

FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

I. BASIC DATA

Organization Name: Rainforest Alliance

Project Title: Using the Eco-Index to Allow Organizations Working in Neotropical Hotspots to Share Experiences and Glean Lessons from Colleagues

Project Dates: October 2002-March 2004

Date of Report: May 4, 2004

II. OPENING REMARKS

Provide any opening remarks that may assist in the review of this report.

III. ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT PURPOSE

Project Purpose: *Enter project purpose from the Logical Framework worksheet of the approved project proposal.*

Planned vs. Actual Performance

Indicator	Actual at Completion
Purpose-level:	
80% of non-CI CEPF grantees whose projects were added to the Eco-Index state that the communications tool has helped them in their work.	In March 2003, we posted a short survey on the Eco-Index; more than 70% of respondents have told us that the Eco-Index is helpful to them as they manage and design their own projects. Note this was done before the redesign and expansion, as the survey asked for suggestions as to how we could make the site more useful.
Number of visits per month to the Eco-Index increases by 30%. (over the duration of the project.)	Monthly visitation -- from October 2002 (9,066) to March 2004 (29,918) -- increased by 230%.
Number of subscribers to the Monthly Update listserv increases by 30% over the duration of the project; with more than 50% of the increase attributed to subscribers in South America.	From the Eco-Index's launch in February 2001 through October 1, 2002, there were 273 total Monthly Update subscribers. From October 1, 2002 through March 31, 2004, there were 637 additional subscribers, an increase of 133.3%. Of these 637 subscribers, 279 (44%) are from South American countries.
Distribution of <i>Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema</i> increases by 15%, with more than 50% of the	On October 1, 2002, there were 15 subscribers to the electronic version of <i>Eco-Exchange/Ambien-</i>

increase attributed to subscribers in South America.	<i>Tema</i> . From October 1, 2002 through March 31, 2004, there were an additional 590 subscribers, for an increase of 3,833.3%. This is attributed to the addition of an electronic subscription form to the Eco-Index in November of 2002. Of these 590 subscribers, 240 (40.6%) were from South American countries.
Format of Eco-Index redesigned	Redesigned Eco-Index launched in October 2003.
Database and search engine expanded.	Database expanded in October 2003 to include Caribbean and South American projects in its search function. Database backend also redesigned so that all content and profiles can be updated by Eco-Index staff in real time, negating the need to pay a Web programmer to update content for us. This redesign saves us an estimated \$300-400 per month.
Eco-Index translated into Portuguese (projects based in Brazil and appropriate regional projects); and projects based in Brazil are translated from Portuguese into Spanish and English.	With site redesign in October 2003, projects based in Brazil also are available in Portuguese. At end of grant period in March 2004, the Eco-Index has a total of 15 projects available in Portuguese, 7 of which are CEPF-funded projects.
100% of CEPF-funded projects in the Atlantic Forest, Vilcabamba-Amboró, Southern Mesoamerica, and Chocó-Darién added to the Eco-Index in the three languages	73% added: 7 of 9 total in Brazil Atlantic Forest 10 of 23 total in Chocó-Darién 16 of 21 total in Vilcabamba-Amboró 24 of 24 total in Mesoamerica
At least 30 reports, studies, photos, species lists, etc. of CEPF grantees converted to PDF and included in database.	A total of 4 PDF reports related to CEPF funded projects were included in our database. The PDF report entitled "Justificación biológica para la creación del propuesto Parque Nacional Maquenque" posted on the " Creation of Maquenque National Park " profile was downloaded 3,017 times between its posting in June of 2003 through March 2004. There are 51 links to related Web sites posted on CEPF-funded profiles, and 3 profiles requested that visitors email project directors for access to reports.
65 initiatives not funded by CEPF but located in a CI hotspot added to the Eco-Index.	106 new projects added or updated.
65 projects located outside of CI's hotspots included in Eco-Index.	112 new projects added.
News originating from CEPF projects provided each month to the manager of the CEPF Web site, with links to project profiles on the Eco-Index.	News always delivered on time, each month.

