

Ashaninka and Yanesha

For the Project “Women of Influence”, we collaborated with Young Indigenous women of Ashaninka and Yanesha communities based in the Junin region of Peru.

Ashaninka

Ashaninka are the most populous Indigenous people of Peru, with 118 277 habitants, who live in 675 communities (Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2020a). Ashaninka people inhabit tropical forests and are located in 7 regions of Peru: Junín, Ucayali, Pasco, Cusco, Huánuco y Ayacucho. The Ashaninka speak their own language, also called Ashaninka, which belongs to the Arawak linguistic family, and 73 567 people in Peru have it as their mother tongue (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017).

The Ashaninka people practice activities relating to agriculture, fishing and hunting (Varese, 2006). These indigenous people used to live in small and dispersed population groups (Rojas Zolezzi, 1994) but currently, they reside in Indigenous communities - spaces officially recognized by the Peruvian government for Amazonian indigenous peoples - and have a larger population than in the scattered settlements they previously inhabited (Sarmiento Barletti, 2016).

Among the Ashaninka there are differentiated and complementary gender roles in the families and the community (Fabián Arias, 2013). In the main, the men are in charge of hunting and food gathering, while the women are responsible for the preparation of the food and mazato¹, taking care of the children and making handicrafts. Activities such as fishing and agriculture are carried out by both sexes (Rojas Zolezzi, 1994; Varese, 2006).

The traditional social organisation of the Ashaninka used to include various leadership roles. The *pinkathari* was the head of the family clans and scattered settlements, whose function was the care of the territory and the resolution of conflicts between members of the group (Rojas Zolezzi, 1994). The *Sheripiari* was the spiritual leader, who could communicate with the spirits and guarantee the welfare of the group (Rojas Zolezzi, 1994). Since the 1970s, with the creation of Indigenous communities, new forms of leadership emerged, with new skills requirements, such as knowing how to read and write, and being able to negotiate with external actors (Green, 2009).

Leadership roles in the Ashaninka used to be exercised, mainly, by men. However, in the last decades, factors such as the absence of male leaders as a result of the internal armed conflict between State and Shining Path² and a greater opening for the public participation of women, have generated an increase of Ashaninka women who assume leadership positions in their organisations and communities (Fabián Arias & Espinosa, 1997; Paredes Piqué, 2004).

The Ashaninka identity is closely related to their territory, and their connection with nature and the beings that inhabit it (Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2014). The Ashaninka have developed and prioritised intergenerational ancestral knowledge of Indigenous plant-based medicine, which functions as an unofficial health system. This knowledge is sustained mainly by the

¹ Cassava-based drink, of great cultural and nutritional importance for the Amazonian indigenous peoples.

² For more information about the internal armed conflict in Peru and its consequences, visit the [Commission of Truth and Reconciliation final report](#).

elderly people of the community. Indigenous health specialists are known as 'vaporeadoras', women who heal through steam procedures with medicinal plants (Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2020a). The Ashaninka consider it important to value and transmit this knowledge and traditional wisdom to the new generations of their community (Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2014).

Yanesha

The Yanesha people are an Amazonian indigenous people with 14,314 inhabitants, living in 75 localities (Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2020b). They live in tropical forests with humid climates, in three regions of Peru: Huánuco, Junín and Pasco. The Yanesha have their own language, Yanesha, which belongs to the Arawak linguistic family and 1,142 people in Peru have it as their mother tongue (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017).

The Yanesha share similar historical and cultural roots to the Ashaninka, because they have the same geographic setting and linguistic family (Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2014). Historically, both have had friendly relations with each other (Weiss, 1975). Similarly to the Ashaninka, the Yanesha are engaged in productive activities of agriculture, hunting and fishing (Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2020b). The Yanesha used to live in population groups formed by family lineages (de Souza, 2014), but since the 1970 decade, like other Amazonian Indigenous peoples, they lived in Indigenous communities officially recognized by the state.

