

Before Corcovado: early conservation initiatives on the Osa Peninsula

Antes del Corcovado: primeras iniciativas pro-conservación en la Península de Osa

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Abstract: The Osa's modern history is replete with initiatives promoting conservation and thoughtful use of the area's rich biodiversity and natural resources, reflecting and sometimes leading wider conservation and development trends. While many Osa conservation-related issues including questions of power and authority remain unsatisfactorily resolved, since Corcovado National Park's 1977 consolidation these activities have all shared a geographical and conceptual context inclusive of the park, with some certitude of Corcovado as a common good. Contrasting the conservation orientations and outcomes of three pre-park initiatives, an attempted integrated forestry industry (1961-1972), a bid for a private science research reserve (1969-1970), and the 'Cuenca del Corcovado' campaign (1972-1975) should help us reflect on policies and practice in the post-Corcovado conservation matrix.

Key words: Osa Peninsula, Cuenca del Corcovado, conservation history, Corcovado National Park, tropical forestry, tropical field science, field stations, Corcovado Basin.

Resumen: La historia moderna de la Osa está repleta de iniciativas para promover la conservación y el uso medido de la amplia biodiversidad y recursos naturales de la Península. Estas reflejan, y en algunas ocasiones han inspirado, tendencias generales de conservación y de desarrollo. Aunque muchos asuntos relacionados con la conservación en la Osa, como cuestiones de poder y autoridad, no han encontrado aún soluciones satisfactorias, desde la consolidación en 1977 del Parque Nacional Corcovado todas estas actividades pro-conservación han compartido un marco geográfico y conceptual que lo ha incluido, así como cierto entendimiento de Corcovado como un bien común. El comparar las orientaciones conservacionistas y los resultados de tres iniciativas de la época pre-parque – un intento de industria forestal integrada (1961-1972), una propuesta para una reserva científica privada (1969-1970) y la campaña por la Cuenca del Corcovado (1972-1975), nos ayudará a reflexionar sobre las políticas y la práctica en la matriz de conservación post-Corcovado.

Palabras clave: Península de Osa, Cuenca del Corcovado, historia de conservación, Parque Nacional Corcovado, silvicultura tropical, estaciones del campo.

Introduction

Since the late 1970s the Osa Peninsula's history has been replete with government, non-governmental (NGO) and local community initiatives intended to promote conservation and thoughtful use of the area's rich biodiversity and natural resources. These projects and programs have reflected and sometimes led wider philosophical trends regarding natural resources conser-

vation and development. Activities entailed have included building buffer zones and biological corridors, providing citizens or park guards with environmental capacity-building, conducting organized 'parataxonomist' species surveys, mapping and rationalizing land titling processes, devising municipal recycling and clean water systems, and centralizing/decentralizing natural resources administration. Many such activities are discussed elsewhere in this volume. As several essays in this collection also attest, many conservation-related issues in the Osa and Pacifico Sur remain unresolved or unsatisfactorily resolved, including questions about who is vested in the power, authority, and advantages associated with particular conservation efforts. Still, one factor does uniformly characterize all these conservation-ori-

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ented projects and programs. Whether or not each endeavor has been directly associated with Corcovado National Park, all have shared in a conviction of the park's continued existence as a common good. In other words, since Corcovado's initial consolidation in 1977, any Osa conservation-related activity has been conceived and enacted in a geographical and conceptual context inclusive of this formidable conservation reality.

This essay considers the first conservation-oriented initiatives on the Osa Peninsula, each dating to the 1960s and early 1970s. Historically related but with distinct ambitions, all three endeavors were contemplated and sought, and one achieved, despite the inexistence of any prior Osa land-use conservation philosophy or physical conservation entity (such as Corcovado). In the first effort, from 1961-1972, a professional forester working for Osa Productos Forestales (OPF), tried to create an integrated Osa forestry operation. In the second, from 1969-1970, the Organization for Tropical Studies actively explored whether it might create its own private research reserve around Rincón de Osa. The third initiative was the 'Cuenca del Corcovado' campaign, which precipitated Corcovado National Park's initial 1975 creation. Exploring the motivations, accomplishments, and pitfalls of these early efforts tells us something about the nature of their respective 'conservation' orientations and constituencies. This in turn should help readers reflect on effects each of these pre-Corcovado initiatives may have had on the Osa's subsequent post-Corcovado conservation matrix.

