

David Sheinin  
Trent University

Wilderness and Pan American Preservation, 1910-1948

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In 1940, representatives of the American republics reached agreement on a draft convention for nature protection and wildlife preservation. Questions of environment degradation, landscape, and nature had arisen in several contexts within the Pan American Union as early as the first years of the century. In 1916, Great Britain (for Canada) and the United States had signed a Migratory Bird Treaty. A similar agreement in 1937 between Mexico and the United States served as a partial basis for the 1940 draft convention -- the first comprehensive inter-American agreement that set out provisions for the preservation of hundreds of species of flora and fauna. The agreement was one of several indicators of the growing strength of the US within the Pan American movement, and more important, the ability of Americans to establish policy direction for the Pan American Union. The Draft Convention on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in the Western Hemisphere also marked the resurgence of the American conservation movement during the 1930s after two decades of comparative weakness, and a heightened sense of crisis in Latin America after generations of environmental decay. Furthermore, the convention suggested the importance of cultural and scientific concerns within Pan Americanism. As in the arena of inter-American strategic concerns, US cultural and scientific influences in the Pan American Union increased on the eve of the Second World War and were reflected in the 1940 Convention.

Mandated in 1938 by delegates to the Eighth Pan American Conference (Lima) to reach an inter-American accord on the preservation of wildlife, a committee of scientific and other experts from seventeen countries began work almost immediately tabulating species to be preserved, and identifying means of conservation. The American representative on the committee was Dr. Alexander Wetmore, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. When completed in early 1940, the draft Convention had the

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<sup>1</sup>. Leo S. Rowe, Director General, Pan American Union, to US Secretary of State, 26 January 1940, 710.H Wild Life/65; Alexander Wetmore, Assistant Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, to Charles M. Barnes, Chief, Treaty Division, Department of State, 15 August 1941, 710.H Wild Life/135, Record Group 59 (RG 59), National Archives of the United States, Washington, DC (NA); "American Republics Sign Convention on Nature Protection," Press News from the Pan American Union, 12 October 1940; JosJL. Colom, "Pan American Policy for Nature Protection," The National Parks Bulletin (February 1941), 5; "The United States has entered...." nd, Box 99, Alexander Wetmore Papers, Smithsonian Instititite

unanimous backing of those who worked on it and, in an unusually aggressive vote of confidence in its efficacy, contained an article that provided for the convention to enter into force only three months after five ratifications had been deposited in the Pan American Union. The fifth ratification came from Haiti on 31 January 1942 (preceded by El Salvador, Guatemala, the United States, and Venezuela). The committee of experts acted on their mandate "to protect and preserve in their natural habitat representatives of all species and genera of their native flora and fauna, including migratory birds in sufficient numbers and over areas extensive enough to assure them from becoming extinct through any agency within man's control." The committee also recognized as its task the protection of scenery of "extraordinary beauty, unusual and striking geologic formations, regions and natural objects of aesthetic, historic or scientific value, and areas characterized by primitive conditions."

Working from earlier international agreements, as well as equivalent designations in the United States the committee distinguished between national parks, national reserves, nature monuments, and strict wilderness reserves. As in the US, the distinction between each of these categories was not entirely clear. The term "national park" referred to an area in which "superlative scenery, flora and fauna of national significance" would be preserved and protected. Parks were meant as preserves for public enjoyment and in which citizens might benefit as a result of government control of the land. "National reserves" were implicitly commercial designations; they were to be regions designated for "conservation and utilization of natural resources under government control." Here, protection of wildlife would be afforded only in so far as

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<sup>2</sup>. Leo S. Rowe, Report of the Committee of Experts on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in the American Republics (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1940); Memorandum, Department of State, "Meeting of the Governing Board of the Pan American Union, June 5, 1940," 710. H Wild Life/89; Memorandum, Division of American Republics, Department of State, "Draft Convention for Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation," 27 May 1940, 710. H Wild Life/87; Memorandum, Division of International Conferences, Department of State, 6 June 1940, RG 59, NA; Leo S. Rowe, Convention and Documentary Material on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in the Western Hemisphere (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1943); No. 189, "Proclamation of Convention on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in the Western Hemisphere," 30 April 1942, Department of State Press Release.

