

**LANDOWNER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CONSERVATION  
IN THE SIERRA OCCIDENTAL OF JALISCO, MEXICO.**

**ABSTRACT**

This project examined current environmental and land-use circumstances in the Sierra Occidental of Jalisco, Mexico, as well landowners' perceptions about conservation, environmental change, and both existing and proposed initiatives to achieve conservation in the region. The forests in this region have been identified as important sources of water, and the region is one of the world's biodiversity 'hotspots.' Yet deforestation and land degradation threaten these values.

Federal government land-use and conservation policies were reviewed, as were existing forest and agricultural programs in effect in the Sierra Occidental of Jalisco. Owners of forested and agricultural lands in the Sierra Occidental of Jalisco were interviewed using semi-structured interviews.

Interviewees identified deforestation, fires, and agricultural and pastoral practices as some of the direct causes of environmental change. They also identified a number of ways to improve conservation. Although interviewees were pessimistic about the problems, they were more aware about the problems in the region than expected, and they are willing to conserve their lands. The main driver for landowners to conserve their lands is the economic benefit that conservation practices could provide.

We found that the failure to adequately conserve forests, water, and biodiversity is associated with agricultural and pastoral policies and programs that compete with conservation, a lack of sufficient incentives for landowners to conserve their lands, a lack of law enforcement, a lack of local (state and municipal) conservation strategies, and the federal government's lack of attention to the needs and perceptions of local governments and landowners when developing policies and programs. Based on these results, what landowners need in order to conserve their lands are economic benefits, technical assistance, and more presence from authorities in the forests (law enforcement).

In particular, the federal Environmental Services Program (PSA), aimed at conserving targeted areas, is effective but insufficient. Interviewees suggested that this program must be extended in area and time. Furthermore, interviewees suggested that local mechanisms should be developed in order to complement the PSA federal program.