Osa Productos Forestales and Integrated Forestry

Properly managed forests, which are protected against indiscriminate felling and burning, can be exploited indefinitely. Unfortunately, in many parts of Costa Rica. . . the forest stands are being destroyed just as rapidly as people can get to them. . . felled for cash crops of rice or corn worth only a fraction of the market price of the lumber destroyed. . . This is living on capital, which no modern population can afford to do.

Paul ALLEN, The Rain Forests of Golfo Dulce, 1956, 3.

In heavily forested and sparsely populated Costa Rica, only a few conservation-oriented regulations existed by the 19th century. National policy generally promoted clearing and settlement to strengthen political and economic security (CHRISTEN 1994, EVANS 1999, SOLURI 2005). The Osa Peninsula, a remote Zona Sur outpost, attracted no conservationist attention, and its homesteaders had little reason to expect their small clearings or larder-oriented hunting to deplete the peninsula's resources (LEWIS 1982-1983, GARCÍA 1988, FRANCESCHI-

BARRAZA 2007). Few naturalists had seen the Osa, though Swiss émigré Henry Pittier's 1890s stopover during scientific expeditions with Costa Rican colleague Adolfo Tonduz faintly signaled that even the Osa could someday become a territory of research or agroexport interest, in a political climate whose new 'modernizing' liberal government was welcoming to science, education, and entrepreneurial commerce (ALLEN 1956, CONEJO 1975, GÓMEZ & SAVAGE 1983, EAKIN 1999, DÍAZ-BOLAÑOS, this volume).

Through the 1950s, the Osa's wildlands were little hampered by commerce and nearly unattended by science (but see DÍAZ-BOLAÑOS, and WEBER, this volume, on the 1930 expedition). Had the Osa's soil, drainage, and transport conditions met United Fruit Company's industrial requisites, much of it might have become part of United Fruit's massive new 1940s Zona Sur operations (VAUGHAN 1981, CLARE 2005, STEPHENS, this volume). Instead, the Osa properties it had acquired in the 1920s-1930s eventually ended with U.S. buyers who in 1959 set up 'Osa Productos Forestales' (CHRISTEN 1994). The new company's 47,513 hectare (117,357 acre) holdings girdled the northern Peninsula from the Golfo Dulce to the Pacific coastal plains, surrounding a 13,462 hectare (33,251 acre) state inholding, both nearly all forested or in other natural vegetation, though a 1963 survey found 83 existing homesteads on land titled to Osa Forestal (VAUGHAN 1981, CHRISTEN 1994).

The company's principal owners were the Pritzker family of Chicago, and Wilford Gonyea, of Oregon's Timber Products Company. The Pritzgers also owned half of Gonyea's company, and were building a real-estate empire that includes Hyatt Hotels. Alvin Wright, a Yale School of Forestry graduate, became Osa Forestal's manager in 1961 (J. ZETTERGREN, pers. comm. 1993, CHRISTEN 1994). With high expectations, Wright envisioned the first appreciably conservation-minded Osa natural resources project. He believed he could create and successfully run the first tropical integrated forestry industry in Latin America (HOLDRIDGE & TOSI 1991, CHRISTEN 1994). After a comprehensive forest inventory, the timber property would be divided into forty lots of 1,000 hectares each. Each year one lot would see selective harvesting of trees of a certain diameter, followed by selective planting with commercial hardwood species. Forty years later the lot would rotate back into harvest ('La Nación' 29 Mar. 1973; CHRISTEN 1994).