<sup>3</sup>. See, for example, John C. Phillips, "Brief Report of the Accomplishments of The Conference on the Fauna and Flora of Africa, 1933," 2 December 1933, Box 99, Wetmore Papers, SI.

consistent with the primary natural resource utilization objective of reserve. "Nature monuments" were entirely in keeping with equivalent designations in the US. They might be regions, objects, or living species of "aesthetic, historic or scientific interest." Monuments were to receive strict protection as inviolate, except for authorized scientific work or government inspection. "Strict wilderness reserves" warranted the highest level of protection. These would be regions under government control characterized by what the experts called "primitive conditions of flora, fauna, transportation and habitation." There would be no motorized transportation in this final category of preserve.

Urgency governed the terms of the convention. The committee of experts recognized the rapid degradation that had taken place over preceding decades in several Latin American states, particularly those that had undergone swift industrialization. In Argentina, for example, there was widespread ecological devastation in the two generations before the Pan American wildlife initiative. Between 1906 and 1915 in the province of Santiago del Estero alone, rapid commercial integration of the region into national and international markets for sugar, wood and other products led to a virtual deforestation of the province. In the province of Mendoza, olive trees cultivated for two hundred years had disappeared while in San Juan, scientists believed that excessive tree harvesting had an impact on the climate. In addition to Convention provisions for unusually rapid implementation, the document urged that contracting governments explore right away the possibility of establishing preserves in each of the four preservation categories. If establishing preserves proved impossible immediately, governments were to quickly identify suitable areas for future designation as parks. Scientific investigation was a key objective of the convention and was specifically highlighted in the agreement. Though prohibited from national parks, hunting would be allowed for what the Convention described as duly authorized scientific work. Scientists would also be allowed access to the otherwise inviolate wilderness reserves. Where governments were called upon to cooperate among themselves in promoting the Convention, they were also urged by the experts to assist

scientists engaged in field work. Far more significant as an act of preservation, Pan American Union member countries designated hundreds of species of plants and animals as protected by the terms of the convention -- though the United States listed a scant ten species, including the Manatee, the Whooping Crane, and the Puerto Rican Parrot.

Though based on an encyclopedic compendium of extinct and nearly extinct species in the Americas, the provisions of the convention were much more straightforward than the patchwork of thousands of laws and decrees that governed wildlife preservation through the hemisphere. In fact, strict federal control of wildlife preservation -- with reference to the Pan American accord -- was a principal objective of the committee of experts. The simplicity of the convention inherently challenged the inefficacy of the tangled existing preservation rules in many countries. Ruins in the Parque Nacional Desierto de los Leones (Cuajimilpa), for example, Mexico's first national park (1917), came under the jurisdiction of the Secretaría de Comunicaci3n y Obras P3blicas, while the park itself was overseen by the Secretaría de Fomento. In Argentina, hunting fell within the scope of both federal and provincial jurisdictions. In some provinces it was regulated by law, in others by decree, and in others still by the Rural Code. By contrast, Panama had no legislation to regulate hunting or protect wildlife. In Colombia there were only minimal restrictions of any sort on hunting. A 1927 decree allowed the free importation of hunting guns and no permits were required for gun ownership. The result was a rapid decline in alligators, iguanas and other species in the years leading up to the Convention. In Guatemala, wildlife-related legislation covered fauna that might be killed at any time for a broad range of reasons -- ferocious mammals (as a threat to livestock),

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<sup>4</sup>. Leo S. Rowe, Convention and Documentary Material on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in the Western Hemisphere (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1943); Antonio Elio Brailovsky, La ecolog3a y el futuro de la argentina (Buenos Aires: Planeta Tierra, 1992), 68-73; Olivier Dollfus, Territorios andinos: reto y memoria (Lima: IFEA/IEP, 1991), 23-24; Antonio Elio Brailovsky, Memoria verde: historia ecol3gica de la Argentina (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1991), 196; S.T. Davis, "Forestry in the Argentine Republic," 5 February 1908, Box 92, Research Compilation Files, 1897-1935, Forest Research Divisions, Department of Agriculture, RG 95, NA.

