

## U.S. Engagement in Chile: U.S. Support for Conserving Parks and Nature Reserves in Chile

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Torres del Paine National Park, Chile/ Frank Kehren/ [Flickr/ Creative Commons License](#)

Chile and the United States both have long traditions of conservation, dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>1</sup> However, cooperation between the two nations on this issue began to take shape in the 1990s, starting with the pioneering work of the American businessman Douglas Tompkins, who established extensive Private Protected Areas (PPA) in Chile. In the framework of the 1994<sup>2</sup> Law No. 19.300, Chile established legislation that later facilitated the participation of the private sector in the conservation of natural territories.

In 2003, Article 35 of the law was approved, which established the possibility of creating private parks and reserves as long as they contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, nature, and national heritage.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Chile and the United States incorporated environmental cooperation agreements, deepening this new bilateral agenda.<sup>4</sup> Between 2003 and 2018, U.S. private industry participated heavily in the conservation of national parks and reserves in Chilean territory. Despite this, Chile still does not have clear definitions and regulations regarding PPAs.<sup>5</sup>

### The Environmental Cooperation Agreement and the Inclusion of Chile in “Sister Parks”

As of the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2003, Chile and the United States made their agenda for sustainable development and environmental protection official. Under the FTA, both countries established an Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA), which created a Joint Commission for Environmental Cooperation. Among its most recent objectives (2018-2020) related to conservation are the promotion of preservation programs, park twinning agreements, and the exchange of joint work experiences with local communities for the management and

protection of national parks.<sup>6</sup> As of 2018, more than one hundred activities related to the ECA have been carried out, in addition to the training of approximately 500 public officials, totaling an investment of about US \$3 million.<sup>7</sup> The same year, the US included Chile in a conservation twinning agreement called “Sister Parks,” granting protection to the Torres del Paine and Alerce Costero National Parks, as well as the Francisco Coloane Marine Park.<sup>8</sup>

### Douglas Tompkins and Public-Private Cooperation: The Transformation of Private Protected Areas into Federally Protected National Parks

Along with the approval of national laws and decrees, the National Digital Library of Chile includes the conservation project led by the American businessman Douglas Tompkins<sup>9</sup> as one of the milestones in the development of the protection of natural parks in the country.<sup>10</sup> In 1991, Tompkins acquired a 10,000-hectare ranch in Chilean Patagonia, with the aim of protecting a temperate rainforest located there.<sup>11</sup> In subsequent years, the businessman bought the adjacent land, forming a 293,338-hectare private park. In 2005, the Chilean State declared this area a Nature Sanctuary,<sup>12</sup> shielding it from the development of future large-scale exploitation projects.<sup>13</sup>

In March 2017, the Chilean State and the entities related to Douglas Tompkins signed an Agreement Protocol for the execution of the project "Red de Parques de la Patagonia Chilena" (Patagonia national parks network), whose objective is to create and expand environmental conservation areas.<sup>14</sup> In total, the Tompkins Conservation Foundation delivered 407,625 ha to Chile,<sup>15</sup> the largest donation of land by a private actor to a country.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the land, these donations included the previous infrastructure present at the properties. This agreement established the creation of three new national parks (Pumalín,<sup>17</sup> Melimoyu, and Patagonia), as well as the expansion of three other existing ones (Hornopirén, Corcovado, and Isla Magdalena).<sup>18</sup> At present, Chile has 15,991,710 ha of continental surface of State Protected Wildlife Areas, which represents 21.14% of its territory.<sup>19</sup>

### The Wildlife Conservation Society and the Creation of Karukinka Natural Park

The Karukinka Natural Park is located on the Big Island of Tierra del Fuego (Magallanes and Chilean Antarctic Region) and occupies a total of 300,000 hectares.<sup>20</sup> This area formerly belonged to Trillium, an American logging company attempting to harvest Lenga, a typical patagonian tree in southern Chile. In 2002 the company declared bankruptcy and Goldman Sachs acquired these lands. Two years later, the U.S. bank donated the land to the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), a non-profit organization based in New York, in order to create a new conservation area: the Karukinka Reserve.