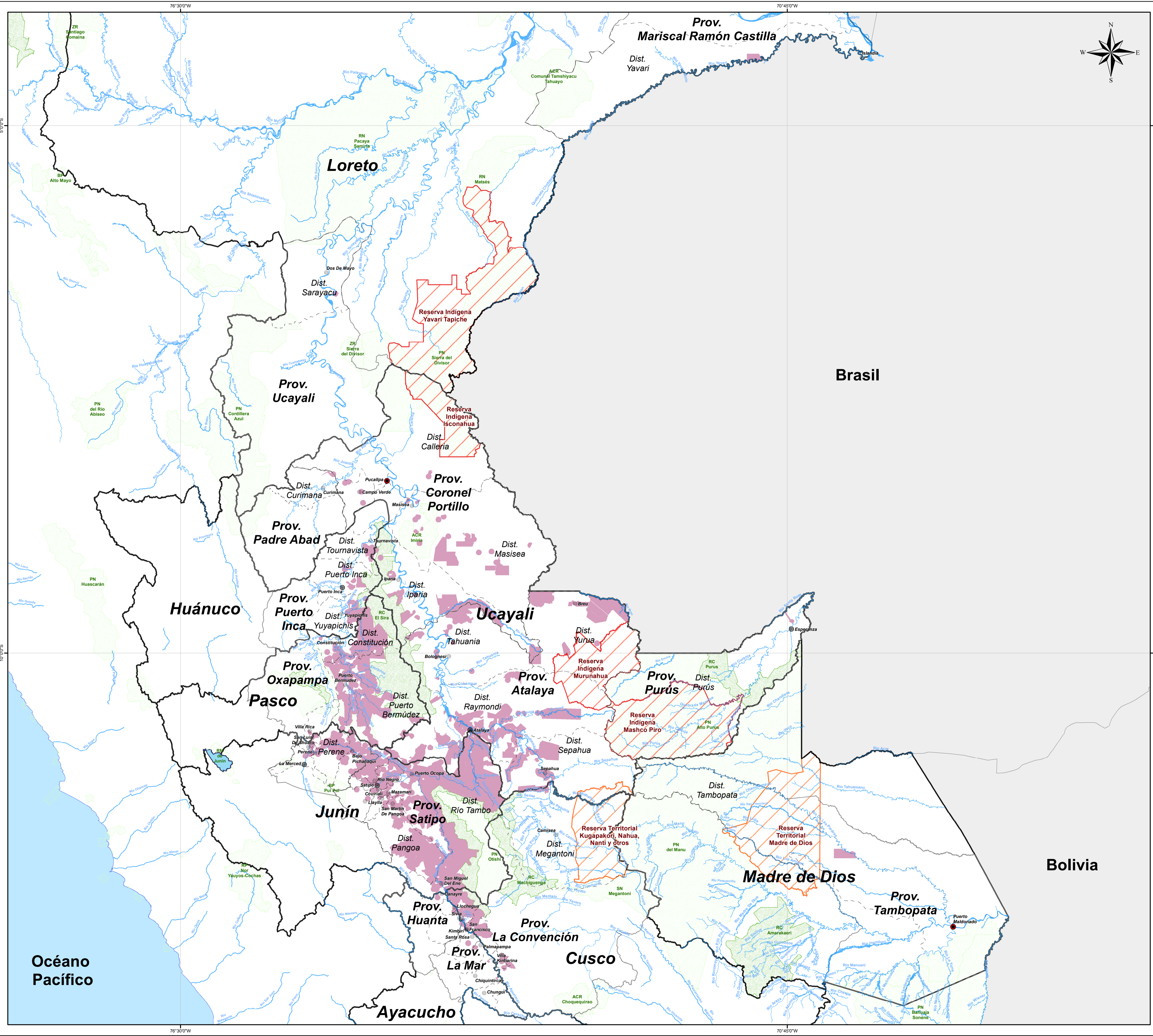
Among the Yanesha there are differentiated gender roles, which boys and girls learn as they grow up. Women are dedicated to cooking the food, raising children and taking care of the farm, while men do the fishing, hunting and prepare the farms for planting (Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2020b). The Yanesha have defined rituals of passage to adulthood. When women have their first menstruation, they are confined for a few days and follow special requirements. Men mark the passage to adulthood with their first hunt, after previous teachings from their older peers. This first hunt is buried for honouring the divinities (Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2020b).

Regarding their traditional political organisation, the Yanesha had their own leadership roles. The *cornesha* was in charge of political, social and spiritual affairs, and he was mediator between humans and divinities (Santos Granero, 1994). Furthermore, the *amcha'taret* was someone with great physical strength, who was chosen in times of war (Santos Granero, 1994). Historically, these leadership roles have been reserved for men, but currently women have been assuming leadership positions. For example, in Indigenous federations that incorporate Yanesha, Yanesha women have been recognized as *cornesha*, as is the case of Teresita Antazu (Rousseau & Morales Hudon, 2018).

The Yanesha people have their own conceptions of health and illness, and possess deep knowledge about forms of healing (Valadeau et al., 2010). They have specialists in biomedicine, for example, the *apartañ* or *vegetalista*, who perform cures based on medicinal plants prepared as an infusion or in steam procedures. In addition, the *pa'ller* or *tabaqueros*, are those who have great power, spiritual abilities and can relate to the non-human world (Santos Granero, 1994, 2004).