Wright hoped to ensure maximum economic returns through vertical integration, with waste-free processing at a Rincón plywood plant. Plywood was in very great demand, but U.S. old-growth hardwood timber was nearly gone (STEEN 1992). The 'mixed stands' of Latin America's tropical forests contained the softwood and

hardwood species plywood required. Impediments to its extraction included lack of infrastructure and the inefficiencies faced because high-diversity mixed stands necessarily contain few individuals of a given species. Wright (and others; see ALLEN 1956) believed vertical integration, i.e. carrying out several phases of production right on the Osa, could make this diversity an asset. So, Osa Forestal would grow and harvest the Osa trees, then also mill and process the timber right on the Osa. Plywood plants adjacent to tropical forests could maximize effective use of this mixed species composition, by processing corestock and cabinetwoods together onsite. Wright's integration would also include arrangements for transport, with the factory's Golfo Dulce dock allowing for shipping directly from the Osa to markets worldwide (ALLEN 1956, STEEN 1992, CHRISTEN 1994).

Wright's employers held less idealistic aims. They would have been content with a 'cut-and-run' operation, quick log sales followed by resale of the property plus its improvements – roads, airstrip, buildings – to realize capital gains (HOLDRIDGE & TOSI 1991, CHRISTEN 1994). Still, in 1962 the owners expanded Wright's powers as manager and he moved forward with the project. To them it was an acceptable risk – at first – because the company's fixed monthly investment budget, for initial setup and operating costs, was money they could write off from U.S. income taxes. The Pritzgers typically gave great authority to local management, intervening only if a company foundered. Wright was expected eventually to make the operation self-financing (VAUGHAN 1981, HOLDRIDGE & TOSI 1991, CHRISTEN 1994).

Wright's plan had a good start. He hired fellow forester Leslie Holdridge, co-founder of the new San José-based Tropical Science Center (TSC), to conduct a timber inventory. Despite the impediments – steep hills, no roads, much rain – this market assessment of timber tree species, volume, and quality confirmed the forest's potential for mixed soft and hardwood harvests (HOLDRIDGE & TOSI 1991, CHRISTEN 1994). But Wright foundered on competition for control of the Osa's timber resources, which were his commodity basis. Osa Forestal had legal title and state authorization, but untitled settlers were felling and burning for agriculture and ranching. This 'living on capital' (ALLEN 1956) precluded controlled timber harvest. Wright tried imposing restrictive rental contracts, and for years sought to swap populated lands for state-held forested areas. Instead, settlers, with support from the developing agrarian reform movement, resisted rental controls, new settlers slowly continued arriving, and no swap happened. Wright could negotiate no solution affording him total commodity protection. Despite much effort, he also failed to gain permission to lease an appropriate waterfront lot for his plywood plant and dock. By 1966 Wright's integrated tim-

ber project was hopelessly stalled. He decided to postpone forestry work and then sought to practice large-scale agriculture to protect Osa Forestal against increasing land invasion pressures while building capital that would someday allow the company's return to forestry. Even these agriculture projects did not progress very far. Then, in mid-1972, while still recovering from a December 1971 auto accident, Wright found his job was usurped by a con-artist, Donald Allen, who saw an easy mark in the beleaguered company (CHRISTEN 1994).

How conservation-oriented were Alvin Wright's integrated tropical forestry plans? In Osa forest history terms, they fall somewhere short of halfway between United Fruit, a high-chemical-input industry seemingly devoid of a conservation ethic that routinely felled large primary forests to convert them into extensive monocrop plantations, and the regime represented by the institution of Corcovado National Park (see also UGALDE, this volume), with its mandated primacy of protecting intact the ecological and environmental values of that unit's highly diverse natural flora, fauna, and ecosystems. Wright was a forester, not an ecologist. His conservation was forestry-oriented, and he may never have thought of it as 'conservation.' It was about rational exploitation. Wright envisioned utilizing a selected subset of the Osa's natural resources, timber trees, as the commodity basis for a particular business enterprise. He would manage the forests for steady timber yield, introducing commercial species – perhaps native (like cedro amargo (*Cedrela odorata*) and cedro macho (*Carapa guianensis*)), and perhaps not – to skew the mix in his favor. He would seek to maintain forest structure integrity so the trees would still grow well in mixed soft- and hardwood stands ('La Nación' 29 Mar. 1973; CHRISTEN 1994).