<p>Six CEPF projects featured in <i>Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema</i> or in “Stories from the Field.”</p>	<p>Seven articles in <i>Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema</i> and one interview in “Stories from the Field.”</p> <p>Links to <i>Eco-Exchange/Ambien Tema</i> articles featuring CEPF-funded projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February - March 2004 • February - March 2004 • December 2003 - January 2004 • August - September 2003 • August - September 2003 • June - July 2003 • December 2002 - January 2003 <p>Link to Stories from the Field article featuring CEPF-funded projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February 2004
<p>Six CEPF projects highlighted with the following recognitions: “Innovative Eco-Initiative of the Month,” “Are We Making Progress Yet?,” “Best Lessons Learned”, and “In Print & On Line.”</p>	<p>10 projects highlighted.</p> <p>4 projects named “Innovative Eco-Initiative of the Month”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=692 • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=489 • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=703 • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=390 <p>4 projects recognized for having notable monitoring and evaluation systems in “Are We Making Progress Yet?”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=682 • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=710 • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=642 • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=695 <p>2 projects highlighted in “Best Lessons Learned”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=469 • www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=456
<p>At least 10 interviews with staff of CEPF grantees</p>	<p>18 interviews with staff of CEPF grantees (plus 2</p>

featured on the Eco-Index.	with CEPF staff themselves) featured in the <i>Eco-Exchange/Ambien Tema</i> , "Stories from the Field" and "On the Record." Interviews with two CEPF staff members will be featured in "On the Record" in the near future.
At least 10 potential donors contacted for funding.	Eco-Index staff has met with the following potential (or current or pending) sponsors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemonics, Inc. • Corredor Biológico Mesoamericano-Costa Rica CR-USA Foundation • Fondo Mexicano para la Conservación para la Naturaleza • GEF-Small Grants Program of Costa Rica • National Fish and Wildlife Foundation • National Science Foundation • Overbrook Foundation • Summit Foundation • Tinker Foundation • UNDP Equator Initiative • US Fish and Wildlife Service • US Forest Service • Wildlife Conservation Society • World Bank DevComm division
At least \$150,000 secured during 2003-04 (to ensure the financial sustainability of Eco-Index through 2004).	\$109,500 secured, plus: CEPF grant was scheduled to conclude in one year (November 03) but was extended; \$52,231 received from CEPF after projected end. <u>Funds received, 03-04:</u> \$40,000 from Fundación CR-USA \$30,000 from US Fish and Wildlife Foundation \$10,000 from Inter American Development Bank \$12,000 from Overbrook Foundation \$5,000 from GEF-Small Grants Program of Costa Rica \$7,500 New York Times Foundation \$5,000 from Summit Foundation
At least 25 participants attend "Diálogo de Conservación para proyectos en el Corredor Mesoamérica sur"	28 participants, plus 4 from CEPF, 4 from Rainforest Alliance and 1 guest speaker.
Visitors to the Eco-Index increase by 10% during the weeks before and after the summit.	The Eco-Index received 22,571 visits during the month of February of 2004; in March 2004 that number increased to 29,918, or 32.5%. (The workshop was held March 24-25.)
100 page views weekly following posting of summit conclusions.	The project profile, with six PDF documents attached, is now online ; we expect to post the 40-page "Conservation Dialogue" report, in English and Spanish, during the week of May 3.

Describe the success of the project in terms of achieving its intended impact objective and performance indicators.

As with many projects, the performance indicators chosen for this project were estimates based on past performance and our best guesses as to what the impact of the project

would be. In most cases, we underestimated. After the redesign of the Eco-Index and the inclusion of projects in South America to the database, visitation to the Eco-Index grew by leaps and bounds. We were also surprised by the huge increase in subscribers to both the Eco-Index Monthly Update and the news bulletin, *Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema*, once we made it possible to subscribe online. Further, our subscribers are the target audience for this information – the most are with conservation groups in Latin America, exactly the people we want to learn from this information.

