

## To Conserve or Consume?

The Impact of Natural Protected Areas on the Food Security of Indigenous Communities in the Peruvian Amazon

Adde Sharp  
Davidson College  
[adsharp@davidson.edu](mailto:adsharp@ davidson.edu)

Are environmental conservation and the preservation of indigenous lifestyles mutually exclusive? Often assumed to be universally beneficial, national parks and reserves intended to protect expansive biodiversity hotspots may have unexpected, negative impacts on the indigenous communities that traditionally rely upon them for food and subsistence living. In the Peruvian Amazon, the recent creation of the Bahuaja-Sonene National Park and the Tambopata National Reserve, 1,366,016 total hectares of bioreserves in the Madre de Dios region, are associated with largely unstudied shifts in the food security and sovereignty of the native Ese Eja community of Infierno, Peru. Through an *in-situ* study of the Ese Eja people, this paper examines the how the declaration of restricted-use national parks and bioreserves alters the food security and food sovereignty of the surrounding indigenous communities. The study incorporates interviews and ethnographic research to offer a comprehensive understanding of how the bioreserves in question effect the hunting, fishing, and foraging patterns of the Ese Eja people, thus compromising their sustained livelihoods. I argue that restricting or prohibiting the communities' access to their native bioreserves for subsistence-living purposes directly contributes to their decreased food security and sovereignty, as well as greatly increased rates of anemia and diabetes. The tension between the indigenous communities' ancestral land-use rights and globally necessary environmental conservation begs a larger question about conflicts between local and global priorities and to what extent being "indigenous" to an environment should or should not guarantee preferential and continued access to that ecosystem.

### **Keywords:**

Food security; food sovereignty; indigenous communities; Amazon; bioreserve; subsistence-living