Wright's blueprint would maintain trees and forests but only incidentally conserve ecosystems. Even with selective harvesting, Wright's logging roads and mechanical timber extraction would cause extensive ecosystem damage. His proposed plywood plant, commendable for benefiting the local jobs outlook, would have caused significant, probably irreversible damage to the complex and fragile Golfo Dulce marine ecosystem, as would the cargo ships (for a comparable case, see van den HOMBERGH 1999, and van den HOMBERGH, this volume). Wright thought placer gold mining compatible with integrated forestry, though artesanal mining often greatly harms river banks and associated ecosystems (JANZEN et al. 1985, CHRISTEN 1994). He registered little concern about illegal poaching of mammals or reptiles on Osa Forestal property. They might have been valuable for diversity, but poaching them did not impinge upon Wright's timber trees (VAUGHAN 1981).

Yet Wright's projected time frame resembled that of an ecosystem-oriented conservation ethic, implying certain ecological similarities between Wright's plans and ecological conservation projects. His crop came in over years and decades, similar to the time span of self-regulating ecosystems, not in weeks, like a single corn or rice crop. If successful, the company would harvest the same volume and quality of valuable tropical wood in 2268 as in 2068 and 1968, grown in an approximately natural forest with a mix of hardwood and softwood species. This contrasts with the ecologically impoverished non-native monocrop pine or eucalyptus plantations characterizing much of tropical forestry today (BROWN 2000). With time, Wright might even have focused more on elements of forest ecosystem management, such as the importance of mammals in hardwood seed dispersal. Holdridge kept him apprised of ecological research findings, and Wright also sometimes consulted local forest experts as sources of knowledge on native species (SÁNCHEZ 1991, CHRISTEN 1994).

Wright's near-ecological time frame disadvantaged his negotiations with other Osa stakeholders. He defied the prevailing land use ethic, that rapid clearing always equaled improvement. In turn untitled settlers and politicians took Wright's 'landhoarding' as grounds for censure. Unlike some ecologists of his era, who tended not to acknowledge human agency in any ecological process, Wright did not pretend the settlers didn't exist; he just felt sure his integrated forestry couldn't exist alongside them. This company-settler impasse effectively halted all Osa Forestal's development activities and hindered expansion of these new Osa settlements through the 1960s (CHRISTEN 1994).

These events sowed mistrust and hostility, bad feelings echoed and magnified in even more extreme land use conflicts between Osa Forestal and settlers after Wright's departure. Echoes of this antipathy have resonated much later, e.g. with the community-organizing and development project, BOSCOA, and the Ston Forestal controversy (see HITZ 1994, van den HOMBERGH 1999). Retrospectively we may argue Wright should have been more transparent and inclusive of community interests, but it is hard to see how he might have effected such outreach in his own times and circumstances. The gap between the agrarian reform imperative and any other land use, and the few outlets settlers had for increasing their own power both worked against rapprochement. So did Wright's background, training, and even his 'idealism.' Useful for someone actually managing an integrated forestry operation, these were not enough in the adverse context Wright faced.

Alvin Wright's most salient conservation outcome was facilitating the introduction of many scientists to the Osa's extraordinary forests. Effectively, Wright was

the first sponsor of long-term Osa botanical and ecological research. In 1962, when he hired Les Holdridge, Wright also invited Holdridge and TSC co-founder Joseph Tosi to rent a few hectares for a biological field station. Until 1973 the modest wooden structure was an extremely active training center and research base for North American, European, and Latin American graduate students and biologists. Most were directly associated either with TSC or with a new U.S.-based field science training consortium, Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) (HOLDRIDGE & TOSI 1991; CHRISTEN 1994).

