The Hidrovia Waterway on the Paraguay River

Geomorphology

The Paraguay River
- Approximately 2,670 km long, beginning in western Brazil and ending at the southern border of Paraguay (Quiros et al. 188)
- Slope between .04 m/km and .01 m/km for much of length—Alluvial River (Tucci 162)
- Drainage basin of 1.095 million km²; annual discharge of 2700 m³/s; specific yield of 2.47 m³ per 1000 km² (Tucci 162)

Hidrovia

The Plan
- The Intergovernmental Committee on the Hidrovia includes Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina.
- In 1997, it proposed a plan to create a 3,440 km waterway from the Atlantic Ocean to Caceres, north of the Pantanal.
- Dredge the river to maintain a depth of at least 2.8 meters, even during the dry season (Gottgens, et al.)

The Consequences
- Damage to the Pantanal: Lowering the riverbed by even 25 centimeters could decrease the area of the Pantanal by 22% (Gottgens et al.).
- Increased flooding downstream: There is a loss of regulatory effects and evapotranspirative properties of the Pantanal.
- Encouragement of development in the floodplain: Both industrial agriculture and people will be drawn to the easy transport and increased industry.
- Continued cost of building and maintaining levees: Levees will be necessary to mitigate the effects of flooding.

The Present
- In 1999, Brazil backed out due to pressure from environmental groups, and no news of official plans has surfaced since (Istvan).
- However, Argentina and Paraguay have begun selectively dredging sections of the river, and rumors of meetings behind closed doors are surfacing (Istvan).

History

The Guarani
- Indigenous people; nomadic

The Spanish
- Minimal explorations; focused on Peru

The Cattle Ranchers
- Low impact; move herds with floods

The Shippers
- Increasing interest, especially with growth of industrial agriculture

Works Cited
- Title Quote: Oscar Rivas—coordinator general and founder of Sobrevivencia, a Paraguayan environmental organization in Asuncion—when referring to Hidrovia in Istvan’s article