The investment of time and funds in translating information about projects in Brazil (as well as regional projects of particular interest to the conservation community in Brazil) into Portuguese, English, and Spanish, was worthwhile, as these are among the most visited pages on the Eco-Index (in all three languages). We conclude that there is surprisingly little solid information about conservation projects in Brazil on the Internet, let alone in Portuguese. Our Portuguese translator and editor is a tapir biologist with many years of conservation experience, so our Portuguese content is particularly well written. A current goal is to include more interviews and articles about projects in Brazil.

Thanks to support from CEPF as well as from other donors, in addition to adding CEPF-funded projects, we exceeded the indicator related to the number of projects added to the database that are within CEPF hotspots, but are not funded by CEPF. We feel this is helpful to CEPF funded projects, as they need to be aware of other conservation efforts near their own project sites. For example, the Ocotú Refuge Private Natural Heritage Reserve (www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?ProjectID=403), funded by the Dutch government, is a private reserve near Amboró National Park in Peru. This initiative was awarded “Best Lessons Learned” in March 2003. Another good example is “Lowland Tapirs as Landscape Detectives for the Atlantic Forest: A New Conservation Approach” (www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?ProjectID=385), whose goals are “to implement two management plans critical to the long-term conservation of tapirs and also of the Atlantic Forest.” This project was recognized for its excellent monitoring and evaluation methodology.

We also exceeded our goal in the number of projects outside CEPF hotspots that we added. Again, we feel this project information can be valuable to CEPF grantees, who can surely find helpful information in such project profiles as “Santa Cruz River: Community and Science Working for Conservation” (www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?ProjectID=518), an initiative in Mexico that was named Eco-Initiative of the Month in October 2003; and “Sale of Services to Scientific and Educational Tourism in the Villa Mills-Siberia Research and Demonstration Area, Costa Rica,” (www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?ProjectID=686), whose Best Lessons Learned were recognized in January 2004.

We found that many CEPF projects were strong subjects for our bimonthly, bilingual news bulletin, *Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema*, now in its 12th year of publication. In projects we select to cover, we look for themes that would be of interest to our wide audience – journalists and staff of government ministries, foundations, and research institutions worldwide, mainly in the Americas. Projects that are particularly innovative or that are responding to typical problems in creative ways are good subjects for *Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema*. Developing ecotourism in a biologically rich area is not a new idea, but we wrote about the CEPF-funded project “Ecotourism Development in

Mahogany's Municipal Wetlands Ecological Park" in Nicaragua because the project design places such a strong emphasis on community involvement and training.

It was also not difficult to exceed our goal of awarding special recognition to CEPF projects. The four that were named "Eco-Initiative of the Month" have many of the same attributes as those covered in *Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema*. Four were recognized for having strong monitoring and evaluation methodologies. This is always our most challenging monthly award, as few NGOs have really figured out how to include good M&E in their project design.

One indicator that we overestimated was the number of reports or studies we would convert to PDF and link from project profiles. While the Eco-Index is an extremely efficient way to disseminate reports, and our statistics show that they are downloaded many thousands of times each month, either project directors did not wish to share reports in this way or had simply not produced any reports or studies. Worthy of note is that many CEPF-funded projects added to the Eco-Index are less than one year old, and it is possible that project directors not yet begun to produce reports or studies with their findings.

When the Rainforest Alliance first sought CEPF support, one question posed to us by regional directors was how could we be sure that Eco-Index visitors were really using the content they found to inform their own projects, thus improving conservation success? We thought this was an excellent question, one that would never be easy to answer. As with most environmental education projects, there is a strong assumption that providing the information and educational content is in itself valuable. But we wanted to do more to make it as easy as possible for visitors to glean information they could use from the Eco-Index. On the new site, the projects awarded Best Lessons Learned and best monitoring and evaluation methodologies are now archived by project category, so visitors who manage sustainable agriculture projects can see what lessons their colleagues working on similar projects have learned, while directors of wildlife management projects can quickly discover what kind of monitoring and evaluation methodologies others have adopted.