<sup>5</sup>. Decreto, 15 de noviembre de 1917, Bolet3n Oficial de la Secretar3a de Fomento (Mexico), No. 8, November 1917, 639-640.

the zopilote (a carrier of anthrax), the taltuza (an agricultural pest), and a range of poisonous snakes.

In the Dominican Republic and Cuba, partly as a result of American influences, wildlife preservation was comparatively well-developed. In the former, hunting was prohibited in places where game birds nested, slept or bred. A 1936 decree created a consultative commission on national fauna in Cuba which, in addition to government bureaucrats, included a zoology professor at the University of Havana and a member of the National Academy of Sciences. Other progressive measures included a 1936 decree designating that 75% of funds derived from permits to export live game go to a Special Fauna Fund for the acquisition of new species of fauna as well as specimens to improve Cuba's existing species; the impetus for this provision was directed at improving agriculture. A second 1936 decree protected the famous Zapata Swamp as a forest reserve for the perpetuation of wildlife. In Colombia, forest reservations were set up on the basis of their economic importance, with no reference to scenic beauty or important flora. Though Nahuel Huapi National Park in Argentina was inaugurated for its natural beauties and the Lanin National Park was established for its picturesque landscapes, the Los Glaciares National Park was founded to give tourists access to glaciers in Southern Argentina. In Bolivia, in keeping with the conception of a "national monument," officials linked the preservation of historically significant archaeological ruins to that of important species. The Bolivian government estimated that unless immediate action were taken, many fauna -- including vicuZas, guanacos, and chinchillas -- would die out in fewer than ten years.

In the Brazilian state of Sao Paulo, the rapid destruction of forests after 1900 came as a result of

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<sup>6</sup>. Leo S. Rowe, Documentary Material on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in Latin America, vol. 1, part 1 (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1940), 7, 37-39; Antonio Elio Brailovsky and Dina Foguelman, Memoria verde: historia ecol\gica de la Argentina (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1991), 206-209.

<sup>7</sup>. Leo S. Rowe, Documentary Material on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in Latin America, vol. 1, part 1 (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1940), 60-61; 75-78.

<sup>8</sup>. Leo S. Rowe, Documentary Material on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in Latin America, vol. 2, part 1 (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1940), 6-12; Arthur Posnansky, Inspector ad-hon. del Museo Nacional, Un "Parque Nacional en Bolivia" (La Paz: Editorial "Renacimiento", 1937).

increased coffee production, as well as the slash-and-burn agriculture of settlers on previously uncultivated lands. In 1911, the state established a forestry service that maintained tree nurseries for experimentation and distribution of saplings. All the same, it had no police power to prevent environmental destruction and no preservation program. In Pernambuco state, a shortage of foreign coal brought on by the First World War led to a run on local forests for fuel by railroads, sugar mills and textile factories. There was no government supervision of this dissipation of forests. But by the late 1920s, Brazil's regulations for forest protection were the most advanced in Latin America. Unlike the laws of most countries, Brazilian legislation served as an important model for the Convention. Brazil's 1934 Forest Code declared that all forests were of national interest. It affirmed that in the case of the alienation of lands deemed to be of general interest to the nation, state or municipality, respective governments would have the opportunity to reacquire such lands at any future time of sale. Lands covered by forests were exempted from all taxes. Moreover, forest designations for the purpose of preservation were highly refined. So-called "protective forests", for example, maintained courses of water, prevented erosion, strengthened military defenses, enhanced public health, protected places of natural beauty, and/or provided a refuge for rare specimens of indigenous fauna. Such forests were to be permanently preserved and inalienable. In dry regions of northeastern Brazil, a variety of activities were prohibited. These included the use of wood from trees that had not reached full development, the felling of evergreens, and the cutting of the main shoot and the three newest leaves of palm trees.

In contrast to Brazil, Uruguayans faced a crisis on the eve of the Convention. On 13 March 1939

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<sup>9</sup>. No. 233, C. R. Cameron, US Consul, Sao Paulo, "Paran<Legislation Affecting Pine Lumber Production," 26 April 1929; No. 73, Cameron, "Sao Paulo Forestry Service," 27 December 1927; Nathaniel P. Davis, US Consul, Pernambuco, Brazil, "Forest Conservation in Alagoas, Brazil," 19 December 1927; E. Kitchel Farrand, US Vice Consul, Porto Alegre, Brazil, "Lumber Industry in the State of Rio Grande do Sul," 11 February 1926; Forestry Reports, Foreign Agricultural Service, Department of Agriculture, Box 25, Entry 3, RG 166, NA.

