



Pilots Help Preserve Belize Wilderness

A unofficial environmental air force made up of a group of U.S. pilots has helped Belize set aside its largest protected area—the 152-square-mile Bladen Nature Reserve. The organization, called Lighthawk, provided a low-flying single-engine plane to give “a bird’s-eye view to officials, many of whom had never seen the area,” said Victor Gonzalez, head of the Belize Department of the Environment. “The flights were instrumental in convincing officials that the area should be saved.”

The 11-year-old nonprofit group, based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, owns three airplanes and calls on nearly 60 volunteer pilots with their own planes for environmental missions.

Only scientific research and educational activities may take place in Belize’s new reserve, once targeted for logging. The upland watershed is the site of Maya ruins and home to several endangered species. Mountain lions, Baird’s tapirs, white-tipped peccaries, and at least 190 species of birds also inhabit the reserve’s lush rain forests, clear rivers, and rocky outcrops.

Lighthawk also sponsored an earlier ground expedition into the area and helped prepare a report calling for its protection.

“We hope this far-sighted action by the Belize government will rub off on the U.S. Congress and encourage members to stop the destruction of America’s temperate rain forests,” says founder Michael Stewart. Lighthawk flights over Washington State have already helped challenge the high estimates by the U.S. Forest Service of remaining old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest (NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, September 1996).



New Journeys for Old Tires

Finding new uses for the 275 million tires discarded annually in the U.S. and Canada could help reduce pollution and the visual blight on North American landscapes. Tire dumps often catch fire or are mischievously set ablaze, as here in Tucson, Arizona. The flames release black particles, carbon dioxide, and sulfur dioxide—a compound contributing to acid rain.

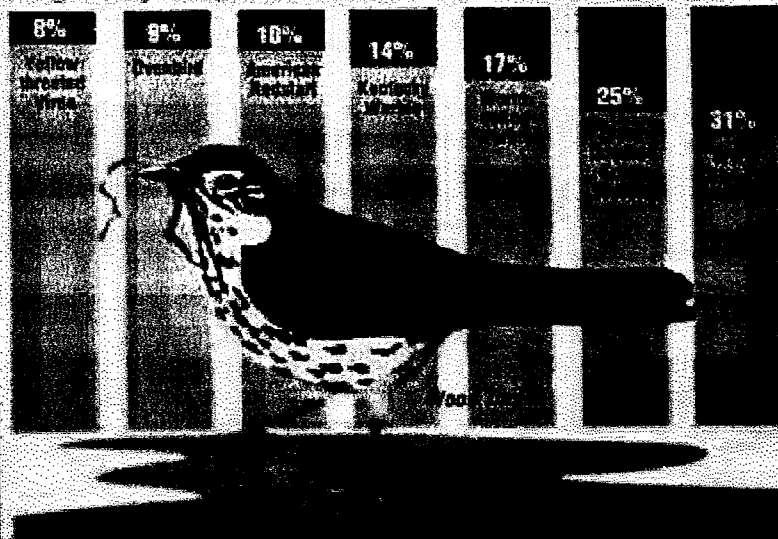
Efforts to recycle tires include freezing and shattering them into crumbled rubber, which can be used in asphalt paving for roads and runways. Tires are also cut up for doormats or shredded for floor coverings. Left whole, they can serve as breakwaters or artificial reefs.

A power plant in Westley, California, burns as many as 800 tires an hour, converting them to energy. The tires are burned at extremely high temperatures for total combustion. This process virtually eliminates particle emissions and reduces sulfur dioxide, which is further neutralized by limestone scrubbers.

A residential project at Taos, New Mexico, piled dirt-filled tires and covered them with adobe to form walls in 70 homes.



Migratory songbird decline 1978-1987



Songbirds that winter in Central and South America have declined in the eastern U.S. and Canada. Among possible reasons: rain forest destruction in the wintering grounds and increased predation in the north by raccoons and other animals that have adapted to human development.