

## **Influence of Economic Incentives on Common-Property Forest Management in Ecuador**

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Environmental conservation in the tropics appears to be on a new governance trajectory as new policy alternatives aim to manage diverse ecosystems for varied social and ecological objectives. Amongst the various policy alternatives, Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) has emerged as a prominent tool to promote ecosystem conservation in developing countries. This research project examines the impacts of an Ecuadorian PES program implemented on common-property forest lands.

The interdisciplinary research project is co-authored with Tanya Hayes (Environmental Studies & IPS, Seattle University) and Hendrik Wolff (Department of Economics, University of Washington). The objective of the study is to empirically test if and how the payments impacts rural and indigenous communities' decision to participate in forest conservation agreements, individual forest use behaviors, and the resultant conservation outcomes.

To carry out this research, the study will compare communities that decided to participate in the payment program with those communities that chose not to, complemented with twelve in-depth case studies. Using institutional analysis, statistical modeling, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and qualitative methods, the study will assess the rural land-use decisions in the context of a set of biophysical, institutional, socio-economic and cognitive factors.

The project results will be critical for improving public policy on forest sustainability, gaining insights on land-use decision processes from marginalized groups, and fomenting links between scientific discovery, undergraduate student research, and practical policy applications.

An article examining the factors that influence community participation in PES programs will be submitted by summer 2014.