<sup>10</sup>. Leo S. Rowe, Documentary Material on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in Latin America, vol. 2, part 2 (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1940), 3.

the Uruguayan executive sent a message to the General Assembly requesting the transfer of 200,000 pesos from a "workingmen's dwellings" fund to reforestation work. Trees remained on scarcely 3% of Uruguay's surface area. Ten per cent of that represented plantations. Uruguayan leaders viewed the crisis as economic nationalist, not environmental. The trees that remained were "not even good enough for fence rails" according to the executive request. More forests would be essential to reducing lumber imports for building construction, fruit boxes, vehicle bodies, and other essential items.

While many Latin Americans had destroyed natural habitats, American and other companies also played a key role in environmental degradation before the 1940 Convention. The context for the American role in Latin American environmental damage came in American visions of Latin American flora and fauna as an exploitable resource. The US Agriculture Department, for example, described Latin America as one of the most abundant sources of wood -- one that the US might absorb in large volume without detriment to domestic wood production. Before 1930, timber production in the US had not kept up with demand. Business leaders and Agriculture Department bureaucrats sought opportunities throughout Latin America, including areas where deforestation and environmental damage had already been severe. Some understood the danger. In 1913, US Agriculture Department forestry official C. D. Mell called the exploitation of timber in tropical America even more wasteful than it was in the US. He argued that it was almost as important to Americans to have timber in Latin America preserved as it was in the US. But forest devastation persisted. The far-reaching destruction of flora and fauna in Cuba during the Spanish-American-Cuban War continued, though not as quickly, in the first decade of the twentieth century. Mahogany, Cedar, and Yellow Pine were cut and burned by both Americans and Cubans on a large scale every year to make way for new sugar cane and tobacco cultivation. By 1907, practically all of Havana and

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<sup>11</sup>. Augustin W. Ferrin, US Consul, Montevideo, "Reforestation Plans in Uruguay," 27 March 1939, Box 27, Entry 3, RG 166; "El apostol del monte artificial," El Plata (Montevideo), 5 August 1922.



Matanzas provinces had been deforested. Even so, in 1914, one Agriculture Department official described a Cuban paradise for lumbering: "Timber of every imaginable degree of hardness and for every conceivable use may be found in the Bayano region. Its variety and profusion are almost bewildering." Despite widespread concern in Brazil over damage to forests, in 1929 Interstate Trust and Banking Company official Elish Norton reported that conditions for logging and lumbering in Brazil were outstanding, that Brazil was "almost entirely covered by virgin forests," and that there were "millions and millions" of trees, "many very beautiful when prepared for use." He urged that Americans seriously consider augmenting lumber operations in Brazil, partly because US woods were being depleted.

American lumber contractors in Latin America undertook no reforestation or preservation projects, but acted on the favorable reports of resource availability. Honduran interest in the Convention and the passage of legislation in 1939 by the Honduran Congress on soil and forest conservation underlined a need to control -- but not limit -- foreign logging companies. By the terms of a 1927 contract, an American firm paid eleven dollars to the government for each mahogany tree cut, and five dollars per cedar tree. Though there were no maximum values established, the contractor agreed to fell an annual minimum of 725 mahogany trees; there were no reforestation provisions in the contract and the company left a deposit of \$20,000 with the government. In neighboring Belize, for more than two centuries there had been profitable exploitation of mahogany and cedar forests on the coast and along many rivers in the territory. Through continuous harvesting and virtually no reforestation, forests near the water had been entirely destroyed. American firms pressed into the Belize interior in search of new hardwood forests. One contractor invested

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<sup>12</sup>. "Field Explorations and Laboratory Tests of South and Central American Hardwoods," 25 February 1924, Box 186; Elish Norton, Interstate Trust and Banking Co., New Orleans, to Lynn H. Dinkins, President, Interstate Trust and Banking Company, 22 April 1929; H. N. Whitford, School of Forestry, Yale University, to Raphael Zon, US Forest Service, 17 October 1918, Box 92; "Panama Woods", 1914; F. S. Earle, President, The Cuban Horticultural Society, to Gifford Pinchot, Chief Forester of the US, 25 April 1907; C. D. Mell, "The Need of Forestry in Tropical America," 1913, Box 91, Research Compilation Files, 1897-1935, Forest Research Divisions, Agriculture Department, RG 95, NA.

nearly \$100,000 in tractors manufactured in the US; during the mahogany cutting season of 1923 alone, the company planned to extract 5 million feet of wood using some 70 tractors.

