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NEW NATIONAL PARK FOR VENEZUELA **By Aldemaro Romero**

Venezuela's ecologically diverse western llanos or savannas will be added to that country's national park system, thanks to a unique cooperative effort by Venezuela's Ministry of Environment and BIOMA, the Venezuelan Foundation for the Conservation of Biological Diversity. The 1.5-million acre park, larger than Grand Canyon National Park and twice as large as Yosemite, is a habitat for more than 300 species of birds, or one-quarter of the birds found in Venezuela, plus endangered species, including the manatee, Orinoco caiman and Orinoco turtle. Its sand dunes and wind-formed plains are geologically significant and rare. The new park lies between the Cinaruco and Capanaparo Rivers, both tributaries of the Orinoco River.

Venezuela's Environment Minister, Ing. Guillermo Colmenares Finol, announced establishment of the the park on February 25, 1988. BIOMA recently completed a preliminary inventory of the park's flora and fauna and provided the Environment Minister with recommendations on park boundaries and

preservation goals. The foundation continues studies aimed at producing specific management recommendations. Among these will be strategies for protecting the park from incompatible development as a new road across the area is constructed.

This cooperative project marks the first time that a private organization in Venezuela has participated in the establishment of a national park as well as the first time for which satellite images and Geographic Information System technologies were used for the selection and design of a national park.