

DEVELOPMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS: AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION,
AND POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION IN THE LA AMISTAD PACIFIC
CONSERVATION AREA OF COSTA RICA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the possibilities for sustainable development at the interface of natural resource management, conservation, and agriculture in the La Amistad Pacific Conservation Area (ACLAP) in Costa Rica. I use ethnographic methods and archival research to develop a description of the history of regional development, the agricultural economy, and conservation across ACLAP. I draw on participant observation and interviews with farmers and members of community organizations to explore local perceptions of La Amistad International Park and the relationships between area residents and natural resource managers. I also use these data to assess the future of agriculture and the potential of community organizations partnering with larger national and transnational development agencies in working towards sustainable development of the region.

In general, residents across the study location have a favorable view of the La Amistad International Park. Despite this positive view of the park, however, I also find important differences in local development histories, agricultural production systems, and relationships between communities and natural resource managers. The experiences of local development associations and other community organizations also varied by place, as did local agricultural production systems. Collaborations between community organizations and national government agencies, however, tended to be challenged by a lack of trust and understanding, and the success of interventions of development agencies across the region has been limited. Future efforts towards sustainable development of the region should take into account the local differences identified and address the concerns of farmers related to soil and water quality.