Project Title: The Drivers of Large-Scale Private Conservation and Livelihood Change in Chile

Over the last twenty years Chile has been fertile ground for the establishment of privately owned protected areas (PPAs). Favorable economic and political climates in Chile have enticed private actors of varying degrees of wealth to purchase tracts of land to ensure long-term protection of and access to arable land, water, and biodiversity. PPAs have been considered complementary to state-sponsored conservation in Chile. Thus, they have garnered the attention of Chilean governments agencies, which are attempting to regulate PPAs and have also provided funds for communities residing near large PPAs. Many large-scale (for this study I define large-scale PPAs as PPAs greater than 1300ha [5sq. miles], intentionally interacting with local communities, and pursuing tourism development) have been met with resistance at the local level, however. There have been claims large-scale PPAs have incited socio-political tensions concerning equity, livelihood disruption, elitism, and land rights, among other issues. PPA agents have attempted to quell dissent and strike a balance between human and ecological wellbeing despite the historical failure of merging fortress conservation and human development. PPA agents in Chile have encouraged nearby communities to participate in entrepreneurship, wage employment, and the provision of services and goods to the PPA and its visitors. Some PPA websites claim their operations seek to reduce poverty and protect or modernize dying cultures. Despite the rise in large-scale PPA numbers across the globe, and in Chile in particular, the local effects of PPAs and the drivers of their proliferation and resultant conflict have gone largely unexplored to any significant depth in the Spanish and English literature.

With the assistance of the Laarman International Gift Fund, I traveled to Los Rios, Chile to examine the large-scale PPA phenomenon between the (Chilean) winter months of May and August, 2013. Los Rios, the XIV administrative region located in southern Chile, harbors a large portion of the Valdivian forest. The forest is of national and international conservation significant because of the abundance and diversity of endemic species found there. In 1974, the Pinochet regime passed Decree Law 701 that resulted in the proliferation of industrial monoculture tree plantations throughout Chile. These plantations replaced extensive tracts of native forest with fast growing exotic species and caused great destruction to native ecosystems. Many of these impacts occurred in Los Rios. In an effort to curb ecological destruction in Chile, wealthy individuals and organizations have found opportunities post-dictatorship in Los Rios to create large-scale PPAs. The three largest, Parque Oncol, Reserva Costera Valdiviana (RCV), and Huilo Huilo, were the sites examined in this study. Each park differs in the type of ownership and size, but they are all similar in that they were formerly portions of larger working forests for timber extraction. Chilean wood pulp company Arauco owns Parque Oncol, which is approximately 500ha. The Nature Conservancy owns RCV. Originally, TNC purchased 60,000ha of Valdivian forest following the bankruptcy of timber company Bosques S.A. Over the last ten years, this parcel has been reduced to 50,000ha after land donations. Huilo Huilo, owned by Chilean billionaire Victor Petermann, is a two-parcel expanse totaling 100,000ha. It was purchased prior to the government’s mass public land selloff at the close of Pinochet’s reign in the early 1990s. The latter two PPAs have obtained global notoriety due to their size and conservation accomplishments.
I assembled a small team to examine who is involved in large-scale PPAs, what mechanisms are in place for their operations, what factors, conditions, and processes determine changes to local livelihoods as a result of PPA creation, and how locals have responded to change. I began the project with an ongoing document review and analysis. My team and I then began a stakeholder mapping exercise via interviews with conservation officers at Parque Oncol and RCV as well as governments officials. The aim of these initial interviews was to better understand a) which actors influence PPA creation and decision-making and b) understand how PPAs are organized and supported or resisted. My team and I then conducted semi-structured interviews with communities that were deemed by conservation officers and locals to be least and most interacting with Parque Oncol. We used key-informant and snowball sampling to identify 1a) how communities receive PPAs, 1b) how PPAs shape local livelihoods and why, and c) what reasons influence variability in perspectives; 2 a) identify how locals have responded to PPAs and why and 2b) what variability in local response exists and why. I then created a twenty-five-item survey to supplement interviews with the goal of assessing cultural differences between PPA agents and experts and locals regarding conservation and development happenings at RCV and Huilo Huilo sites. Upon completion of five days of fieldwork in the communities near Parque Oncol and creation of the survey, my team moved to the RCV area for another week of data collection, followed three weeks later by a week of data collection near Huilo Huilo. In between stints in the field, one research assistant and I conducted phone interviews with decision makers and stakeholders in Santiago and also in-person in Valdivia (capital of Los Rios and my place of residence). The final interview took place in Santiago just before my departure from Chile. The project was a tremendous success with over 80 interviews completed in total and comprising an array of perspectives. A small team of transcribers was employed throughout the winter to turn Spanish interviews audio files into English transcripts.

**Preliminary Results**

The preliminary findings from interviews are intriguing. Interviews show those communities (largely indigenous) residing near RCV and Oncol, though relatively close geographically, have had vastly different experiences and interactions with PPAs. Much of this difference appears to result from preconceived notions and confusion about park intensions; the number of employment opportunities provided by the existence of the PPA; the degree of assistance to secure state and local funding; conflict over historical land use and degradation; the scale of community interaction by the PPA; and concessions made by the PPA at the request of communities. For some households interacting with PPAs, their lives have changed for the better, largely due to tourism opportunities fostered by PPAs. Still, many households remain unchanged and locals remain faced with hardship and uncertainty now that the timber industry is never to return; for two of the three PPAs, conservation does not create many employment opportunities. Some households and their communities benefit greatly through PPA employment or purchasing of good and services, Yet, these communities continue a dangerous and intense dependence on one industry to provide income, making the shift from timber to tourism. Preliminary analysis from the cultural consensus analysis (survey) indicates a great deal of intercultural variability among the community members and PPA experts regarding PPA conservation and development happenings. Forthcoming analysis will be conducted over the coming months to better understand where these differences originate.
Thank You

On behalf of my Chilean research team, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Jan Laarman International Gift Fund that provided the necessary funds for this research in Los Rios, Chile. The majority of funding from this grant was used to support the employment of research assistants, without whom this research would not have been possible. Moreover, without these funds, it would not have been possible to amplify the voices of those living near these large-scale PPAs so as to tell their story.

Figure 1. Christopher among 2000-year-old alerce trees in RCV (Photo courtesy of Felipe Guarda).

Figure 2. PPA-based income opportunities include handmade goods sold to PPAs and tourists.
Figure 3. View of the Pacific Ocean from RCV (a major restoration project provided the clearing).

Figure 4. Much of Puerto Fuy’s population is employed by Huilo Huilo (in the distance).

Figure 5. Salto de Huilo Huilo, Reserva Huilo Huilo.
Figure 6. Research Assistant trying hard to keep up with a fast interviewee in the coastal rainforest.

Figure 7. PPAs and traditional livelihoods try to coexist (Parque Oncol and RCV areas).