During the 1960s, participants in research and in training courses came to value the Osa's wildlife, botanical, and ecosystem diversity, both the towering Rincón forests and the diverse interior northwest ecosystems. By the late 1960s, observing the timber/settlement impasse, and aware of incipient land use changes at Rincón, on the Osa, and in tropical forests worldwide, many individuals and institutions began seeking ways to develop a more stable and effective Osa science and conservation presence. Two contrasting segments of this complex story of conservation explorations and initiatives were a projected OTS private reserve, and the Cuenca del Corcovado campaign.

Río Riyito Watershed – Seeking a Private Reserve for OTS

*If I read all the signals correctly we should
be moving rapidly and not wait for the on-the-ground
survey of the Osa.*

Mildred MATHIAS (December 1969)

The Organization for Tropical Studies was founded in 1963 as a consortium of six United States universities and the University of Costa Rica, to provide critically needed opportunities in tropical biology research and training, especially for North American students. Politically stable and biologically rich Costa Rica was quickly selected as OTS's principal field training venue. In 1964 OTS started offering field courses, including tropical forestry, population ecology, and its flagship 'Tropical Biology: An Ecological Approach,' also called just 'Fundamentals.' OTS had then no field stations of its own. With Les Holdridge and Joe Tosi party to the deliberations over OTS creation, almost inevitably the intact Rincón forest quickly became a principal course venue (GÓMEZ & SAVAGE 1983, STONE 1988, G. HARTSHORN, pers. comm. 1994, CHRISTEN 1994).

While few Rincón scientists integrated the human component into their research or training courses, by the late 1960s many knew their worksites were threatened by human activities. Conservation was fast becoming a local issue. Most of Central America's Pacific slope

forests and north Atlantic slope tropical wet forests had been cleared. The settler influx was gaining force on the Osa, spurred by a national population explosion coupled with an incipient shortage of unclaimed land. Rincón scientists began realizing only vigorous conservation efforts might protect the Osa species and ecosystem diversity that underpinned their ecological field science (FEARNSIDE 1972, CHRISTEN 1994).

First to offer a concerted response was OTS, which by 1969 had 25 member institutions. OTS was trying to acquire several properties throughout Costa Rica to match its emerging focus on long-term comparative ecological studies of tropical ecosystems. Also, many OTS board members were unhappy with Rincón's cramped conditions and their dependence on TSC for field station access. By late 1969, OTS president Mildred Mathias, executive director Jack T. Spencer, and OTS board members corresponded about the ideal OTS Osa station. To facilitate both training and long-term ecological study, they wanted Rincón, with its airstrip and infrastructure, plus a modest-sized but still pristine adjacent watershed embracing the Río Riyito and Laguna Chocuaco. They believed this watershed's moderate size, hilliness, and Rincón proximity would facilitate physical exclusion of other land use interests, providing a secure landholding presumably not implicated in present or potential settler disputes (GÓMEZ & SAVAGE 1983, HOLDRIDGE & TOSI 1991, PIERCE 1992, MATHIAS 1992, CHRISTEN 1994).

Budget-strapped OTS began inquiring about U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that might finance this purchase. Huey Johnson at the Western Regional Office of The Nature Conservancy (WRO-TNC), who knew Mathias, offered to orchestrate an 'insider' approach, talking Osa Forestal into a tax-deductible land gift or 'bargain sale' to TNC, which could presumably later hand it over to some version of OTS ownership or management control. In April 1970, Osa Forestal received and rejected this overture, emphasizing its own development plans. Alvin Wright was then still able to convince his employers that further company activities – including his new 'short cycle' forestry plan, were better than a tax write-off partial buyout stripping the company of Rincón infrastructure and top-quality forest land (CHRISTEN 1994).

