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Evaluating the impacts of different conservation strategies on deforestation and forest degradation in the Peruvian Amazon

In light of the persisting environmental degradation despite considerable conservation efforts, there have been increasing calls to rigorously evaluate conservation approaches to ensure that they are effective in reaching their intended impacts. However, such evaluations are still relatively rare. In addition, the establishment of state-controlled protected areas (PAs) has dominated conservation strategies globally, although an extensive literature has highlighted that no single governance regime is a silver bullet solution to sustainable resource use. As a result one emerging strategy, which has so far received relatively little research attention, has been to draw on the contribution of private actors to conservation. One such novel conservation tool promoted in a number of Latin American countries, are Conservation Concessions (CCs). CCs comprise public land given to private actors for conservation purposes.

To contribute towards addressing the mentioned research gaps we therefore evaluated the impacts of CCs on deforestation and forest degradation in the Peruvian Amazon compared to state-controlled PAs and lands of Indigenous Communities (ICs). More specifically, we integrated data derived from remote sensing, field surveys, and spatial biophysical and socio-economic datasets to better understand: 1) whether CCs have helped to reduce 2006-2011 deforestation and forest degradation rates in the Peruvian Amazon compared to logging concessions, mining concessions and the wider non-protected landscape, using propensity score matching; and 2) how these impacts compare to those of state-controlled PAs and ICs.

Our study finds that although CCs, state PAs, and ICs all significantly reduced deforestation and degradation rates compared to similar areas in the wider non-protected landscape, CCs and ICs were on average more effective than state PAs. In addition, the impacts of the different interventions were more variable and there were no consistent differences between strategies when matched to logging and mining concessions. Consequently, the findings highlight the potential contribution in particular of CCs and ICs towards reducing deforestation and forest degradation in the Peruvian Amazon; however, their effectiveness depended on the measure of success and what their impacts were evaluated against. As a result future impact evaluations of conservation interventions could benefit from further disentangling the land use restrictions in place in the non-protected matrix.