

# Transboundary Protected Area Proposals Along the Southern Andes of Chile and Argentina: Status of Current Efforts

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**Abstract**—An evolving network of protected areas along the southern Andes of Chile and Argentina—the heart of Patagonia—are in various stages of evaluation and potential Transboundary Protected Area designations. This paper examines three such efforts. The first proposal is the North Andean-Patagonia Regional Eco-Corridor, which was the subject of a recent bilateral meeting between Argentine and Chilean officials to set a framework for pursuing international status of this 180-mile (300-km) long corridor. The second effort is based on a recent private land acquisition of a large ranch in Chile's 11<sup>th</sup> Region with plans to restore the area and create a "Patagonia National Park" that has the potential to be the impetus for a transboundary protected area. Finally, another private land acquisition provides the link to connect national parks in Chile and Argentina on Tierra del Fuego. Supporters are pursuing Biosphere Reserve status for this mountain range at the end of the world.

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## Introduction: Chilean and Argentine Perspective

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Since this is a paper about wilderness, I should forewarn readers that none of the areas presented are formally designated "Wilderness" by the national or regional governments. Of the two countries, only Chile has a category equivalent to Wilderness. However, this specific category from a 1984 law for the National System of Wild Protected Areas of the State (Law No 18.362) has never been used to designate such an area.

These areas are called *Reservas de Regiones Virgenes* or primordial (virgin) reserves. They are defined as areas where primitive natural conditions exist of flora, fauna and habitat with an absence of roads for motor vehicle traffic and closed to all commercial exploitation. The objective of this management category is to maintain these reserves as inviolable as feasible, with exception to scientific investigations authorized by Conaf (*Corporacion Nacional Forestal*, an agency responsible for both forestry issues and national parks) or for other purposes that are consistent with creating the reserve.

Although none of the protected areas addressed in this paper are legislatively designated wilderness, they cover

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an array of legal designations from national parks, national reserves, provincial parks, and nature sanctuaries to those owned by non-governmental organizations—both domestic and foreign. Currently, none of these areas are recognized by an international body as Transboundary Protected Areas, which are defined by the World Conservation Union's World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN/WCPA) as:

An area of land and/or sea that straddles one or more boundaries between states, sub-national units such as provinces and regions, autonomous areas and/or areas beyond the limits of national sovereignty or jurisdiction, whose constituent parts are especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed co-operatively through legal or other effective means (Sandwith and others 2001: 3).

Transboundary protected areas provide benefits that go beyond ecosystem concerns, such as encouraging friendship and reducing tension along border regions. In addition they provide these principal benefits (Hamilton and others 1996):

- Promoting international cooperation at different levels;
- Enhancing environmental protection across ecosystems;
- Facilitating more effective research;
- Bringing economic benefits to local and national economies; and
- Ensuring better cross-border control of problems such as fire, pests, poaching, marine pollution and smuggling.

In this particular case, the development of transboundary protected areas in the future could help prevent a repeat of the past. Between Chile and Argentina there is a long history of tension and rivalries, most recently in the late 1970s, when Argentina threatened war over the Beagle Channel claimed by Chile. The Beagle Channel, at the tip of South America, cuts between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans providing ship access to Ushuaia (Argentina) on the north bank and Puerto Williams (Chile) on the south bank. At stake was the possession of three islands (Picton, Lennox and Nueva) in the Beagle Channel that had been under contention since the early 1800s. The islands themselves were not so important, but by extension of the border around them they included fish and oil rights. In 1977, an international court ruled in favor of Chile for possession of the islands. Argentina disputed the decision and repeatedly violated Chilean air and maritime space. Bilateral negotiations had failed and in January 1978 Argentina declared the court's decision "fundamentally null."

By December of that year, Argentina sent a naval squadron to the Beagle Channel and Chile followed suit. Both prepared

for war. Pope John Paul II sent a personal message to the leaders of both countries, urging a peaceful solution. Eventually both countries accepted the Pope's mediation offer, although the tensions were not reduced until 1984, when both countries signed the "Treaty of Peace and Friendship." The final agreement was signed at the Vatican, giving the islands to Chile, but most maritime rights to Argentina.

Although this incident happened over 20 years ago, the results of that military build up are still evident in the form of minefields. In November 2000, Chilean military sources confirmed that land mines had been laid in seven different national parks. They also disclosed that nearly 250,000 mines in 293 minefields were still active throughout the country. They estimated the cost of clearing the minefields at U.S. \$300 million and the time to complete the process at ten years—if they had the funds to proceed.