What did OTS want from this initiative, what were its conservation elements, and what ethic(s) did it reflect? To some extent this was indeed a bid for conservation. It was certainly presented as such by WRO-TNC, which otherwise had little basis for involvement since TNC as an organization is dedicated to land resource conservation. Yet for WRO-TNC to emphasize conservation value as the root of its own interest in this land

was somewhat disingenuous, since Johnson was really acting as a proxy for OTS. For its part, reminiscent of Wright's forestry, OTS's conservation motivation was inherently enterprise-oriented, since its assets were predicated on the primacy of environmental preservation. OTS wanted to acquire quickly some authentic and accessible Osa wilderness area that could be kept intact from development. Ecological significance meant something, but a physical layout providing reasonable wilderness next to a good airstrip meant even more. Of course, at that time, virtually any Osa terrain arguably would have provided high conservation and biodiversity value. Still, the deciding element in this case really was infrastructure, not optimal conservation value; OTS needed existing infrastructure so it could continue to provide training and research in a conservation setting. This is why OTS did not aim its initial 'conservation' interest at the unique ecological riches of the northwest Osa. They saw that area as too fraught, too distant, and devoid of infrastructure (CHRISTEN 1994).

Information-gathering generally is integral to conservation, providing ecological details supporting indefinite protection of particular resources. In this instance, OTS executives hoped to complete an 'ecological appraisal,' a process (like Wright's timber surveys but wider in scope) oriented to gathering and evaluating ecological data and to assessing prospects for the area's intact survival over long time horizons. Their watershed focus reflected these interests, since protecting a complete watershed instead of a randomly sited tract helps ensure long-term protection of component ecosystems. Various OTS board members urged commissioning and carefully evaluating aerial and surface surveys of the watershed before deciding whether to pursue a purchase interest. But others discounted the importance of charting these details first. In December 1969, based on her reading of the signals, Mathias recommended not waiting for ecological data from an on-the-ground survey but moving rapidly to the real-estate bid, which apparently is what they did in April 1970. The signals Mathias was intercepting, evidently of the real-estate variety, seemed to indicate that Osa Forestal was ready to sell and nobody else was yet prepared to buy. Interestingly, such a sale would have covered only part of the watershed, as the other part still belonged to the Costa Rican state. OTS indicated hopes of leasing the other portion from the government, but it appears they would have been content even with the partial watershed (CHRISTEN 1994).

Quite naturally for a young and rapidly growing institution, the purchase OTS pursued reflected its institutional objectives as much as 'conservationist' concerns about disappearing natural resources. But this OTS bid for a rapid and real-estate transaction also reflected, at best, an obdurate naiveté. OTS hoped some-

how it could become a significant international landholder through a relatively simple real-estate transaction, and thence, by carefully marking its boundaries, remain essentially untouched by the contemporary social, political and economic realities of Osa land-use issues, including agrarian reform, rising anti-U.S. sentiment, and concurrent conservation efforts. The OTS board members did discuss being in close contact with some institutions regarding this landholding prospect, including departments in its own member organization, University of Costa Rica, but seemed to have little to no interest in keeping TSC apprised of it, despite shared conservation interests and shared concern with Rincón facilities (HOLDRIDGE & TOSI 1991, CHRISTEN 1994).

Had Osa Forestal ever agreed to the deal, the local TNC office would have been obliged to involve its Washington, DC headquarters office, which would then carefully assess the project's conservation significance and legitimacy. When Robert Jenkins of TNC's headquarters office did weigh in, in November 1970, he cautioned OTS that achieving an Osa conservation arrangement could not be restricted to addressing only the consortium's own growth interests. Jenkins, an OTS alumnus with Osa experience, believed in the value of conserving some of the Peninsula's ecological wealth, but in doing so through regular channels. Jenkins noted that TNC's national office didn't even yet have an Osa file. Huey Johnson had treated this bid as an opportunity for personal negotiation via an acquaintance network. While Jenkins doubtless recognized the usefulness of such networks, he was acutely sensitive to the need for transparency in addressing practical and political issues facing a U.S. based conservation organization (his own) that was considering starting a 'Latin American program' with an Osa initiative (R. JENKINS, pers. comm. 1994, CHRISTEN 1994). As he wrote Mathias that November, 'I, of course, am keenly interested in the preservation of Latin American lands and there are still so many undisturbed areas which could be preserved, perhaps quite cheaply. Of course, there are the political difficulties and a lot of thought will have to be given to the exact procedures appropriate to a Latin American program. I guess we had better get started on this while there is still something left to save' (CHRISTEN 1994).

