

Amazonian Indigenous territories are crucial for conservation

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"In this paper we show that supporting Indigenous peoples' rights is in the interest of the conservation agenda," explains Dr. Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares, the first author of the study, from the University of Helsinki. "The future of a substantial proportion of the Amazon's biodiversity depends largely on coordinated action to support and strengthen indigenous peoples' rights across the entire region."

The authors argue that the convergence of the agendas and priorities of both wilderness-centered conservationists and Indigenous peoples is more important than ever, as some of the government in the region have started to trample over commitments towards globally agreed goals on both the environment and indigenous peoples' rights.

"There is no doubt that the Amazon is at a crossroads in its social-ecological history," adds Dr. Fernández-Llamazares. "Rollbacks on environmental protections and indigenous peoples' rights across the entire region are opening up vast natural areas to new external pressures."

All these macroeconomic and political forces are being felt in both [wilderness areas](#) and Indigenous Peoples' territories. However, disputes on whether conserving wilderness should come at the expense of [indigenous peoples'](#) rights undermine potential for collaborative conservation.

Minimal forest loss on Indigenous territories across the Amazon

The study underscored the substantial role of Indigenous territories in buffering against deforestation through advanced geospatial analyses based on available satellite data. These lands account for less than 15% of all the forest loss occurring within the Amazon's last wilderness frontiers. This is largely evidenced throughout the southern rim of the Amazon, where Indigenous territories represent the only islands of biological and cultural diversity in the larger landscape.

"The concept of wilderness has a contentious history across much of the Global South, as it is based on the assumption that humans have inherently [negative impacts](#) on nature," highlights Prof. Eduardo S.

Brondizio, a researcher from Indiana University Bloomington and senior author of the study.

"Yet, the Amazon is a classic example of how long-term interactions between Indigenous peoples and forests can be linked to positive environmental outcomes. We have known for decades that a significant portion of the region's supposedly pristine forests are in fact cultural forests,"he notes. "Indigenous peoples, and also other traditional communities, show that it is possible to successfully combine [forest](#) conservation, management and agroforestry systems."

In view of this, the authors call for a more socially inclusive notion of wilderness in order to align the agendas and priorities of both [wilderness](#)-focused conservationists and Indigenous peoples against a new wave of frontier expansion.

More information: Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares et al, Reframing the Wilderness Concept can Bolster Collaborative Conservation, *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.tree.2020.06.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2020.06.005)

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