

Case Study: **Identifying Priorities and Developing Strategies in South America/ Northern Tropical Andes Case Study**

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Purpose and region of analysis

The Northern Tropical Andes Conservation Program (NTA) comprises all ecoregions of the Andean, Chocó, Orinoco and Caribbean natural regions, extending from Northern Perú through Ecuador and Colombia to the Orinoco delta in Venezuela. It encompasses a total of 4 countries and 35 ecoregions. Seven out of the 10 mayor habitat types found in South America occur in the Northern Tropical Andes, a program that stretches over 146 million hectares.

The Northern Tropical Andes Conservation Program carried out a Strategic Planning to define strategies adequate to conserve at least 10% of the biodiversity of each mayor habitat type (MHT) in its region. The plan was based on priority ecoregions as defined previously by a region-wide South America assessment.

Criteria/Methods

TNC's North Tropical Andes staff carried out the planning process using adaptations of the principles of Conservation by design.

Selecting focal issues

Priority ecoregions were defined through an assessment of 3 basic issues:

- Representativity (level of representation of all ecosystems in the ecoregion within protected areas)
- Vulnerability (a combination on how accessible areas in the ecoregion are and population density)
- Irreplaceability (occurrence in the ecoregion of endemic bird, amphibian and other species groups).

Based on these 3 factors an index was designed, called the Action Index (AI) that represented relatively to each major habitat type the importance of each ecoregion for conservation purposes. A high AI was given to ecoregions with poor representation of the assemblage of it ecosystems in protected areas, and highly vulnerable (very accessible, high population and converted) and with high endemism of specific species groups (birds, amphibians and other). The AI was used

by the Northern Tropical Andes Program to select a group of focal ecoregions for each Major Habitat Type (MHT).

Threat analysis

The subset of ecoregions selected for each MHT in the NTA Conservation Program was the basis to identify the most prominent and critical issues affecting biodiversity conservation in these area. Situation Analysis diagrams were used to assist the groups in understanding the threats (stresses and sources), as well as key players related to the threats. Also, based on the knowledge team members around specific habitat types, most important threats occurring at scale were identified for the subset of ecoregions. This was done by discussion, probing and selecting the set of most important threats and using situation analyses as tools to understand stresses and sources of threats.

Information used was data in the form of maps and tables of ecoregions with highest AI, distribution of remaining ecosystems and location of protected areas. Groups worked around projected digital maps showing all the information together with the possibility of defining views at different scales, identifying the location of important threats and the fragmentation level of remaining ecosystems.

Conservation Strategies

Strategies were designed considering big area goals, such as 1.2 million hectares in some instances. The information to design conservation strategies was basically priority ecoregions, which in an analogous manner were like priority areas in an ecoregional plan and the known threats occurring in the selection of these priority ecoregions for each MHT. As secondary information, data such as the distribution of protected areas and the level of ecosystems fragmentation was also used during deliberations.

Products/outcomes

Priority ecoregions where the focal issues and strategies were developed based on the known threats occurring in them. The strategies are: (i) consolidation of national park systems and declaration of new areas in key ecoregions; (ii) promote conservation of critical areas in communal lands; (iii) design and promote the implementation of economic incentives and financial mechanisms for conservation of priority areas within private lands; and (iv) influencing the private sector to promote conservation in priority areas.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strength--Thinking on large-scale strategies

To respond to the challenge of conserving 10% of the world's biodiversity by year 2015, we must start to think at large scales and define strategies at that level. Northern Tropical Andes was the first effort in the career of many where strategies have been developed at this scale (Northern Tropical Andes: 146 million hectares). It was a good exercise in terms of making staff thinking at the scale of the 2015 Goal for South America, what it means, and the changes that must be implemented.

We must learn from site or area projects but must take this learning to other scales and be capable of designing a multiplying process. We need to shift our thinking from individual sites to large areas, multiple areas or mechanisms that will influence directly or indirectly the conservation of millions of hectares, such as public policies or direct influence over natural resources management practices of the private sector.

Weaknesses-- lack of information and time management

It was desirable to have specific information on the status of remaining ecosystems and the effectiveness of each protected area for supporting this kind of exercise and the decisions done. Also, it would be useful to have more socioeconomic information in each priority ecoregion, since it is fundamental to know around what issues strategies can be developed.

The process did not have enough time to better define threats at different scales. A thorough and detailed threat analysis is a key to better design strategies.
