



Patriot-News/Bob Levy

GRASS-ROOTS EFFORT — Rain-forest demonstrators march, ride through city's downtown yesterday on way to Capitol.

Small rally notes big risk to rain forests

By Karl Blankenship
Patriot-News

On Tuesday, Randy Hayes waited in the lobby of the United Nations Building in New York for Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar to accept petitions with 3.5 million signatures — and 600 thumbprints — demanding a special U.N. session on rain-forest destruction.

Yesterday he was on the steps of the state Capitol calling on people to get involved in the campaign to save rain forests.

"We're not going to have a special session at the United Nations on the rain forests unless people like ourselves demand it," Hayes told a rally of several dozen supporters who turned out despite the light rain.

Hayes, executive director of the San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network, is working to generate grass-roots demand for reforms that can be translated into national and international action.

To boost attention, the network this summer has sponsored the cross-country horseback ride of Lucian Spataro, who was also at the rally.

It was the 15th such rally for Spataro, a native of Tucson, Ariz., who started his ride on the West Coast four months ago and has since braved temperatures of 117 degrees in the Mohave Desert in the effort to draw attention to the cause.

Spataro, riding his horse March Along, led a parade from City Island through Harrisburg to the Capitol that included several dozen marchers ranging from students to representatives of environmental groups to horseback riders.

Although the rally drew few people besides those who marched in the parade, Spa-



Associated Press

RIDER — Spataro with "March Along."

taro said the ride has been successful in spreading word about rain forests.

"We probably have reached 4 to 5 million people through the media," Spataro said. "That was the objective — to reach as many people as possible."

Worldwide, an area roughly the size of Pennsylvania is deforested each year for lumber or to make room for ranches, dams

and other development, according to Hayes. At the present rate, rain forests will be gone by the year 2050.

Rain forests are not only home to most of the world's species, but the trees also produce much of the planet's oxygen — leading some to call them the "lungs of the world."

"We're the last generation on this planet that has a chance to solve this problem," he said.

Hayes hopes to stop U.S. funding — whether as foreign aid or support to the World Bank — that leads to the destruction of rain forests.

To do that, he said, grass-roots groups — like the Rainforest Action Committee of Harrisburg, which arranged yesterday's rally — are needed to mobilize the public and put pressure on politicians and corporations.

That has brought some success. Last year, a letter-writing campaign and boycott helped pressure Burger King to cancel a \$35 million purchase of Brazilian beef. Clearing rain forests for cattle ranching is a major reason for their destruction in Brazil.

More recently, the organization gained 3.5 million signatures on petitions worldwide calling on a special U.N. session to discuss the problem.

Included on the petitions were 600 thumbprints from natives living in the Penan rain forest on the Southeast Asian island of Borneo, which is being lumbered by a Japanese corporation.

Hayes is optimistic that such efforts will generate enough attention to force change.

"There is a tremendous movement building worldwide which is going to save the world's rain forests," he predicted.