



Lolo Escobar is a subsistence farmer in Chile's Puelo River valley.



## RESOURCES AT RISK

**n Local Agriculture** Temperature fluctuations caused by the dam's giant reservoir will disturb farming.

**n Flora and Fauna** Threatened species include alerce, mountain cypress and the endangered Andean deer.

**n Coastal Fishing** Puelo fresh water feeds salmon farms on Reloncaví Sound.

**Puelo River Dammed** Those who stumble upon Chile's Puelo River Valley find paradise: a swollen, turquoise river twisting through stands of southern beech, hemmed in by glacial peaks. These natural barriers have long kept the valley pristine.

A century ago, while Argentina populated the other side of the Andean divide, the government lured pioneers to stake claim to this region in the name of national interest. Now, a hydroelectric project may force their descendents out for the same reason.

Spurred by national fears of an energy crisis, the Spanish power company Endesa has plans for large-scale dams throughout Patagonia, where it controls over 90 percent of the water rights. In the Puelo Valley, one proposed dam would flood 12,000 acres and displace the population. Popular views deem the project necessary to protect the nation's energy reserves, but Chile's public sector uses only 28% of its energy—67% is consumed by the mining industry. Endesa claims the project is still under study, though Dr. Wolfram Heise of Conservación Patagónica says, "Of all the planned dam projects, the Puelo is the easiest target and probably will be the fastest to go." Now Puelo's residents, used to a life of isolation—without telephones or a post office—scramble to have their say. Even if compensated, residents worry about finding the same quality of life. Subsistence farmer Tito Cuevas Mansilla says, "We have very little but it is enough to live on. And no one wants to leave even the little or nothing they have for a dam." —Carolyn McCarthy