One of the unique attributes of this park is that approximately ¼ of its territory is covered by peat bogs, a type of wetland that is highly scientifically relevant, rich in biodiversity, and important for climate control.<sup>21</sup> In terms of social impact, Karukinka has implemented a program of student visits for schools with low resources and awarded scholarships to Chilean students to carry out field work. Likewise, the park is regularly used by artists as a place of work, in addition to fostering cooperation with conservationists from Argentina.<sup>22</sup>

## The Nature Conservancy and the Valdivian Coastal Reserve

In order to prevent the advance of agriculture in a temperate rainforest area, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), an international non-profit organization based in Virginia, acquired a 150,000-ha territory that became the Valdivian Coastal Reserve. The lands of the Reserve were bought by the TNC in 2003, through a public auction held after the bankruptcy of a forestry company. In 2005, together with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), The Nature Conservancy opened the Reserve to the public.<sup>23</sup> In 2013, the petroleum and mining company BHP Billiton awarded \$20.4 million to TNC through a global conservation fund for protected areas.<sup>24</sup>

The Valdivian Reserve is located in an area of ancient human habitation and because of this, TNC sought to involve local communities in the preservation of the habitat. TNC hired professionals from the region to work in the park and encourages the traditional use of natural resources by indigenous communities and fishermen,<sup>25</sup> as well as for building and maintaining an infrastructure to attract visitors.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Valdivian Coastal Reserve shines in researching methods to eliminate non-native species (e.g., eucalyptus trees), and bears the title of the first “carbon offset” initiative in Chile.<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, the impact of the United States on the conservation of parks and reserves has been significant for Chile in terms of environmental governance. Although Chile lacks clear regulations regarding Private Protected Areas (PPA), public and private initiatives from the U.S. have supported Chilean conservation efforts since the 1990s. Between 2003 and 2018, the bilateral environmental agenda intensified, materializing in agreements framed by the FTA, including initiatives by U.S. non-profit organizations and other private actors. The consolidation of the Patagonia national parks network at the beginning of 2018 was described as the largest park conservation action of the last 50 years in Chile.<sup>28</sup> This public-private project today totals 4.5 million hectares, a territory larger than Switzerland.<sup>29</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The world's first national park (Yellowstone Park) was born in the United States in 1872, while Chile's first fiscal reserve (Reserva Fiscal de Malleco) was officially established in 1907. Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Chile.

“Memoria de Chile: los parques nacionales.” Accessed October 18, 2021.

<http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-printer-3571.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile/BCN. “Ley 19300 | Aprueba Ley sobre bases Generales del Medio Ambiente.” Accessed October 18, 2021. <https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=30667>.

<sup>3</sup> Myron, E., Gloss, L., Fabiano, C., and Ahmed, H. “International Outlook for Privately Protected Areas: Chile Country Profile.” International Land Conservation Network (a project of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy) - United Nations Development Programme, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Fuentes, Claudia, and Francisco Rojas Aravena. 2016. “Chile and the United States: A Cooperative Friendship.” In *Contemporary U.S.-Latin American Relations. Cooperation or Conflict in the 21st Century?* eds. Jorge I. Domínguez and Rafael Fernández de Castro. New York: Routledge, 128–50.

<sup>5</sup> “El marco normativo está disperso y fragmentado, compuesto por una serie de textos legales individuales y disposiciones aisladas.” (Oyarzún 2009, 4). Accessed October 19, 2021.

[https://www.iucn.org/downloads/pumalin\\_en.pdf](https://www.iucn.org/downloads/pumalin_en.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Gobierno de Chile. “Programa de Trabajo para la Cooperación Ambiental Chile-Estados Unidos 2018-2020,” Accessed October 20, 2021.

<https://minrel.gob.cl/minrel/ministerio/direcciones/direccion-de-medio-ambiente-y-asuntos-oceanicos/programa-de-trabajo-para-la-cooperacion-ambiental-chile-estados-unidos>.

<sup>7</sup> Embajada de los Estados Unidos en Chile. “15 Años de Cooperación Ambiental Chile-EE.UU”. Acceso en 18 de octubre de 2021. <https://cl.usembassy.gov/es/15-anos-de-cooperacion-ambiental-chile-ee-uu/>.

<sup>8</sup> Besides Chile, the United States has this agreement with Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Georgia, Germany, Guatemala, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Korea, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Norway, Palau, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. National Park Service (NPS). “Sister Park List by Country.” Accessed October 18, 2021. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/sister-park-list-by-country.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Then president of *The Conservation Land Trust* (CLT).

<sup>10</sup> Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Chile. “Memoria de Chile: los parques nacionales.” Accessed October 18, 2021.

