



Celebrating the International Year of Biodiversity with Success Stories from the Field - Strengthening Protected Areas from the Outside-in: Conservation Mosaics in Colombia

Protected areas around the world do not exist as isolated islands of tranquility where centuries of evolutionary processes continue uninterrupted by humans. Rather, they are often found in mixed-use landscapes where natural resources are intensively managed for satisfying human needs such as food, water, fuel, and wood. Protected area administrations are thus challenged to manage protected areas to achieve their conservation objectives while land-use and management actions taken outside the park borders can often work at cross-purposes to their conservation goals.

With support from the GEF through the “Colombia National Protected Areas Trust Fund Project”, implemented by the World Bank, Patrimonio Natural - Fondo para la Biodiversidad y Áreas Protegidas and the Colombian National Parks System, is employing a novel approach to strengthen the management of protected areas from the “outside-in”. By recognizing the bio-physical and socio-economic milieu that protected areas are part of, the protected area administration is turning a potential management problem into an opportunity to sustain protected areas for the long-term.

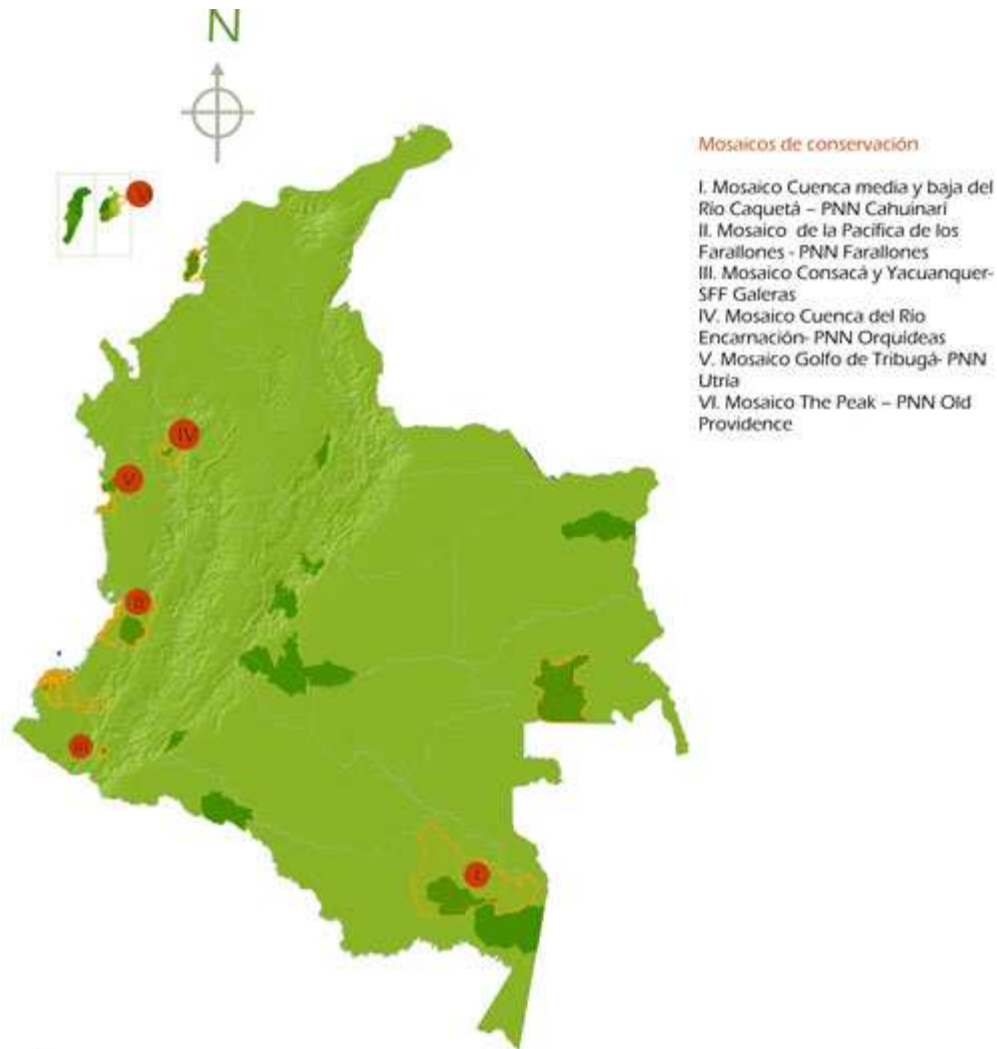
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The concept of “conservation mosaics” (CM) moves beyond the concept of “conservation corridors”---which are mostly defined by biological considerations-- and encompasses a more fluid and organic understanding of landscape-level ecosystem processes and management requirements within and beyond the protected areas themselves. In the context of this project, conservation mosaics are defined as “networks of protected areas and complementary landscapes that include combinations of national parks, production landscapes and seascapes, and collectively-owned ethnic territories”. Conservation mosaics build upon existing social and institutional arrangements to ensure that conservation and local benefit objectives are both met in a way that can be socially sustained. As a management approach, CM emphasizes the symbiosis of meeting the objectives of national parks, other natural resource management strategies, and local economic development.

The project is piloting this approach in six conservation mosaics where it has focused on strengthening local capacities, promoting self-determination in decision making within each conservation mosaic, and supporting existing landscape-level management processes and initiatives of communitarian counsels’ in ethnic territories, indigenous peoples, and local farmers. Within each project conservation mosaic, Local Working Groups (LWGs) have been formed and they identify actions that link conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity with local economic development. Each CM includes a

core national park that was selected because of its importance for global biodiversity conservation and for its strategic role in the provision of environmental services.