As illustrated by this example, the need for transboundary co-operation obviously goes beyond the viability of protected areas, however for the purposes of this paper I'll concentrate on the ecological benefits of three likely candidates for Transboundary Protected Area status between Argentina and Chile.

## Three Transboundary Protected Area Efforts in Patagonia

### North Andean-Patagonia Regional Eco-Corridor

This effort for a transboundary protected area is an expansive corridor equaling the length of its name. The geographical area stretches over 180 miles (300 kms) north-south and averages 40 miles (70 kms) in width (fig. 1). The proposal includes the following protected areas in south central Chile and Argentina (areas are listed from north to south):

Chile	Argentina
Puyehue National Park	Lanin National Park
Vicente Perez Rosales National Park	Nahuel Huapi National Park
Hornopiren National Park	Rio Azul Protected Area
Pumalin Nature Sanctuary	Lago Puelo National Park
	Lago Epuyen Forest Reserve
	Cerro Pirque Provincial Park
	Rio Turbio Provincial Park
	Los Alerces National Park

What began in the early 1990s by local conservationists in Argentina as an idea to link protected areas in a contiguous corridor for protecting native forests, has led to a bi-national effort by government officials in both Chile and Argentina to create an official corridor. That impetus began with Project Lemu, which was founded by Argentine conservationist Lucas Chiappe to promote native forest protection at his home in the Epuyen Valley and north and south along the southern Andes (Keller 2001).

After attending an international conference in Missoula, Montana, organized by the Native Forest Network, Chiappe envisioned this Argentine corridor as a nucleus for his even more ambitious Gondwana Forest Sanctuary, which would encompass all the world's native forests south of the

40th parallel. This mega-vision began as an effort between Chiappe's Project Lemu and the Defenders of the Chilean Forest, a non-profit environmental group based in Santiago, Chile. Together, they concentrated on the first step of working to include Chile's Pumalin Park (which was declared a Nature Sanctuary in August 2005 by Chilean authorities) with Chile's Vicente Perez Rosales and Puyehue National Parks into the North Andean-Patagonia Regional Eco-Corridor.

Although government officials from both countries, such as Conaf (National Forestry Corporation) and APN (Argentine National Park Administration) staff had been reviewing the North Andean-Patagonia Regional Eco-Corridor proposal, it wasn't until May 31, 2005, that they held their first bilateral meeting. The resort town of San Carlos de Bariloche hosted the meeting with participants from the Provinces of Chubut, Rio Negro, APN, Chile's 10<sup>th</sup> Region and Conaf. They considered and discussed whether this eco-regional corridor could become a Biosphere Reserve. Previously, in February 2005, the President of APN, Hector Espina, announced the creation of the North Andean-Patagonia Regional Eco-Corridor for the Argentine side as a show of support for the bi-national effort.

Government officials from both countries are considering nominating the corridor as a Biosphere Reserve. Their objectives include transboundary conservation of the corridor's natural heritage, developing ecotourism activities and the sustainable development of goods and services for the well-being of local communities.

Currently, committees of APN and Conaf representatives are exchanging proposals and ideas to evaluate options and develop a strategy for the next steps in deciding how to nominate the Corridor as a Biosphere Reserve (Araya, personal communication, 2005). Under the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Man and the Biosphere Programme's Seville +5 Recommendations, countries participating in the establishment of a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (TBR) have the option of establishing a separate biosphere reserve in each country or a joint nomination for the whole area as a TBR (UNESCO 2000).

Although a common approach and timeline has not yet been established, it's encouraging that government officials are continuing efforts initiated by local conservation groups in order to formalize the vision of a protected area corridor along the Andes of northern Patagonia. It may seem like a small step, but considering the state of affairs between Chile and Argentina 20 years ago, and most recently when I worked in the region from 2000 to 2002, this is a substantial improvement for transboundary coordination. Just a few years ago, only once had the staff at APN and Conaf been invited to a joint meeting and that was at the park ranger level. In light of the growing popularity of visiting Patagonian protected areas and potential resource impacts, coordination in this bio-region will become even more important.

### Patagonia National Park Potential

The wind-swept, rugged landscape between two of Patagonia's largest lakes may set the stage in a future national park of the same name—Patagonia (fig. 1). This effort is the latest in a line of protected areas created by Doug Tompkins and his wife Kristine McDivitt Tompkins.



Figure 1—Three transboundary protected area efforts: Patagonia Eco-Corridor, Patagonia National Park, and Tierra del Fuego potential biosphere reserve.