We were able to raise sufficient funds from other sources to not need to expend all CEPF monies in one year, but to extend the grant an additional four months.

Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

As we began to add more and more PDF reports to the Eco-Index, and after we invested in statistical software to help us measure visitation, we were astounded to discover how often the reports linked to project profiles are being downloaded each month. We have about 85 reports available and these are downloaded an average of 20,000 times each month! That seemed so incredible that we asked the company that provides the stats to confirm these numbers (they did; they are correct). We think this is one of our best measurements of how the information provided on the Eco-Index is being used, since people seldom take the time to download PDF reports unless they intend to read and share them.

Another goal of this project was to help the Rainforest Alliance find ways to make the Eco-Index self sufficient. Having previously done market research, we had concluded that it would not be possible to charge for access to the site – few Web sites have

successfully done this. Our strategy was to sell donors our services for established fees, based on the number of projects they fund in the Neotropics. We developed a package of materials to help us make our pitch, and we recently translated and produced these “sell sheets” in Spanish. So far, we have found that while the packets are indeed good sales tools, foundations are not set up to “purchase” services from nonprofit groups like the Rainforest Alliance. Still, we were able to attain sponsorships from the Summit Foundation and Overbrook Foundation based on the number of projects they fund and the services we will provide them. We will continue to pursue this approach, in addition to seeking corporate sponsorships.

We use the CEPF Web site as a model during our presentations to potential donors, as a way of showing them that all they need to do is list the names of projects they fund and then include a link to the project profiles, in English and Spanish (and when appropriate, Portuguese) on the Eco-Index. That way they don’t need to go to the trouble of collecting this useful information, translating and editing it and putting it on their own sites. Meanwhile, these profiles include links back to their homepages, so potential grantees can quickly get information about how to apply for grants.

IV. PROJECT OUTPUTS

Project Outputs: Enter the project outputs from the Logical Framework for the project

Planned vs. Actual Performance

Indicator	Actual at Completion
Output 1:	
Eco-Index redesigned to handle projects in South America and in Portuguese.	Eco-Index completely redesigned and expanded and now features dozens of projects based in South America.
Output 2:	
Eco-Index users access detailed information on conservation projects in the Neotropics in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.	Number of users and projects added and updated rose steadily throughout the project.
Output 3:	
CEPF projects highlighted in Eco-Index.	57 CEPF projects now in the database; 14 projects featured in <i>Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema</i> or “Stories from the Field,” or recognized through one of the Eco-Index monthly “prizes.” Also, 12 projects highlighted on the CEPF homepage, with links to their Eco-Index project profile.
Output 4:	
Eco-Index promoted to a broader audience to encourage financial sustainability.	Through articles, postcards, Power Point presentations, and a packet of promotional materials (in English and Spanish), we widely promoted the service and have excellent materials to continue fundraising.
Output 5:	
Organize summit to be attended by directors of CEPF-funded projects located in the Southern Region of the Mesoamerican Biodiversity Hotspot, as well as CEPF field staff, government officials if appropriate, and Eco-Index staff, where participants can describe achievements to date, share lessons learned, and debate next steps for biodiversity conservation in the area; in other words, they can	The Conservation Dialogues were well attended and the discussions were excellent. A great deal of work and planning went into its organization. As a result, this was one of most successful workshops ever (over the past 13 years, the Rainforest Alliance’s Neotropics Conservation program has given dozens of workshops in Latin America and the Caribbean) in terms of the level of participation

<p>exchange verbally and with immediate feedback the information presented in their Eco-Index project profiles. Of particular interest is the question: How can we really learn from each other? Project conclusions will be posted on the Eco-Index.</p>	<p>and enthusiasm from attendees.</p> <p>See the profile of the workshop to learn more: www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?ProjectID=747</p> <p>It includes all the Power Point presentations given at the workshop, in PDF format.</p> <p>After the workshop, we sent a list of participants to all, so people could stay in touch. During the first week of May, we expect to have the full, 40-page workshop report (a detailed summary of the discussions), online, in English and Spanish.</p>
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Describe the success of the project in terms of delivering the intended outputs.