The question of whether OTS was mainly naïve or perhaps also somewhat callous becomes more problematic in light of certain August 1972 events. Only days after Donald Allen took over as Osa Forestal manager amidst great apprehension in Osa science circles about his unsavory character and dubious intentions, OTS and Allen signed a 'letter of agreement' for an Osa Forestal lease of Rincón land to OTS so the consortium could build its own scientific station, effectively excluding TSC from both researcher activity and course revenue. When OTS

couldn't raise a construction budget by January 1973 the agreement fell through. Allen then proceeded to sequester all the training proceeds before closing down the TSC station forever in mid-1973; OTS was shown no further favor by this mis-manager who eventually skipped over the Panama border with all the cash he could loot from the Osa Forestal till (Christen 1994). So, perhaps during these early years OTS suffered in equal measure from disproportionate self-interest and naiveté when it came to negotiations about Osa science infrastructure, science practice, and conservation.

La Cuenca del Corcovado: Coalition-building for Public Conservation

... it covers all the major Osa ecosystems, it's still in one piece, and it's a definable, defendable piece of real estate that, for all practical purposes, would seem to be protectable for a very long time, regardless of other changes that may take place on the peninsula.

Jack EWEL (March 1973)

By the early 1970s, Rincón's diverse science constituency was debating both which Osa areas most urgently merited conservation and which preservation approaches offered the best chances of success in the Osa's volatile sociopolitical circumstances. OTS's Rincón fixation was mostly an outlier in these deliberations. Most station veterans, government administrators, and international allies focused on iterations of the enormous ambition of securing protection for some portion of the Osa's northwestern sector, a 'wildlife paradise' offering almost guaranteed sightings of jaguar, tapir, or some other impressive creature (GÓMEZ 1991). The Osa's developing conservation constituency was engrossed by the near-absence of human impact in this sector. They were equally aware that the settler/forestry company impasse centered on the future disposition of this sector could shift at any time, with irreversible development immediately to follow.

In mid-1973, longtime Rincón researcher Jack Ewel and his University of Florida, Gainesville colleagues privately printed and widely distributed a bilingual booklet, 'The Corcovado Basin/La Cuenca del Corcovado'. Here and in accompanying correspondence they argued -persuasively – for protecting this entire region, the complete Corcovado Basin watershed. This 29,000 hectare territory on the Osa's northwest Pacific slope encompassed several habitats and ecosystems, including the Laguna Corcovado, freshwater and palm forest wetlands, bottomland and upland rainforests, estuaries, and sandy and rocky beaches and shoreline. In the mid-1960s Joe Tosi first suggested this as the most logical Osa park or research reserve, because while it was of relatively modest size (compared with, for example, the

Amazon) its 'definable' and 'defensible' natural boundaries encompassed a plenitude of habitats and animal species, especially the large mammals he knew would soon become scarce. Acknowledging that saving the whole Cuenca was much more challenging than saving only a segment, the booklet's authors nonetheless argued that only the whole thing could offer ecological integrity and hence potential conservation longevity. They also contended this could succeed only as a national park or biological reserve enhancing the national patrimony, not as a foreign/private preserve. Hugely expensive to acquire for a park, they emphasized it could be created only with international monetary assistance, as befit a project offering certain benefits to humanity worldwide. Ewel's group's proposal became the working blueprint for Corcovado's creation. Mario Boza and Alvaro Ugalde, chiefs of Costa Rica's young and underfinanced Park Service, had long been interested in an Osa component. They became convinced of the Corcovado Basin imperative, based on its scientific and conservation merits, despite its being too big, too costly, and its ownership status too complex for rational consideration (EWEL et al. 1973, EWEL 1991, UGALDE, this volume, CHRISTEN 1994).