The Convention framers had no intention of eliminating commercial exploitation of wildlife. Like other Pan American treaties and instruments, the Convention on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in the Western Hemisphere functioned as no more than a guideline, except where member countries moved specifically to act on its provisions. In 1942, for example, American scientists continued to express concern over the threat to "American" migratory birds during their South and Central American travels. In offering so few species on its list of fauna to be protected by the Convention, Americans intended the provisions of the agreement to apply in the first instance to the Latin American republics. In part, the US planned to bring order and control to aspects of wildlife preservation in Latin America that touched American wildlife preservation. The Smithsonian Institution strongly backed the explicit references to migratory bird preservation in the convention, expressing the concerns of American naturalists for the safety of migratory birds that left the US in winter for Central or South America. And while Smithsonian scientists applauded the constructive efforts for international preservation in the accord, they also valued the advantages the Convention promised for American scientists likely to work in Latin America in the future. In fact, Smithsonian scientists spearheaded the inter-American agreement.

A long history of Smithsonian Institution research in the Americas, and collaboration with Latin American scientists, informed an excited interest in the accord among Smithsonian and other American officials. Expeditions to Cuba, Haiti, and Trinidad in the early 1900s had mapped marine geology and

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<sup>13</sup>. No. 593, John D. Erwin to Secretary of State, 14 February 1939; Richard Ford, US Consul, Tegucigalpa, "Mahogany Contract Awarded American Firm in Honduras, 11 April 1927; William Wallace Early, US Consul, Belize, "Growing Use of Tractors in Mahogany Forests of British Honduras," 28 April 1923, Forestry Reports, Foreign Agricultural Service, Department of Agriculture, Box 25, Entry 3, RG 166, NA; "Ley de Bosques," La Gaceta (Tegucigalpa), 13 February 1939.

<sup>14</sup>. C. G. Abbot, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, to R. Walton Moore, Counselor, Department of State, 28 June 1940, 710.H Wild Life/96; A. Wetmore to Secretary of State, 27 January 1941, 710.H Wild Life/118; Memorandum, Division of American Republics, Department of State, 10 July 1942, RG 59, NA; International Committee for Bird Preservation, Pan American Section,

methodically identified dozens of species of flora and fauna. A 1906 biological survey of the Caribbean by Edward Alphonso Goldman and Edward W. Nelson generated 17,400 specimens of mammals and 12,400 specimens of birds; 354 of these were described as new while still more were assigned new scientific names. All specimens were deposited at the Smithsonian. In the 1920s, The work of US National Herbarium scientist Agnes Chase in Brazil helped establish the practice of a systematic inter-American exchange of botanical specimens as a core procedure in US scientific research. At the time the Eighth International Conference of American States set in place an inter-American plan for a wildlife preservation convention, the US created an Inter-Departmental Committee on Cooperation with the American Republics; the Smithsonian was put in charge of a program for the "conservation of flora and fauna in the New World on an international basis." The connection between the Smithsonian and nascent US government environmental policy went further still. With the backing of Ecuadorian officials, Curator of marine invertebrates Waldo I. Schmitt began planning a biological conservation laboratory on the Galapagos Islands in the late 1930s. Schmitt knew the islands well, having accompanied President Franklin D. Roosevelt's well-publicized 1938 tour of the Galapagos (a visit that had helped convince the president of a need for a comprehensive inter-American agreement on preservation). Schmitt travelled twice to the islands in 1941-42 and selected a sight for the research station before the Second World War derailed the project.

As a US Bureau of Biological Survey biologist, Convention architect Alexander Wetmore spent

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"Bird Migration in the Western Hemisphere," 1942 (unpublished pamphlet).