The Eco-Index was an experiment when it was first launched in February 2001. While the Rainforest Alliance believed it filled a real information need, we did not know if people would actually use this resource. The response, however, was quite positive. Support from CEPF enabled us to bring the Eco-Index to a whole new level of usefulness and professionalism. As a result, we think we are able to provide an important service to CEPF, by making detailed information about funded projects in four CEPF hotspots in Latin America available to a broad audience and by bringing even greater attention to many of the most innovative projects in these four corridor areas.

Cases in point: If you do a Google search for *ALTROPICO Ecuador*, the first two results are on the Eco-Index; the next two are the CEPF Web site. Eco-Index pages are also the first two results if you do a Google search for *conservation La Amistad*. Results of a Google search for *Vilcabamba-Amboró Corridor* are pages from the CEPF sites as #1 and #2; pages from the Conservation International site as #3 and #4; an ICFJ page as #5; then a Rainforest Alliance page (our *Eco-Exchange/Ambien-Tema* article about the ICFJ project) as #6; and the Eco-Index as #9. Similarly, searches for conservation information – whether the key words are *wildlife conservation Mesoamerican corridor* or *recursos forestales Colombia* – in Latin America frequently result in the Eco-Index among the top 10 results. Search engines like Google are commonly used by researchers, donors, journalists, and conservationists to find information, and we feel the Eco-Index results will provide them with exactly the information they need, plus links to many other sites with helpful data.

We were very pleased with the results of the workshop for CEPF grantees in the southern Mesoamerican corridor, which was held in March 2004. Virtual information sharing is practical and cost-efficient, but face-to-face exchanges yield more analytical and memorable results. The success of this workshop and another similar workshop we held in the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica, with funds from Fundación CRUSA, has convinced us that future fee-for-service proposals should include a “Diálogo de Conservación” workshop.

Were any outputs unrealized? If so, how has this affected the overall impact of the project?

The most serious unrealized output was our inability to collect project information from 100% of all CEPF grantees. Based on interviews, we know this is overwhelmingly due

to project directors feeling they just don't have time to complete questionnaires. Their intentions to share information may be good – and if there is an easier, faster, more democratic way for them to meet this objective, we'd sure like to know about it – and yet some will simply not make this a priority. This has a negative impact on our efforts because it cheats thousands of others out of opportunities to learn from colleagues, avoid duplication of effort, and a chance to build on others' initiatives. It also costs us time not-well-spent contacting project directors again and again, encouraging them to complete questionnaires. At the same time, we accept the fact that some of the blame lies with us -- we have not managed to make a strong enough case for sharing information to those project directors who never respond. Even explaining that one of their main donors really, really wants them to complete a questionnaire, even having the donor directly contact the unresponsive NGOs with similar encouraging words may not yield results.

The only way we can guarantee that we can include 100% of all grantees in the Eco-Index is through a "Diálogo de Conservación" workshop. In the case of southern Mesoamerica, a completed questionnaire was in effect their fee of admission, and this technique worked. Through March 04, 100% of CEPF-funded projects in southern Mesoamerica are in the Eco-Index.

In two of the other four hotspots, we came close to 100%. The Chocó-Darién was where we had the most trouble meeting our goal. Of the 13 projects whose directors did not respond to our entreaties, two managed projects that provided funds for attending a workshop or conference, so directors may have felt the projects were not appropriate for the Eco-Index. (We would argue otherwise. How was the selection of people who attended made? Was there any follow-up to see if their attendance was worthwhile? Etc.) Three projects relate to preparation and planning so it's likely that project directors felt that objectives and results were too abstract. Again, we'd argue otherwise; see "Preparation of a Management Plan for the Mache-Chindul Ecological Reserve" (www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=516), which has interesting objectives and lessons learned.

V. SAFEGUARD POLICY ASSESSMENTS

Provide a summary of the implementation of any required action toward the environmental and social safeguard policies within the project.

