

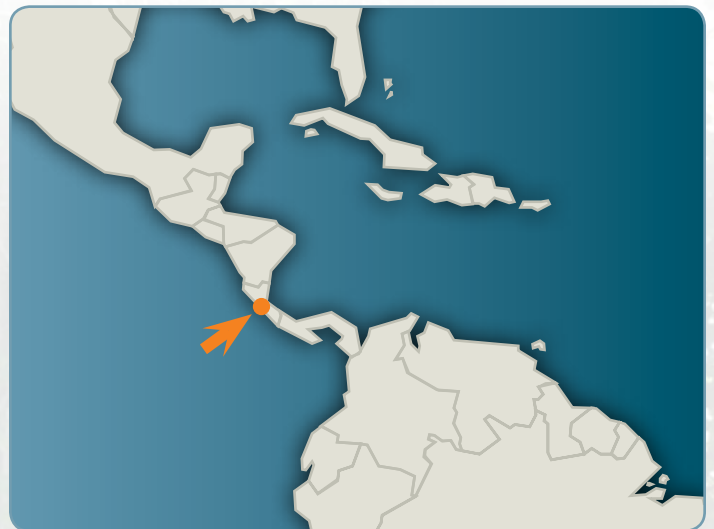


LANDOWNERS PARTICIPATE IN DRAWING UP A MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR A PROTECTED AREA

Challenges

The Cerros de la Carpintera Buffer Zone (ZPCC) covers 2 386 hectares and is one of the last bastions of tropical forest inside the Metropolitan Area of San José, the capital of Costa Rica, which has a growing population of over 2.6 million inhabitants. In this buffer zone, the land tenure is mixed, so most of the territory is privately owned.

In 1976, the Cerros de la Carpintera area was declared a buffer zone. Over the years, a variety of territorial planning bills were put before the Legislative Assembly, with efforts mainly focused on changing over to the category of national park. However, not one of the bills passed. Land is very expensive in the buffer zone and the State did not have the financial capacity to acquire all or part of it. Moreover, the buffer zone did not meet the biological requirements for it to be changed over to the category of national park. As a solution, the



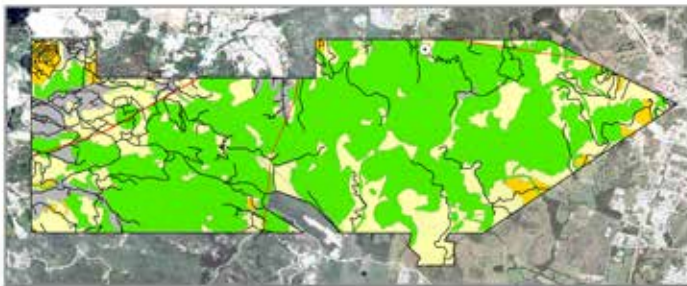
Reventazón Model Forest, Costa Rica

Established: 2003 | Area: 312,460 hectares

Facts

- The Reventazón Model Forest includes 14 public and two private protected areas.
- The area is of great importance for the country as it has vital sources of drinking water, hydropower production, agricultural land, as well as significant areas of natural forest with huge potential for tourism and economic development.
- 11% of the country's total exports, at least 38% of domestic hydroelectric production, 25% of the drinking water for the San José Metropolitan Area, and 50% of the country's cement are produced in the upper and middle areas of the Reventazón Basin.

Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE) proposed that it keep the category of buffer zone and that a management plan be drawn up and implemented to ensure its biological integrity, which initially made the environmental sector sit up and take notice. It was in this context that the possibility arose of developing a platform with the participation of key actors to look for an alternative capable of reconciling the State's conservation interests with the private sector's production goals.



Finding a solution

The first step was to set up an Interagency Commission to head the process. The institutions taking part were the MINAE, the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC), the Central Volcanic Mountain Range Conservation Area (ACCVC), the La Carpintera Owners Association (ASOPROCA), local governments, local NGOs, and the Reventazón Model Forest as technical support and facilitator of the process. All of the partners and individuals involved were highly motivated and committed to this initiative. Several strategic players were also consulted during various stages of the process, prior to the stages involved in its formalization. For the first time in Costa Rica, a management plan for a protected area was drawn up by an Interagency commission with the aforementioned characteristics for a buffer zone with mixed land tenure. The preparation of the plan lasted from August 2007 to November 2010.

Results and impacts

The ZPCC management plan was a joint effort, designed to suit a situation where there is mixed land tenure. The plan includes zoning of the area and agreed criteria for land use, as well as guidelines and actions for its implementation. As the MINAE had no prior experience or clear methodological guide for the planning of protected areas in similar categories, the methodology was adapted to the type of category and characteristics of the protected area for the implementation of zoning and ground rules for both the conservation of its natural resources and the development of viable sustainable activities for the landowners. After ironing out their differences and reaching an agreement on the criteria for the plan, the process was expedited through the unconditional support of all parties and members of the Commission. This experience gave rise to a new SINAC guide with broader criteria for use in other protected area planning processes. At the present time, this guide is in the process of being drawn up.



One of the conditions that enabled the process was the fact that there was always at least one person, provided by the Reventazón Model Forest, devoted to supporting the preparation of the plan. The Model Forest representatives took the lead in the development of significant parts of the management plan, including the following: (1) the analysis of the most suitable management category for the protected area, which was important to change from the initial idea of creating a national park to that of preparing a management plan for the buffer zone; (2) the compilation and generation of digital information to develop the geographic information system (GIS) for La Carpintera, which was important for the production of the diagnosis and zoning; (3) the compilation and analysis of the current environmental legislation that applies to the protected area, which was important for the definition of the ground rules; and (4) the preparation of the zoning and ground rules, and the strategic management programs.

The La Carpintera Owners Association (ASOPROCA) was also set up and was later represented by the ZPCC Interagency Commission. At present, this organization has approximately 12 members who own more than 50% of the land in the protected area. It is initiating actions for the integrated and sustainable management of the properties of the organization members. Experience has shown that it is essential to involve owners in the territorial planning of a protected wild area when there is land that is privately owned, as the zoning and ground rules set out in the management plan will apply to their land. Motivation creates more motivation and new stakeholders will gradually become more interested in being involved as they witness the results of the work of a multi-stakeholder team (in this case, the Commission).

A solid social and institutional basis was created for the implementation of the plan. This is not a theoretical plan to be merely filed away, but rather an instrument for achieving well-informed decisions and actions based on the input of all partners. The plan involves periodic follow-ups and updates aimed at gradually incorporating lessons learned, thus improving and adapting its contents to the area's needs.



This experience has seen communication and trust grow, criteria being agreed upon and a balance of power being achieved among representatives. It has also managed to create a shared vision and space, deal with conflicts of interest, achieve more fluid communication between the Ministry and the city of La Unión, and guide the ongoing learning process among the stakeholders. This long and intense learning process has shown us that the building of trust contributed to the partnership of parties interested in the ZPCC, who represent the different values and interests of a variety of sectors of society, as well as to the development of a shared vision for the sustainable management of the area.

To find out more

- imfn.net/reventazon-model-forest
- Video: youtu.be/etrQlic9kwY

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