

Conservation Concession

Protecting forest ecosystems with payments for ecosystem services in Guyana

In southern Guyana, Conservation International (CI) leased a conservation concession to prevent logging, and to ensure the preservation of natural biodiversity and wildlife within the forest ecosystem.

Why is a Conservation Concession Necessary?

The conservation concession is located in a forested region alongside the Essequibo River, part of an ecosystem that forms a key section of the Guiana's Tropical Wilderness Corridor. In addition, the region serves as an important watershed for communities located downstream. Although the region does not face any immediate threats, there is speculation that development in neighboring Brazil will increase environmental pressures from loggers in the near future.



Essequibo River in Southern Guyana. Source: www.travelvantage.com/guyana.html

How does the Conservation Concession Work?

In 2002, CI hired Hardner & Gullison Associates, a private-sector firm, to design a conservation concession to be implemented in Guyana. The conservation concession follows the same legal model as a standard timber sales agreement, except that the land is held as a reserve rather than harvested for timber. A nonprofit NGO known as the Amazon Conservation Association is responsible for governing the agreement and monitoring the forest. The conservation concession covers 80,000 hectares, equal to 313 square miles. According to the terms of the agreement, CI will pay market rates to protect the land for 30 years. In the first year, CI will pay US\$200,000 to cover a number of start-up costs. These include US\$46,000 for a timber inventory and US\$30,000 for ranger training. In addition, CI has offered to pay US\$41,000 for government fees that the timber company would generally have had to pay for management rights. CI intends that the forestry department will use the money to regulate logging in timber concessions (Ellison, 2003).

What are the Social Benefits of the Conservation Concession?

The conservation concession is designed to benefit residents in the sixteen Amerindian communities near the forest. The equivalent of US\$10,000 per year is placed in a renewable "voluntary fund" that provides agricultural training and technical support for local residents. This fund is also designed to provide scholarships so that children in the Amerindian communities have the opportunity to attend University (Denny, 2004). In addition, the conservation concession provides a limited number of jobs for local residents as park rangers and boat men.

What are the Results from Conservation Concessions?

Four years after the conservation concession was first established in Guyana, CI reported that the project had proved to be a "sound economic investment" (conservation.org). Camera traps, set up in 2006, revealed that the abundance of animal life has increased throughout the reserve. In addition, the value of land around the reserve has increased as the region becomes more popular for ecotourism (Ibid).

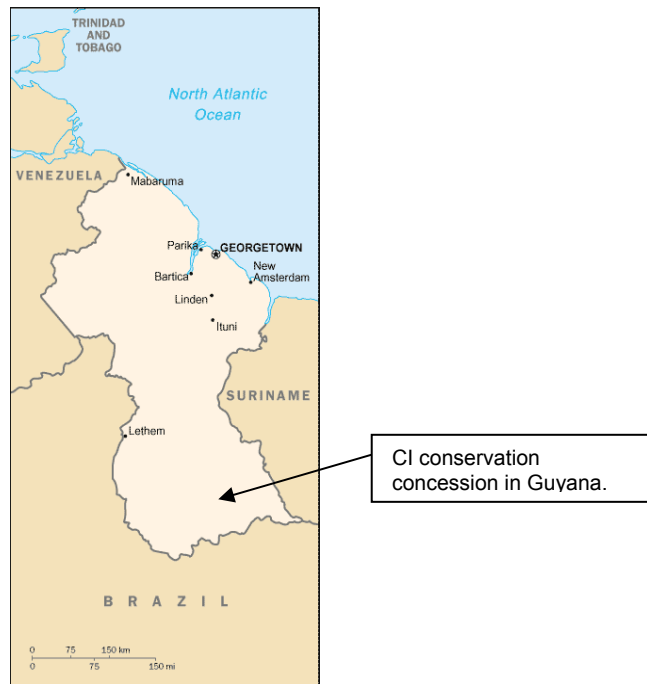
Why is the Conservation Concession Successful?

The success of the conservation concession has not occurred by chance. Guyana was one of the first countries to experiment with conservation concessions, and the location of this particular concession was specifically selected because of its defining characteristics. Primarily, the forest is relatively remote and sparsely populated. The closest village to the concession is Apoteri, located 50 miles away, with approximately 63 households. Other villages include Rewa, 70 miles away, and Crash Water, 100 miles away, with combined populations of about 350. In addition, the region was selected because there was

no competition for the bid on the land. CI was aware from previous experiences that it is sometimes impossible to compete with industries that are interested in extracting resources from the land. Although these characteristics are not essential for a conservation concession to be successful, they are useful and should be considered when choosing whether a conservation concession is an appropriate environmental management approach.

For Additional Information:

- Conservation International. (2002). "Guyana Establishes It's First Conservation Concession." *Conservation International Press Release*. Available at: http://www.conservation.org/xp/news/press_releases/2002/071802.xml
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- Ellison, Katherine, 2003. Renting Biodiversity: The Conservation Concessions Approach. *Conservation in Practice* 4 (4), 20–29.



This report was researched and written by Aimee Barnes, Matthew Ebright, Emily Gaskin and William Strain from the Master of Public Administration in Environmental Science and Policy program of the School for International and Public Affairs at Columbia University



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