N/A

VI. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PROJECT

Describe any lessons learned during the various phases of the project. Consider lessons both for future projects, as well as for CEPF's future performance.

1. Everyone – including us – underestimates the time needed to manage the amount of information on the Eco-Index.
2. Anytime we introduce the Eco-Index to someone unfamiliar with the resource, that person is always impressed and amazed. This is quite rewarding! The World Wide Web holds millions of sites, but only a tiny percentage actually offer quality

information. We have yet to find another site that fills the important niche of the Eco-Index. So would users be willing to pay for this information? No, at least not yet. To date, this just isn't the culture of the Internet.

3. It would be unusual to find a foundation or funding institution that didn't think the information on the Eco-Index was valuable, who didn't agree that information sharing was important, and who didn't think it would be excellent to have a permanent archive of conservation efforts in the Neotropics. But that doesn't mean they all want to pay for this service. One foundation officer told us that she used the Eco-Index "all the time," and referred her grantees to it, but that foundation still rejected a request for support. An original funder of the Eco-Index, the foundation felt it had done its share. (Now we know how Public Television feels.)
4. Project directors are more likely to complete questionnaires if the request comes directly from the project donor.
5. Project directors are even more likely to complete questionnaires if doing so is a donor requirement.
6. Since CEPF is such a leader in conservation grant-making in the Neotropics, its sponsorship of the Eco-Index has been extremely important – not just for the funds involved but also because it has attracted other donors.
7. For lessons learned related to the Conservation Dialogues workshop, please see: www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=747

Project Design Process: (aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/failure)

This project provided support to cover travel costs, enabling the project director to fundraise and keep the Eco-Index alive and well. It was much more effective to fundraise, however, *after* the Eco-Index had been redesigned and re-launched, which came toward the end of the project. While the Eco-Index has secure funding through FY05 (a goal of this project), we would be even farther ahead if we could have re-launched the site earlier and thus started fundraising earlier in the course of the project. This miscalculation also explains why we did not spend more of the funds allocated for travel expenses.

Project Execution: (aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/failure)

Reaching out to CEPF regional managers was an important first step. By talking with them and explaining our goals, we were able to enlist their support and help in gathering project information from grantees in their regions.

Similarly, it was important to meet several times with CEPF/Conservation International staff in Costa Rica to discuss and debate the agenda of the Conservation Dialogues workshop. That way, both the goals of the Rainforest Alliance as outlined in this project and the goals of CEPF could be met at the gathering. If we were designing another, similar workshop, we would also like to gather input from the potential participants.

VII. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the next year, we will be developing a new section of the Eco-Index, www.eco-index/tourism. This will also be bilingual and feature descriptions of small- and medium-sized sustainable tourism operations, organized for quick retrieval of information. Our intended audiences are tourism agencies worldwide as well as tourists wanting to make wise, sustainable choices about where to stay and what to do.

We are also talking with Fundación CRUSA about developing another special section dedicated to conservation efforts in Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula. The section would be organized to allow visitors to quickly find all the information available to them, on the Eco-Index and elsewhere, related to efforts to conserve biodiversity in the Osa.

A third special section may be developed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and feature easily searchable, bilingual information and links related to migratory wildlife in the Neotropics.

Because the Eco-Index has proven itself to be a valuable resource that is high in quality, well known, and frequently visited, the Rainforest Alliance is in a position to develop more special sections like the above. This can help make the Eco-Index sustainable plus meets our organizational goal of improving the effectiveness of conservation through information sharing.

We would welcome your feedback about this final report. Did it provide too much information? Too little? Was the information appropriate? Do you feel the tone we used is too informal? *Thank you!*

For more information about this project, please contact:
Diane Jukofsky, Director / Directora
Communications and Education [Comunicaciones y Educación]
Rainforest Alliance / Alianza para Bosques
Apdo. 138-2150
Moravia, Costa Rica
Tel: 506/240-9383
Fax: 506/240-6046
E-mail: djukofsky@ra.org
www.rainforest-alliance.org/