America through the unique perspective of flight. We hope you enjoy WayPoint and will share with others our success stories from above.

On the Wing in 2008

A Year of Flying with LightHawk



Illegal extraction from a protected area in Chiquibul National Park, Belize. Photo: Friends for Conservation and Development/LightHawk

Mesoamerica Program Region

(Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama)

In Mesoamerica, LightHawk has been helping conservation partners for the past two decades to document, halt and raise awareness about illegal deforestation. Mesoamerica's vast and unique wilderness is under threat of disappearing, with some of the highest rates of deforestation in the world. This severely affects terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments. Thousands of hectares of rain forest are cut down every year in the region and many plants and animals that live in this forest, like the big-leaf mahogany trees, jaguars and harpy eagles, among others, face the specter of extinction.

During 2008, LightHawk conducted aerial campaigns with conservation groups who have collaborated to establish and monitor protected areas, which help safeguard some of the most important ecosystems in this region. Illegal logging and land clearing inside these designated protected areas continues and many times goes unnoticed until the damage is catastrophic. Aerial surveys provide a highly efficient way to monitor these incursions and stop the destruction. For example, LightHawk's collaboration with Wildlife Conservation Society in Peten, Guatemala has for almost ten years been helping to monitor and stop illegal activities in the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

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Ocean Conservancy biologists retrieve derelict crab traps spotted from the air. If not removed from coastal waters, the traps continue to drift and kill wildlife. Photo: Ocean Conservancy

Eastern Program Region

Work in the eastern forests near the border of Canada and the US grew in 2008 as LightHawk linked its efforts with that of land trusts, forest advocates and scientists sustaining ecologically healthy forests and human communities. In New York, LightHawk and a coalition of non-profits in the Adirondack Park are monitoring the health of public and private forest lands. Further east, along the populated coast of the northeastern Atlantic Ocean, LightHawk works with groups like Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies and the Peconic Baykeeper. These and other partners study, restore, and protect delicate bay and estuary ecosystems – nurseries for shell, ground, and sport fish, havens for migratory birds, natural water filtration systems, and recreational gems.

Eastern Program Region (cont.)

In Florida, LightHawk eastern region programs are gaining a secure foothold as flights with groups like the Mote Marine Laboratory help scientists learn more about shark and ray populations, understand the origins and impacts of red tide and blue green algae blooms, and remove "ghost" fishing gear lost in storms but still capable of ensnaring and killing fish and marine mammals. In the Everglades, LightHawk has begun work to help protect endangered panther habitats and to restore the freshwater flows of the "River of Grass."



Point Reyes, California as seen from Volunteer Pilot Michael Baum's plane on a flight in support of marine reserves. *LightHawk*

Our annual Fly-In, a celebratory gathering of our volunteer pilots, board and staff, was held in Klamath Falls, Oregon this year. As part of the weekend's activities, four volunteer pilots flew local ranchers, farmers, conservation organizations, and tribal members over the Klamath Basin. This encouraged communication and cooperation among the diverse parties in the historically contentious water rights battleground that is the Klamath Basin. Other LightHawk flights long before and after the fly-in demonstrate our commitment to this region and our hopes for a harmonious and sustainable watershed management solution.

Pacific Program Region

In the Pacific Region, LightHawk entered into interesting territory. We assisted NASA by providing over two weeks of flying for a climate change study using laser technology to calculate the carbon load of boreal forests in Alaska. We continued to support efforts to establish marine reserves off the coast of California by flying stakeholders, journalists, scientists, and photographers over some of California's iconic coastal resources. We also initiated a new project with our marine conservation partners to conduct aerial surveys of commercial and recreational fishing boats. This helped refine the location of the marine reserves while minimizing economic impact to the fishing community.

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This section of the Gallatin River in southwestern Montana is part of a Gallatin Valley Land Trust Private Land Conservation Project. *Ted Lange/GVLT/LightHawk*

Rockies Program Region

LightHawk missions in the Rockies in 2008 explored the impacts of oil and gas development, mining, and residential development on Western landscapes, wildlife habitat, and inland waterways. Flights enabled land conservation groups to assess potential conservation areas and to monitor wilderness areas and conservation easements. Scientific information gathered on missions furthered the cause of wildlife conservation throughout the Rockies, including monitoring critical wildlife corridors, evaluating lynx habitat, tracking and photographing migrating pronghorn, and investigating the impact of snowmobile use on mountain caribou. One November flight took a more hands-on approach to wildlife conservation, as Volunteer Pilot Steven Garman flew three river otters from Olympia, Washington to Taos, New Mexico as part of an effort to reintroduce river otters to New Mexico.



Waste lagoon outside a veal CAFO (concentrated animal feeding operation) in Michigan. *Sierra Club/ECCSCM.org/LightHawk.*

Other Areas

In the upper Great Lakes, forest flights seek to better protect and manage the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest where questions about the extent of logging are hotly debated.

Working with community members and small farmers in southern Michigan, LightHawk continues to bring attention to groundwater pollution by unregulated industrial dairy operations. Gaining ground access is often impossible for these operations as they are located on private property, so LightHawk flights are especially important for this type of monitoring.



LightHawk's first airplane, names Emily in honor of the donor.

30 Years of Flying for the Environment

Join LightHawk to celebrate 30 years of flying for conservation.

A weekend of anniversary Fly-In activities will be held October 9 -11, 2009 in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Reconnect with fellow pilots, learn more about LightHawk's history and participate in a host of special events.

We hope you'll save the date to join us.

About LightHawk

Founded in 1979, LightHawk is a nonprofit, volunteer pilot-based organization that flies environmental missions in collaboration with with a large network of pilots and hundreds of partner organizations throughout Central and North America. LightHawk flights provide a powerful and effective platform for research, groundtruthing, environmental awareness, and education.

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