

Some countries sidestep Kyoto rules with land 'donations'

October 9 2008

(PhysOrg.com) -- When is a park a meaningful piece of protected land and when is it merely a political gesture?

That's the question University of Alberta Professor Arturo Sanchez-Azofeifa and a team of economists asked themselves while examining the effectiveness of Costa Rica's conservation system. Using state-of-the-art satellite images and econometric data they examined the length and breadth of the country. Sanchez-Azofeifa, a researcher in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, says that in Costa Rica's case the land set aside for parks has little value for agriculture or commercial use.

"No one is going to develop a banana plantation on the side of a volcano, so that's where they put the parks," said Sanchez-Azofeifa. "All the arable land is being used."

The mapping system and analysis used in the Costa Rican survey has been turned into a tool that can be used to analyze the real "conservation value" of land belonging to member countries of the Kyoto Protocol. Under terms of Kyoto, members would be allowed to earn carbon points for setting aside tracts of land for zero development in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Sanchez-Azofeifa says that with their access to images and data, the researchers can tell if the land earmarked as "protected," has potential for impacting the environment and whether taking it out of use will make a meaningful contribution to a decrease in greenhouse gases.

Sanchez-Azofeifa says the study shows new levels of co-operation between researchers from normally distant fields, "This is a great example of interdisciplinary work; earth sciences and economists working together, combining unique talents that in this case can help improve the environment."

Provided by University of Alberta

Citation: Some countries sidestep Kyoto rules with land 'donations' (2008, October 9) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-10-countries-sidestep-kyoto-donations.html>

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