<sup>15</sup>. Expeditions: 150 Years of Smithsonian Research in Latin America (Washington, DC: The Inter-American Development Bank and the Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 16-21; Edward Alphonso Goldman, Biological Investigations in Mexico, Publication 4017 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1951); George Hugh Banning, "Hancock Expedition of 1933 to the Galapagos Islands: General Report," Bulletin of the Zoological Society of San Diego, No. 10 (May 1933), 1-30; "Velero Brings Big Cargo of Rare Animals," Evening Tribune (San Diego), 22 February 1935; "Visiting Scientist, Here From Galapagos Islands, Leaves Reptilian Curio," Monterey Peninsula Herald (Monterey, California), 7 March 1935; Waldo L. Schmitt, "The Galapagos Islands One Hundred Years After Darwin," Nature Magazine, Vol. 26, No. 5 (November 1935), 265-271, 312, 315; "F.D.'s Ship Headed for Galapagos Island," Washington News, 22 July 1938; "Scientist' Roosevelt's Catch to Enrich National Museum," Washington Post, 13 August 1938.

1911 in Puerto Rico studying ornithology; he later traveled through South America for two years analyzing bird migration between continents. This work helped focus his longstanding attention on the problem of protecting birds migrating through different countries -- a concern that helped drive the preparation of the 1940 draft Convention. Though the possibilities for field research were more limited for American scientists during the Great Depression and World War II, as Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian (1925-1945), Wetmore nevertheless pressed forward in his Latin American research, making short research trips to Colombia, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and elsewhere.

Though well-intentioned, not all of US government wildlife initiatives in Latin America helped preserve existing species. In the interest of wilderness conservation, combined with commercial advantage in Latin America, the US Fish and Wildlife Service shipped millions of fish and fish eggs to Latin America before 1940. In 1910, one consignment of small-mouth bass went to a lake in Brazil on behalf of the Sao Paulo Tramway Light and Power Company, while in the same year eggs from US species of trout and salmon were shipped to Argentina to help foster a nascent fishing/tourist trade based on the enjoyment of the outdoors. American scientists hoped to recreate "wilderness" in Latin America by introducing fish and other animal species from the US that figured prominently in fishing and other nature diversions. As a consequence of these foreign species introductions, dozens of local species were destroyed before 1940. Though never explicitly stated in planning for the 1940 agreement, the cataloguing of protected species would have the potential to protect local fish and other species from damaging foreign species shipments.

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<sup>16</sup>. Expeditions: 150 Years of Smithsonian Research in Latin America (Washington, DC: The Inter-American Development Bank and the Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 21-23; Alexander Wetmore and Bradshaw H. Swales,, The Birds of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Smithsonian Institution Bulletin 155 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1931).

<sup>17</sup>. I. Dunlop, Acting Commissioner, Bureau of Fisheries, Department of Commerce and Labor, to W. P. Plummer, 9 August 1910; Huntington Wilson, Assistant Secretary of State, to The Secretary of Commerce and Labor, 25 January 1910; Jos. J. Leon Suarez, Zoología y Policía Veterinaria, Division de Ganadería, Secretaría de Agricultura, Argentina, to George M. Bowers, Commissioner, US Bureau of Fisheries, 2 March 1910; Epifanio Portela to US Secretary of State, 28 December 1909; Suarez to Bowers, 14 August 1909, Records of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Box 1, Entry 120, RG 22; "Argentine Fish Culture: Its Beginnings," Standard (Buenos Aires) 25 January 1909.

American officials and scientists were explicitly motivated to complete the 1940 Convention as a means of ending what they believed were abuses of wildlife in Latin America. In 1926, E. A. Goldman, Chief of Game and Bird Reservations of the Biological Survey reported critically that Mexicans in Toluca and Puebla continued to practice a colonial era method for the slaughter of ducks that risked eliminating their numbers entirely; more than 100 guns -- and sometimes upward of 200 -- were set out side by side in long formations called "armadas" or "baterias." All were fired at once when the ducks were overhead; dozens died in an instant. The result of was a gradual reduction in duck numbers through the valley of Mexico. In a second case concerning Mexico, Americans believed that "California's" fish stocks were being depleted when they entered Mexican waters and that Mexican authorities were powerless to make changes.