<http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-printer-3571.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Rivera, Claudio, and Arturo Vallejos-Romero. 2015. “La privatización de la conservación en Chile: Repensando la Gobernanza Ambiental.” *Bosque* 36(1): 15-26.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Education Exempt Decree n.º 1.137 from August 18, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Rivera and Vallejos-Romero (2015).

<sup>14</sup> The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by President Michelle Bachelet and Kristine Tompkins, one of the founders of Tompkins Conservation.

<sup>15</sup> Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública, Gobierno de Chile. “Ministerio de Bienes Nacionales crea el Parque Nacional Melimoyu, en la comuna de Cisnes, provincia de Aysén, Región de Aysén del General Carlos Ibáñez del Campo.” Accessed October 19, 2021.

<https://www.diariooficial.interior.gob.cl/publicaciones/2018/08/09/42128/01/1443487.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Agencia EFE. “Chile recibe oficialmente la donación de dos parques en la Patagonia.” Accessed October 19, 2021. <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/sociedad/chile-recibe-oficialmente-la-donacion-de-dos-parques-en-patagonia/20000013-3962426>.

<sup>17</sup> Pumalín Park has the largest area donated by the Tompkins Conservation Foundation (293,338 ha of 402,392 ha in its entirety) and since 2018 it ceased to be a Protected Private Area and became a federal national park. The park is known for its rich biodiversity, and among the plant species that compose it is the Alerce, a thousand-year-old tree threatened with extinction in Chile. In the country, 25% of the total remaining of this species is found in the Pumalín

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Park. Ruta de los Parques de la Patagonia. “Parque Nacional Pumalín Douglas Tompkins.” Accessed October 17, 2021. <https://www.rutadelosparques.org/parque-nacional-pumalin-douglas-tompkins/>.

<sup>18</sup> Ministerio del Medio Ambiente, Gobierno de Chile. “Gobierno y Tompkins Conservation sellan acuerdo para donación de tierras y creación de Red de Parques Nacionales de 4,5 millones de hectáreas.” Accessed October 18, 2021. <https://mma.gob.cl/gobierno-y-tompkins-conservation-sellan-acuerdo-para-donacion-de-tierras-y-creacion-de-red-de-parques-nacionales-de-45-millones-de-hectareas/>.

<sup>19</sup> Corporación Nacional Forestal (CONAF), Gobierno de Chile. “Listado Sistema Nacional de Áreas Silvestres Protegidas del Estado (SNASPE) - Diciembre 2020.” Accessed October 17, 2021. [https://www.conaf.cl/wp-content/files\\_mf/1610052227ListadoSNASPEActualizado21122020.pdf](https://www.conaf.cl/wp-content/files_mf/1610052227ListadoSNASPEActualizado21122020.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS CHILE). “Parque Karukinka.” Accessed October 17, 2021. <https://chile.wcs.org/Karukinka.aspx>.

<sup>21</sup> WCSChile. “Milenarias turberas de Karukinka y su aporte para la adaptación al cambio climático.” Accessed October 17, 2021. <https://chile.wcs.org/Nosotros/Noticias/ID/12202/Milenarias-turberas-de-Karukinka-y-su-aporte-para-la-adaptacion-al-cambio-climatico.aspx>.

<sup>22</sup> Stolton, S., Redford K.H., and Dudley N. 2014. “The Futures of Privately Protected Areas.” Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

<sup>23</sup> The Nature Conservancy (TNC). “Chile: la Reserva Costera de Valdivia.” Accessed October 17, 2021. <https://www.nature.org/es-us/sobre-tnc/donde-trabajamos/tnc-en-latinoamerica/chile/reserva-costera-valdiviana/>.

<sup>24</sup> La Tercera. “Reserva Costera Valdiviana recibe US\$ 20 millones.” Accessed October 17, 2021. <https://www.latercera.com/noticia/reserva-costera-valdiviana-recibe-us-20-millones/>.

<sup>25</sup> Rivera and Vallejos-Romero (2015).

<sup>26</sup> Myron et al (2019).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> El País. “Chile crea un parque natural del tamaño de Suiza.” Accessed October 20, 2021. [https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/01/30/actualidad/1517303867\\_528716.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/01/30/actualidad/1517303867_528716.html).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

[Assessing the Cumulative Effects of U.S. Engagement in Uruguay and Chile](#)



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