



# Coping with lithium mining in the High Andes

Gaining authority by collaboration

Lithium mine at Bolivia's Uyuni Salt Flat, on a CBERS4 MUX yesterday's image. Image contains modified Copernicus Sentinel data 2019.

Lithium mining, a water intensive industry, poses a huge threat to the High Andean wetlands. Due to the acceleration of the global green energy transition, lithium has been declared a strategic mineral by governments worldwide. In 2021 the pressure to extract lithium from the Argentinian Andes has increased significantly. Wetlands International's Saving High Andean Wetlands for People and Nature programme has had to step up their work on this threat in the past year. It also became evident that it was necessary to develop a joint position on lithium mining between all involved NGOs. The aim of this collaboration is to identify new - more responsible - mining practices and to communicate a joint position in the lobby towards international banks and investors. By collaborating, all involved parties would be less easy to ignore.

Due to the economic crisis that Argentina is going through, it has however been difficult to discuss and influence mining regulations with regional authorities, especially in the Catamarca province. Mining is an important source of foreign currency for the country.

### **Awareness among politicians**

Nevertheless, with the COVID-19 pandemic in a new stage, Wetlands International is optimistic about the future. Programme coordinator Román Baigun: "We see a greater concern in society for natural disasters resulting from a changing climate, taken seriously by mass media too. This pressure has led politicians in Argentina to include the conservation of wetlands in their election campaigns for the first time."

Nevertheless, with the COVID-19 pandemic in a new stage, Wetlands International argues that the most effective thing to do now is to strengthen communities, generate awareness at a local level and make sure that there are knowledgeable and well-trained people in each of the five project sites. Román: "Although this bottom-up strategy takes time we are convinced that in the end it'll be the best way to generate interest from local governments in developing environmental regulations and capacity for enforcement."




Humedales Altoandinos: los oasis de la Puna



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## Programme

Saving High Andean Wetlands for People and Nature

## Goal

Improving the management of five wetlands in the Puna ecoregion, valuable both for their biodiversity and for the ecosystem services they provide to the communities living there.

## Achievements

The programme restores part of the fragile ecosystem and introduces better grazing practices to reduce further degradation. Water is a limiting resource at this high altitude. Together with local farmers management plans are developed to steer sustainable use of these unique wetlands. Lithium mining, a water intensive industry, poses a huge threat to this remote area. The programme facilitates knowledge exchange with the academic sector on more responsible mining practices. It also works with communities and provincial governments to develop a regulatory framework for mining that conserves wetlands and respects the rights of local communities.

## Partner

Wetlands International

### Saving High Andean Wetlands for People and Nature

January - June 2021



Workshops for exchange of knowledge with the communities of Salinas Grandes, Argentina.



Maintenance of the livestock closure for the recovery of pastures with the community of Chuiroc, Junin Lake. Peru.



Solar water pumps installation in five ranches of the locality of Pasajes, Pozuelos Lagoon, Argentina



Closure on a vega in El Moreno locality with students of an Agrotechnical School, Salinas Grandes, Argentina.