

The quality of sustainable utilization of vicuñas: A critical analysis of how decisions are made for its conservation and management

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Although biological sustainability is an assumed condition for sustainable development of wild vicuña populations, the latter is not guaranteed even with state-of-the-art biological management. There are several environmental aspects to be taken into account before a management project can reduce epistemic uncertainty and be easily incorporated into locally required “management plan documents”. Data on vicuña densities, social composition, behaviour, and landscape geomorphology are some of the essential aspects to be incorporated. In addition, community perception about vicuñas and local social groups can interact for generating a successful management system. Currently, most of the development projects consider that the economic benefits from the use of wildlife must return or stay within the local community in order to keep “room” for conservation of the species. In this presentation the Cieneguillas Vicuna Utilization Project of Argentina will be assessed by critically revisiting the range of different actors, interests and responsibilities assigned to government researchers and local community-associations. The required ecological background data will be reviewed, as well as, the difficulties local people have experienced in selling vicuna fiber. Adaptative management, precautionary recommendations, and welfare guidelines will be included in the presentation of a complete project incorporating environmental impact analysis and biological sustainability measures. Interdisciplinary science, formal (in practice teacher courses) and non-formal (meetings, films, and posters) environmental education practices, and bottom-up strategies appear to be the key factors in fulfilling the sustainable management of vicunas while minimizing poor decisions.