During 1974-1975, despite many setbacks and through innumerable twists and turns, Boza, Ugalde, Tosi, Ewel, and many others in Costa Rican and US academic and government circles persistently strategized and lobbied for a Corcovado reserve. They backed up their arguments with extensive, detailed data collected in on-site ecological reconnoitering (TOSI 1975). Corcovado was the first Costa Rican park justified on the basis of ecological and scientific merits, without defined cultural or recreational attributes. Yet, in a key move, in light of the political and economic vulnerability of this intense parkmaking effort its leaders also chose to forgo what they judged potentially damaging foreign-backed offers to create a Corcovado basin research station while the park's own establishment was still in doubt. They set aside these offers even though Rincón station was no longer viable, deliberately refusing to privilege science over the purely conservationist land-preservation effort (CHRISTEN 1994).

In October 1975, the 35,000 hectare Park was created by Presidential decree, facilitated by an Osa Forestal land exchange and the promise of emergency start-up funds from U.S.-based international conservation NGOs (including TNC's Washington, DC office) to supplement Costa Rican government monies (CHRISTEN 1994). Further intensive lobbying led by Costa Rican scientists rallied the executive branch to direct key government agencies to commence the hard work of actual park consolidation in January 1976, at the dry season's outset and just before an anticipated wave of settler forest-clearing

would have altered its landscape dramatically. Guard stations were put in place and regular patrols enacted (CHRISTEN 2006). By 1977, again with supplemental international funding, censusing, indemnifying, and relocating hundreds of settlers was completed (VAUGHAN 1981, CHRISTEN 1994). In a remarkably short time, Corcovado had become an authentic protected conservation area, exemplifying the actual if imperfect defensibility of its natural boundaries, an attribute continually tested and strained since then. Though scientists were allowed to start visiting the park towards the end of the consolidation period, actually getting any kind of scientific program(s) up and running inside the park took several more years, owing to several reasons, including the Park's budgetary and infrastructure priorities.

Alvin Wright's integrated forestry was a capitalized business plan for a company with land, personnel, and project expertise. The OTS private research reserve effort also represented a single institution pursuing its own development interests. Both moved along unilateral paths. Both projects might have offered some conservation benefits to the Osa, though in neither case was this the primary goal. Either one might even have succeeded in its own aims given somewhat different circumstances, but did not fare well in conditions that seem to have required coalition-building for success.

The Cuenca del Corcovado endeavor contrasted with these in several ways. It was a coalition of individuals representing diverse institutions, united around a well-articulated conservationist goal of sequestering a defined ecological unit of land for purposes they believed and asserted would benefit the public at large. Admittedly, the park's advocates chose not to engage the local public in dialogue about the park effort, though at the time they expressly recognized this public as a park constituency, and stated (to one another) their regret at not having sufficient time or resources for the kind of local outreach they believed could have been useful (CHRISTEN 1994). But, by way of counterbalance, the campaign also resolutely discarded any possible intermediate goals of creating a new Osa research field station for its members' own scientific purposes, though all hoped that in future, scientific research in the park would become a reality.

This was collaboration for a single goal – a gazetted public conservation park – that provided no direct business benefit for any one entity. The Cuenca campaign pursued this goal virtually without capital, personnel, or much rational expectation of success. Remarkably, throughout its turbulent history, Corcovado has consistently re-proven its 'protectability,' maintaining most of its ecological and conservation value and filling its promise as the basis for an embedded yet increasingly

dynamic conservation heritage that next will likely be called on to protect the Osa from the 'golf-coursing' tourism real-estate developments now predominating in so many Pacific coastal regions.

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