

# Examining the linkages between conservation initiatives, land-use decisions, and forest cover: A study of the Community Baboon Sanctuary, Belize

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Established in 1985, the 4,800 hectare Community Baboon Sanctuary (CBS) protects one of the few black howler monkey populations (*Alouatta pigra*) in Belize. With support of a local non-governmental organization, the lands for this sanctuary were set aside by private landowners from 7 Creole communities situated along 33 kilometers of the Belize River. For 20 years the CBS communities have been participating in two conservation initiatives: nature-based tourism and a voluntary, written pledge for private landowners to leave riparian forests intact and forested corridors that provide habitat connectivity for howler monkey populations, the tourism attraction. Little is known, however, about residents' perceived benefits of riparian forests (the conservation focus of the initiatives) and the function of place attachment as an incentive to conserving forests, in addition to the role these initiatives play in managing community benefits.

This paper presents place-based meanings of riparian forests and examines perceptions of community benefits attributed to these landscapes. Results show a relationship between initiative involvement (pledging or tourism) and higher perceived benefits (importance) and place attachment (meanings) toward riparian forests and conservation. Residents, however, regardless of initiative involvement agree that riparian forests are not providing economic benefits. Further examination showing higher perceived benefits and place-based meanings attributed to riparian forest landscapes and conservation among residents involved with either initiative indicate that it may be these *intangible* benefits and place-based meanings that are actually promoting conservation. The study findings, which expand on current conceptualizations of sense of place and place attachment, will aid future planning to improve program integration into community development and environmental conservation strategies.