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Examining the linkages between conservation initiatives, land-use decisions, and forest cover within protected areas: A study of the Community Baboon Sanctuary, Belize

The Maya Forest's natural and cultural resources are today threatened, to different degrees, in Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize by colonization, a lack of viable socio-economic alternatives to traditional shifting agriculture, and illegal logging. In an effort to protect these resources, while also providing for the needs of local populations, conservation initiatives are increasingly combining community economic development with conservation; the Community Baboon Sanctuary (CBS), Belize is one such example.

Established in 1985, the 4,800 hectare CBS protects one of the few black howler monkey populations (*Alouatta pigra*) in Belize. With support of a local non-governmental organization, the lands for this sanctuary were set aside by private landowners from the seven Creole communities situated along 33 kilometers of the Belize River. For 20 years the CBS communities have been participating in two conservation initiatives: nature-based tourism centered around the howler monkey, and a voluntary pledge system for private landowners to leave riparian forests intact and forested corridors that provide habitat connectivity for howler monkey populations. Little is known, however, about the linkages between landowner pledge compliance, nature-based tourism participation, land-use decisions, and forest cover. At both the individual landowner and community / landscape levels, this research takes a comparative approach to examine these relationships within the CBS communities.

The objectives of my research are to investigate three interlinked themes relevant to forest cover change and community-based conservation within protected areas: 1) the impact of conservation initiatives on land-use decisions, 2) land tenure and institutions for community-based resource management, and 3) spatial processes of changing land-use patterns.