



Research Brief

Conserving Private Lands

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The loss of tropical biodiversity is one of the great environmental challenges of our era. To help address this problem in Latin America, where 80 percent of land is privately owned, ELI's Inter-American Program launched an initiative in 2001 to conserve ecosystems on private lands. Partnering with environmental nonprofits in seven countries, we worked on strengthening the legal framework to supplement the more well-known efforts to protect public parks and reserves and to catalyze private land conservation.

Senior attorneys from ELI worked closely with our partners over a two-year period designing legal instruments to increase private land conservation. The results were published in 2003, titled *Legal Tools and Incentives for Private Land Conservation in Latin America: Building Models for Success* (also published in Spanish). The report provided the first synthesis of the laws of private land conservation in Latin America, offering an in-depth examination of how voluntary instruments, such as easements and private reserve designations, were implemented since the 1990s.

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The report has led to increased efforts to protect private lands and new networks for conservation action. Its model for conservation easements and private reserves has already been used to draft regulations in Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Peru. One of our team members, Pedro Solano, Conservation Program Director of the Peruvian Society for Environmental Law, known as SPDA, credits the project for bringing together Latin American groups through workshops and for ultimately leading to the creation of the Latin American Network for Private Conservation. The network is developing conservation tools, building NGO capacity, and developing best practices.

The project has already helped our partners implement private land conservation projects, develop a legal framework, and provide incentives to landowners. In Peru, for example, the work of our team helped SPDA not only identify successful conservation models, but also close the gaps in the law. SPDA went on to develop

regulations to create new legal tools in Peru, such as mechanisms that allow the designation of private concessions over state lands for conservation or ecotourism purposes.

The improved legal framework in turn led to a dramatic increase in the amount of land protected. Peru now has 15 conservation concessions covering 413,230 hectares and 20 ecotourism concessions covering 454,500 hectares. And in 2006, the Amazonian Association for the Amazon received a 142,000-hectare area of cloud forests as a conservation concession in the San Marin province of Peru.

Our Costa Rican partners relied upon the project to improve legislation now before the national legislature's Commission on Environment. The law seeks to improve the legal foundation for private reserves and conservation easements. Mechanisms to protect forests have already been extended from 5 years to 99 years. And in Chile, the project helped our partner, the National Committee for the Defense of Plants and Animals launch a network that now has more than 100

members, including individuals, NGOs, foundations, landowners, universities, and others who are committed to conservation practices on their lands. There is now a special focus on biological corridors and private lands within the 133 wild areas covering 386,571 hectares that lie within the network.

Finally, in Ecuador, an active National Network of Private Reserves of Ecuador has developed a strategic vision and action plan and systematized each private reserve's legal status with GIS maps, and a group of NGOs continues to implement private land conservation mechanisms, focusing especially on biological corridors and land purchases.

For example, Nature and Culture International bought 600 hectares of forest to protect numerous endemic plant species found only at the site, and the Jocotoco Foundation has begun to buy land to establish its eighth reserve at Narupa to conserve endangered birds of the foothill cloud forests. A group of NGOs is now working with the Ministry of Environment to develop specific regulations to improve private lands mechanisms, enable government recognition of private reserves, and improve incentives.

ELI will continue to work with our Latin American partners in the future. The tools necessary to prevent further loss of tropical biodiversity in this critical region are already being deployed with success.