The project is currently working in two kinds of conservation mosaics: a) three ethnic-territorial mosaics and b) three environmental goods and services mosaics. (See map and <http://www.patrimoniounatural.org.co/minisite/> for pictures and descriptions of all the mosaics.)



Ethnic-territorial Mosaics

In Colombia the collective territorial ownership by indigenous and afro-descendant groups is legally recognized. These territories coincide with areas of great importance for biodiversity conservation, such as the Chocó and the Amazon. The indigenous “resguardos” (as they are referred to in Colombia) occupy 31 million hectares (29% of the Colombian territory) and are home to almost 1.4 million people. The collective

territories from afro-descendant communities occupy 5.5 million hectares and are home to 3 million people. Hence, in both cases, the sustainable management of this land from a conservation and economic development point of view is paramount. Within the “ethnic-territorial conservation mosaics”, the project recognizes that the conservation of these territories and the national parks that border or are within them will depend on the capacity of these communities, thus, the project aims to strengthen the ethnic- territorial organizations’ governance and management capacity.

For example, in the Chocó, the project is working in the “*Gulf of Tribuga Conservation Mosaic*” which includes Utria National Park and the Riscale’s Communitarian Counsel. This area is known for its lowland and upland rain forests and a high diversity of plants, vertebrates and marine fauna. Hundreds of vulnerable endemic plants are found in the conservation mosaic, and charismatic fauna such as jaguar, macaws, monkeys and humpback whales are encountered within the park. Utria National Park biologists are monitoring the catch rate of the main fish species and identifying the species under increased danger of extinction due to overfishing. The data collected has served as the starting point for developing agreements on sustainable use of fisheries with local fishermen and with communitarian counsels in the territory. In the end, both the Park and the fishermen will benefit when fisheries are sustainably used—with the Park maintaining its conservation goals and the fishermen maintaining a sustainable return per unit of fishing effort. In addition, the Counsel is in the process of declaring five conservation and special management areas within its territory. These five areas will link to the National Park, thus strengthening biodiversity conservation efforts overall in the conservation mosaic.

These kinds of complementary actions of the National Park and the Counsel have enhanced conservation and natural resource management efforts in the territory and the project is replicating this experience in the other mosaics. This alliance may prove very important in responding to potential threats to the protected areas (including a deep-water harbor construction project currently under consideration) and the permanency of ethnic groups. In this context, a conservation strategy that goes beyond Natural Parks and includes the local communities that have legal ownership of the territory has a higher likelihood of success in advancing sustainable natural resources management in the conservation mosaic, including the conservation of the national park.

“The Riscale’s Communitarian Counsel has been strengthened through this process [the project], in particular regarding its capacity of assembly power and alliances. The Local Working Group of this Mosaic wants to become a space to organize the Gulf of Tribuga’s interventions and policies. About the relation with the Utria National Park, this process has made possible an agreement with the Riscales”.

Aida Nelly Montano, President of the Riscales Communitarian Counsel, Mosaic of the Gulf of Tribuga.

(Note: The agreement referenced in the quote established a joint work program that includes fisheries monitoring, water use and management agreements, and sustainable management of mangrove areas.)

Environmental Goods and Services Conservation Mosaics

The environmental goods and services conservation mosaics have the objective of ensuring the sustainable provision and use of environmental goods and services for the local communities. In most of these CMs, the ecological and social link between the Natural Park and the surrounding area focuses on the services generated (water mainly) by the conserved ecosystems of the protected areas. Sustainable natural resource management systems and watershed recovery activities are being implemented with the support of agreements made with community groups and private actors.

In the case of two conservation mosaics focusing on environmental goods and services, “*Consaca-Yancuanquer*” and the “*Peak*”, associated with the Galeras and Old Providence National Parks respectively, the project has helped local organizations reintroduce native species, establish biodiversity corridors, and develop water supply and distribution schemes as central components of water conservation strategies. In the “*Consacá-Yacuanquer Conservation Mosaic*”, the Galeras National Park has also promoted the establishment of 114 private natural reserves in its surrounding territory. These reserves represent 504 hectares, of which 40% are designated for conservation.

As the examples above illustrate, the project’s work within the conservation mosaics is predicated on developing and facilitating the work of strong, self-directed social organizations and aligning their self-interest to sustainably manage their natural resources with the conservation objectives of the national parks. By focusing on this intersection of mutual interests, the project has been able to develop transparent agreements between the national parks and local communities where clear benefits are perceived and received by all participants. The project has reached its halfway point and the nature of the Conservation Mosaic approach is apparent in the fact that 72 agreements have been established which outline plans for biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resources management including management plans for private reserves, conservation agreements, fisheries management, agro-ecological production, and collective agreements for the establishment of natural resources management plans for three indigenous associations and two communitarian counsels of Afro-Colombian communities.

The Conservation Mosaics approach as employed in Colombia reminds us that in order for biological diversity to be sustainable, not only must we recognize its importance as natural capital, but we must also make the necessary investments in social capital as it may be our most effective tool to advance conservation.

Project facts: Duration: 2006-2011. GEF grant: 15 million, Cofinancing: 27 million.

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Editor's note: To celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity, every two weeks we will highlight a GEF project that is creatively addressing the challenges to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity. These examples of good practice in conservation and sustainable use will demonstrate the contributions that biodiversity makes to local and national economies and that halting the loss of biodiversity is indeed possible.