



Protecting biodiversity (and satellite diversity)

A finding contained in one of the latest reports from US consultancy NSR, is quite staggering by anyone's standards: 80 percent of European leased satellite capacity revenues is generated by video (see Spot Beams in this issue of Satellite Evolution EMEA). To a certain extent, this is no mystery: it is a well-known fact that, for years now, the satellite industry has been heavily dependant on broadcasting for a significant part its income. However, while this 'special relationship' between the satellite industry and the broadcasting sector is without a doubt something to be cherished, it also gives rise to a number of questions about the future of the satellite industry as a whole. Shouldn't the industry diversify and create new, hopefully money-spinning, applications? Naturally, this is easier said than done. However, it is worth remembering that satellites can find applications in many different areas.

Addressing the threat of the world's biodiversity vanishing at an unprecedented rate due to factors such as land use change and pollution, world governments agreed through the UN Convention on Biological Diversity to reduce significantly the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. To support this initiative, the European Space Agency (ESA) has kicked off its new DIVERSITY project.

DIVERSITY project services and products are being developed to relate to the different areas where Earth Observation (EO) technology may contribute to the conservation and monitoring activities of the different actors involved in UNCBD in Central America. ESA has identified four main users: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Secretariat of the UNCBD, the Centro American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD) and MarViva.

Based on the initial user requirements, the following products and services will be generated covering the entire Centro American region, one of the main biodiversity reserves on our planet: Mesoamerican biological corridor change detection maps; coral reef maps; ocean water quality monitoring services; and mangrove maps. The projects will also investigate wildlife migration processes from the Galapagos Islands to Cocos Island. Finally, the project will provide a global map of dry lands based on existing global datasets to the UNCBD.

The DIVERSITY project, developed under ESA's Data User Element (DUE) programme, is being carried out in collaboration with the UNCBD Secretariat and UNESCO, which, in addition to being a user, is also the main co-ordinator between the users and contractors selected by ESA.

The DIVERSITY project is only one of the many possible applications for satellite technology, and the revenues it generates for the industry are limited in scale. But it shows how satellite technology can be used for the good of humanity and the industry itself. But above all, it reminds us that, just like biodiversity, satellite diversity is an invaluable resource that should be encouraged and preserved. ●

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