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Leyenda

- Capital Distrital
- Capital Provincial
- Capital Departamental
- Ríos
- Pueblo Ashaninka
- Área Natural Protegida
- Reserva Comunal
- Lago
- Reserva Indígena
- Reserva Territorial
- Límite Distrital
- Límite Provincial
- Límite Departamental

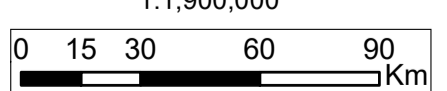


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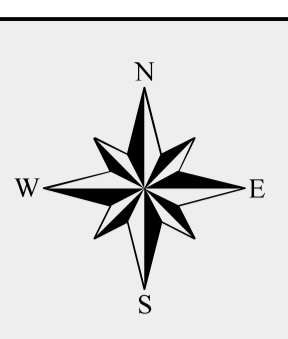
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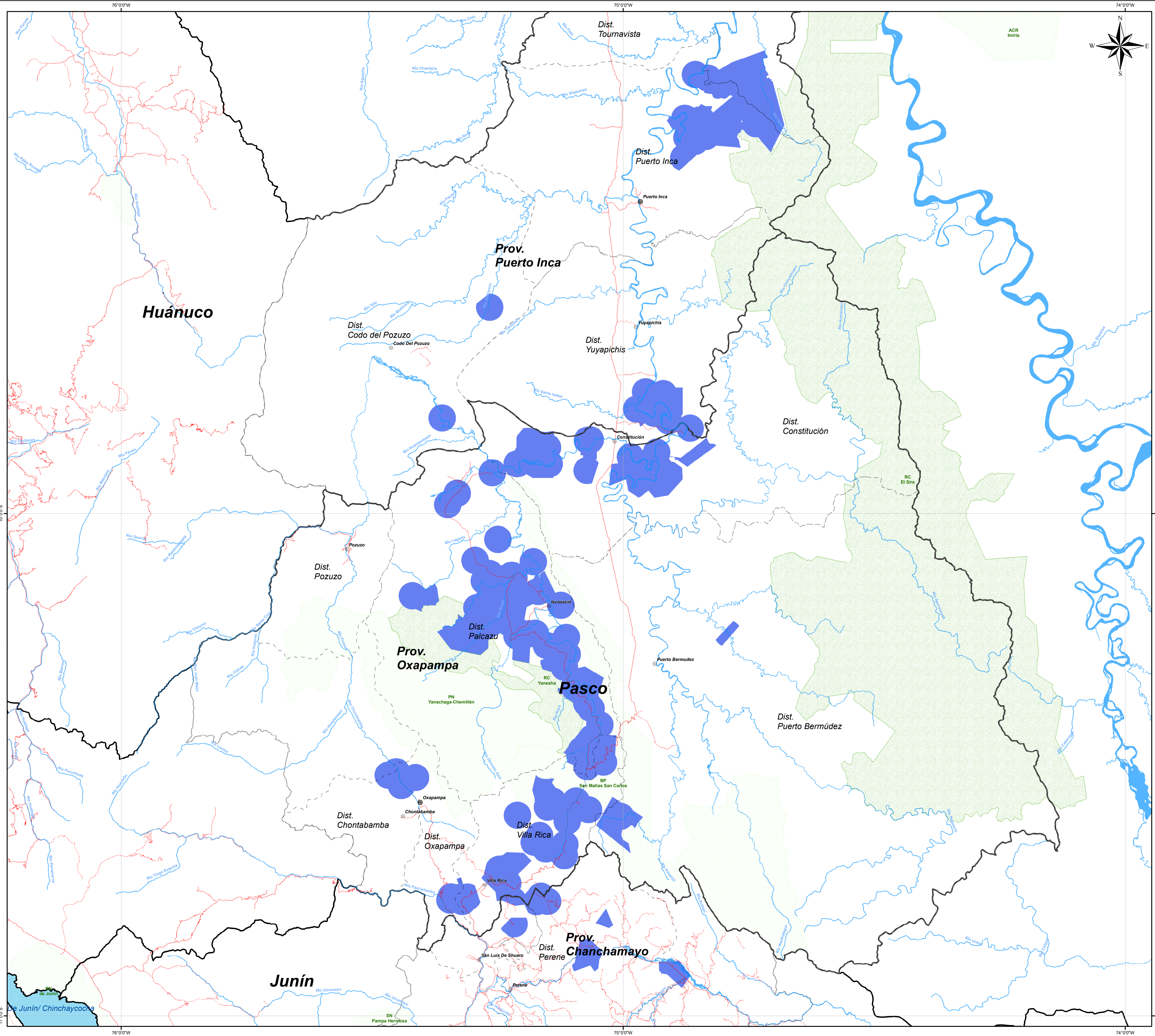
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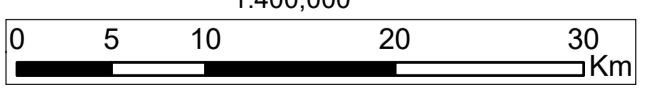
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- Pueblo Yanessa
- Área Natural Protegida
- Reserva Comunal
- Lago
- Límite Distrital
- Límite Provincial
- Límite Departamental


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PUEBLO YANESSHA

Sistema de Coordenadas: Geográficas
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Fuentes de BDPI: ANA, COFOPRI, MINAGRI, IGN, INEI, MTC, SERANP.