

## LOCAL NEWS

# Utuado group wants lands turned into state forest

By the STAR Staff

An Utuado community group that fought the establishment of a copper and gold mining industry in the Utuado-Adjuntas area is trying to establish a 700-acre state-run forest in the same region.

CasaPueblo director Alexis Massol said he asked the Rosselló administration to transfer the land from the Land Authority to the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. DNER has jurisdiction over all commonwealth forests.

A protected forest in the region would help prolong the lives of two lakes in the area, Dos Bocas and Caonillas, Massol said at a press conference Thursday.

The two lakes are the main sources of intake for the proposed North Coast Superaqueduct which will cross from Arecibo to Santurce. The group also claimed the forest would serve as a mitigating factor to the construction of Highway 10 between Arecibo and Ponce.

Massol said the project has the support of many residents of Adjuntas and Utuado. He produced a petition with 3,000 signatures favoring the forest which he said he plans to submit to La Fortaleza.

"It's a critical zone," the engineer said. The forest would be located in "an important biological corridor" that includes Río Abajo in Utuado, Guilarte in Adjuntas and Toro Negro in Villalba, he said.

CasaPueblo opposed a now-defunct plan by two mining corporations to establish an open-pit mine in the area. Studies revealed the Utuado area's copper and gold deposits could create a multi-million industry.

The proposal also was rejected by environmentalists and the mayors of nearby towns. It was supported by Gov. Rosselló provided it contribute to the economic development of the area without harming the environment.



Photo special to the STAR by Wilfredo García

**Alexis Massol, of the CasaPueblo community group, displays their Adjuntas-produced coffee. The organization has asked the Rosselló administration to transform mining lands in the Utuado-Adjuntas region into a state-run forest.**