As a cursory background, the Tompkins team has been active for over a decade in South American land protection efforts. They have been involved in or directly protected (through land acquisition) nearly 2,000 miles<sup>2</sup> (5,180 km<sup>2</sup>) of land in Chile and 1,130 miles<sup>2</sup> (2,927 km<sup>2</sup>) in Argentina (Rohter 2005). In total, those 3,130 miles<sup>2</sup> (8,106 km<sup>2</sup>) are nearly equal in size to Yellowstone National Park or three times the size of the State of Rhode Island. These protected areas are scattered across Chile and Argentina in nearly a dozen projects, including such high profile ones as Pumalin, Esteros del Ibera, Monte Leon, El Rincon and Volcano Corcovado.

The Tompkins' have achieved this remarkable legacy through a variety of home grown organizations, such as their umbrella non-profit, the Foundation for Deep Ecology (FDE) and off-shoots of the Conservation Land Trust and Conversation Patagonica (formerly The Patagonia Land Trust). As of late 2002, the two off-shoots were relocated under FDE management.

Both Tompkins are using their personal wealth to help underwrite this effort. Doug Tompkins accumulated his savings by starting *North Face*, a company that specializes in outdoor equipment and clothing. He sold that years ago to begin *Esprit de Corps* clothing and sold his share in the early 1990s. Kristine McDivitt Tompkins became wealthy in her own right as the former chief executive officer of *Patagonia* clothing company. They have lived in southern Chile surrounded by Pumalin Park since the mid-1990s (Keller 2000).

The cornerstone for this new Tompkins initiative is Estancia Valle Chacabuco purchased through Conservation Patagonica. The scenery of Valle Chacabuco has been compared to that of Grand Teton National Park. This project was launched in July 2004 with the objective of converting the 173,000-acre (70,000-ha) ranch into a premier protected area that would be donated to the national government and hopefully bestowed the title of Patagonia National Park. The ranch is bordered by two national reserves, Lake Jeinimeni (398,000 acres/161,100 ha) and Lake Cochrane (17,100 acres/6,920 ha). On the Argentine side of the Andes, currently no protected areas are adjacent to the proposed Patagonia National Park, however a large ranch of over 54,000 acres (21,850 ha) could be a viable addition to the proposed Patagonia National Park complex if current or future owners are willing to participate in the project—thus creating the potential for a transboundary protected area.

The area is well known as one of the last homes to the endangered Huemul, a medium-size Andean deer. It is also home to flamingos, guanacos, pumas and black neck swans. The Tompkins team anticipates restoration of the former Valle Chacabuco ranch will take seven to ten years before the site is ready for donation to Conaf. The ranch was in operation for 80 years running up to 80,000 sheep and currently supporting 22,000 sheep, which will be removed over the next three to five years (Morgado, personal communication, 2005). Re-wilding the area will include removal of mining roads, grassland restoration impacted by heavy grazing and adapting infrastructure for tourism purposes. In order to complete the work, project organizers will be encouraging financial support from various donors, including in-kind volunteer labor, in order to restore this landscape.

Although, this project is currently not on the path to become an official transboundary protected area, the potential over the long term to protect the bi-national landscape under a coordinated management scheme is worth the effort for this critically important habitat for threatened species recovery in the region.

## Tierra del Fuego Biosphere Reserve Concept

At the end of the world, on the far tip of South America, a large island known as Tierra del Fuego conjures up wild images in a surreal landscape of mountains and fire. However, upon first landfall by ferry from the north, one would think they were stranded in North Dakota sandblasted by a fierce wind. It's not until the southern edge of the island, where the Andes dive into the sea, that one sees the rugged, fiord landscape they envisioned—without the columns of fire, naturally.

It is here, along the Darwin Range of the far southern Andes, that a long-awaited idea is taking hold. A key land bridge was fully acquired in 2002 between a Chilean national park and Argentine national park through private conservation efforts. Now, this corridor will provide an unimpeded flow of wildlife between the following three contiguous protected areas:

- Padre Alberto de Agostini National Park in Chile (3.6 million acres/1.46 million ha)
- Tierra del Fuego National Park in Argentina (155,000 acres/63,000 ha)
- Yendegaia preserve in Chile (96,000 acres/39,000 ha)

Yendegaia, the critical link, was a former ranch that is now held by the Yendegaia Foundation, which is considering several options for the private preserve. One option is to donate Yendegaia to Conaf so the government can enlarge Agostini National Park. Another option being discussed is the development of a bi-national biological conservation zone, which would include both the adjacent Chilean and Argentine national parks. Yendegaia Foundation President, Adriana Hoffmann, former head of the Chilean Environment Ministry and one of Chile's foremost botanists, is promoting the biological conservation zone concept through declaration of the entire area as a biosphere reserve.

