

## Abstract

Conservation Without Evictions: The search for social and ecological justice on Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula

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This thesis examines one region's search for solutions to the problem of protecting tropical forests that are inhabited by a large and impoverished human population. The traditional method, the protected, human free park, is no longer considered a realistic or just approach by many in Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula, where people are dependent on their access to forest land for their daily survival. The Osa Peninsula is the site of multiple categories of official protection: from the strictly protected, people free national park, biological reserve, and wildlife refuge, to forest reserves with restricted land use, to government agricultural colonies and privately owned for-profit preserves. The majority of its 12,000 or so inhabitants lack land security, partly due to the protected status of much of the Peninsula's land. Most of the Peninsula's inhabitants are subsistence farmers or ranchers, who clear rainforest for these subsistence activities, and in recent years, have begun to sell wood to lumber companies. Many believe that people treat their land less carefully because they are living in the short term, as they worry that they will lose their land to still more rainforest protection.

This thesis examines the historical developments that have led to present conflicts on the Osa Peninsula and some creative proposals that have been made for the sustainable use of the Peninsula's lands which guarantee local people's continued access to them. It then examines the larger problem of landlessness, and the national and international policies that perpetuate it, recognizing the grave error and injustice of conservation tactics that place the poor and nature in adversarial positions. The overall intent is to learn from the innovative approach to conservation being born of those at work on the Osa Peninsula, and consider it in the greater context of land use, land tenure, and national and international development policy.