



INTERNATIONAL
LAND CONSERVATION
NETWORK

NEWS FROM OUR PARTNERS

Private Land Conservation in Latin America

Hernán Mladinic, ILCN Regional Representative for Latin America

Latin America is the most biodiverse region in the world. It is home to 40% of the Earth's species, a quarter of all forests and a third of all fresh water. Its indisputable natural heritage contributes not only to the conservation and stability of the planet, but is also the main asset for the sustainability of the region and the well-being of its inhabitants. Therefore, conservation not only makes sense to protect the ecosystems and species with which we share the broad community of life, but because their destiny is inextricably linked to ours. This vital interrelation cannot be better reflected than in the origins of the global Covid-19 pandemic, when ecological limits are exceeded and wildlife is abused. According to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the health emergency caused by the corona virus has not only meant the largest contraction in world GDP since 1946, but the worst economic, social and productive crisis that Latin America has experienced in the last 120 years, and in a 7.7% drop in regional GDP. But not only that. If the health, social and inequality indicators are also added and compared, Latin America is the worst hit region in the emerging world, concentrating, with only 8% of the world's population, 28% of global deaths from COVID.

In this difficult, but challenging scenario, land conservation retakes its key importance as a tool for the protection and restoration of ecosystems, the main containment barrier and prevention of future epidemics, reaffirming our conviction that a healthy planet is the main guarantee of a healthy society and a viable economy. Until recently, land conservation efforts in the region have historically been linked to the work that the States have carried out through the implementation of the National Systems of Protected Areas, through National Parks or Reserves. In the last 10 to 20 years in Latin America, different private or voluntary conservation initiatives have joined this effort, through the commitment of private citizens, non-profit organizations, foundations, organized communities, companies or educational organizations, following a tradition deeply rooted in the Anglo-Saxon world, in the form of land trusts or conservation easements. Although States maintain, and correspond to them, a central role in conservation, currently, either due to lack of resources, political priority or the practical impossibility of incorporating large extensions into national systems of protected areas, private initiatives are increasingly contributing to national conservation goals. Although they are, in the vast majority of cases, small areas, they are located in critical and strategic spots to expand the representation of ecosystems, the preservation of endangered species or to guarantee biodiversity corridors. The close work with communities, which assume a leading role in their management and protection, is usually a recurring characteristic, incorporating sustainable economic activities such as nature tourism, scientific volunteer programs and different forms of agriculture or organic production.

However, the state of the art and penetration of voluntary conservation in Latin America varies greatly from one country to another. Not all of them have networks or associations to facilitate or strengthen their organization and affectivity; in most cases the sources of financing are scarce, which encourages informality; the regulatory framework is insufficient, and there is not always an official recognition or

category of private conservation; conservation standards are very disparate, making one reserve incomparable to another, and they do not offer guarantees of effective protection in perpetuity. This precariousness and diversity of realities, nowadays, does not allow to know for sure, the number and total size of private reserves in the region, and their relative weight, in the same way that we know the situation of the protected areas owned and managed by the states, an issue that we want to address in our work.

Certainly, private conservation is sometimes a lonely and frustrating activity, due to the number of institutional barriers and the lack of necessary support. The ILCN, therefore, wants to facilitate and strengthen this work, by building a highly effective, reliable and connected global network. We strive to harness and share the accumulated experience of the community to successfully promote and enhance the conservation of private and civic lands around the world. As the saying goes: *if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together.*

For greater effectiveness and connection with the particularities of each geographic reality, the ILCN decided in September 2020 to appoint regional representatives. Hernán Mladinic, former Executive Director of Tompkins Conservation in Chile, with extensive experience in the conservation and creation of national parks, will serve as representative for Latin America (covering Mexico, Central and South America) with the immediate objective of identifying and inviting to participate all organizations in the region that are developing private conservation initiatives and want to join this collaborative effort.

So far, we have established contacts and carry out interviews with practitioners and organizations from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Guatemala, with an extraordinary positive response and much enthusiasm for the work that we can accomplish together.