Most recently, local and regional government officials have visited Yendegaia and discussed ideas with the Foundation; however, no formal proposals have been submitted thus far. In the meantime, productive dialogue continues as the Foundation moves ahead slowly with their plans for Yendegaia itself.

These plans include raising funds that will help with the removal of all livestock fences and the cleanup, demolition, or rebuilding of some buildings at the old ranch center. A small visitor center, park warden house, stables, greenhouse, gardens, micro-hydro energy system, campgrounds, and signage are all contemplated in the forthcoming years.

Even though nomination of the zone as a biosphere reserve could be years away, if ever, already positive steps are being taken in recognizing the need for transboundary connectivity. One example at the human scale, which will facilitate research, is an agreement to open a land border

crossing here to allow people to legally pass between Chile and Argentina. Before this, the only legal means of passage on the southern half of Tierra del Fuego was by boat via a Beagle Channel crossing to Puerto Williams.

**“Kiru Kinka:” Goldman Sachs Raises the Corporate Standard in Tierra del Fuego.** On the largest island shared by Chile and Argentina, Tierra del Fuego, a new conservation project is underway (fig. 1). Even though the project is not transboundary in nature, it will provide the benefits of a large protected area to both sides of the border. In September 2004, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) accepted a donation of 680,000 acres (275,186 ha) on the Chilean side of the Island from Goldman Sachs investment bank. The area is just north of the Yendegaia preserve across Almirantazgo Sound and Lake Fagnano. The bank had acquired the land in 2003 as a package purchase of distressed assets. The prior owner, Trillium Corporation, had planned a program of sustainable forestry to harvest the timber, but after years of problems with the project they never realized their plans and defaulted on the bank loans. That’s when Goldman Sachs acquired a series of loans, one of which included Trillium Corporation’s land on Tierra del Fuego.

Goldman Sachs senior management and board of directors agreed the highest value of the land would be conservation instead of subdividing parcels for development. Eventually, the Goldman Sachs Charitable Fund took over the project and sought a partner to develop the objective of long-term conservation for the area. A partnership was developed with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to manage these lands in Chile. At one point, they also held land in Argentina through the acquisition of Trillium Corporation lands, however that has since been sold to the Lenga Patagonian company (Redford and Saavedra, personal communication, 2005).

The partnership includes an endowment by Goldman-Sachs Charitable Fund to initiate management plans and support management operations. A formal alliance between Goldman-Sachs, Goldman Sachs Charitable Fund and WCS will continue for three years to assure continuity. An advisory council has been established to guide management of the area, which will be called, “Kiru Kinka,” meaning “our land” by the native Selknam or Ona people. The advisory council is comprised of Chilean scientists and business leaders representing two-thirds of the 15-member council, the rest are associated with WCS and Goldman-Sachs. WCS country manager for Chile, Dr. Barbara Saavedra will serve as the Secretary to the Council. The first meeting was held in early September 2005.

WCS has gone to great lengths to develop this project from the ground up and provide opportunities for involvement by Chilean citizens and government officials. Well over 50

meetings have taken place during the last year in a constant effort to produce the best approach to protecting this area, which includes an environment of old-growth lenga forests (southern beech tree), Magellanic woodpeckers, guanacos and the culpeo fox. This bold beginning will hopefully provide a model for other corporations that encounter similar opportunities to protect a large, intact ecosystem in perpetuity.

## Conclusion: Designated Wilderness in Patagonia’s Future? ---

It may seem staggering to contemplate the amount of land already protected in these three potential transboundary protected areas, however, on a global scale this is only 14,000 miles<sup>2</sup> (36,260 km<sup>2</sup>), which is just one-quarter the size of Iowa. In comparison, from 1990 to 2000, the total loss of native forests in Chile and Argentina combined was over 18,000 miles<sup>2</sup> (46,600 km<sup>2</sup>) (FAO 2001). Statistics like this underscore the importance of coordinated, effective management to protect native forests and ecosystems. These reserves of biodiversity become more valuable as they increasingly become surrounded by developed landscapes. Considering the loss of native forests, if any of these three areas is declared a Biosphere Reserve, the initial work plan should include designating the core areas as Wilderness, which would be a first in the southern cone.

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