Planning for the 1940 draft Convention came out of these and other American initiatives and concerns, particularly President Franklin Roosevelt's suggestion that an international arrangement be reached covering the Galapagos Islands, under the leadership of the Pan American Union. Implicit to Roosevelt's plan was the notion that Ecuador could not look after the islands' flora and fauna. A Pan American "trust" would preserve unique species in the Galapagos and would mean the purchase of the islands from Ecuador. What held the Galapagos project up in the White House was the Peruvian-Ecuadorian boundary dispute which made it diplomatically unfeasible for the US to enter into an agreement with Ecuador by which the latter would receive several million dollars in compensation -- funds that might be seen in Peru and elsewhere in Latin America as money for arms purchases. But in the implementation of the Convention, American bureaucrats and scientists placed themselves in positions of authority. In

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<sup>18</sup>. Goldman, "Observations Concerning Waterfowl in Mexico, with Special Reference to Migratory Species," 1926, Box 4, Entry 146, Division of Wildlife Refuges, Fish and Wildlife Service, RG 22, NA; Leighton Hope, "Reported Conference on Fishing on the Pacific Coast to Be Held at San Diego, California," 24 April 1926, Records Concerning Relations with Mexico, Box 1, Division of Wildlife Refuges, Fish and Wildlife Service, RG 22, NA.

<sup>19</sup>. Sumner Welles to Lawrence Duggan, 26 April 1940, 710. H Wild Life/173, RG 59, NA.

1943, the State Department agreed to fund the newly-created Nature Protection Section of the Pan American Union for a period of three years to carry out the provisions of the Convention on Wild Life. More than a third of the funds were to cover the salary of a biologist who would oversee implementation in Latin America; according to the State Department, "because of the advanced development of such work in the United States, the biologist would be a North American -- and he would... present to influential, intelligent and stable elements in the other American Republics some of our proudest accomplishments, in fields that have a strong interest and appeal to our neighbors south of the Rio Grande."

Though concerned principally with the science and administration of wildlife, the Convention was an essentially Pan American document in its emphasis on American leadership, recent precedent in American scientific and cultural advancement, and US government designs on influencing "intelligent and stable elements" in Latin America with policy alternatives that would bring order to the region and normalize inter-American relations. During the 1910s and 1920s, the conservation movement had weakened somewhat as a result of negative public associations of federal power with preservation. But thanks in part to a renewed popularity for government intervention during the depression years of the 1930s, conservation reemerged as a core component of New Deal era interventionist federal programs and helped inspire the Pan American Convention a few years later. The founding of the Soil Erosion Service in 1933 and the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934 reasserted government control over land use. The Taylor Act withdrew from settlement remaining public lands and ended the longstanding federal policy of turning public lands over to private ownership as a matter of course. The government drive for environmental renewal extended to Puerto Rico. American officials saw forestry initiatives and a lumber industry as an environmental imperative, but also as a means for social and economic advance in an impoverished region.

Two generations of national parks designations that included the opening of Yellowstone in 1872

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<sup>20</sup>. Division of Science and Education, Department of State, Project Authorization, nd [1943], 710. H Wild Life/176, RG 59, NA.

and Grand Canyon in 1908 also fueled the Pan American Wild Life Convention as well as the creation of national parks in several Latin American countries. Concern over declining species of rare plants and animals did not constitute the core basis for national parks in the US; of more importance was the effort to define a national identity in natural beauty. This is evident as well in Pan American convention language on parks, which makes reference to "superlative scenery" and "national significance," and in the definition of nature monuments as areas of aesthetic or historic interest. At the same time, the 1930s marked a period unprecedented influence of scientific thinking on the creation of American national parks; this was evident in the weight of Interior Department, Smithsonian Institution and other scientists in the drafting of the Pan American Convention. To an extent far greater than earlier national parks designations, the 1934 Great Smoky Mountain National Park and the Shenandoah National Park (1935) were justified on the basis of botanical richness and came in the aftermath of extensive scientific analysis of the bioregions concerned.

As late as 1931, wildlife preservation still stressed commercial and social objectives over environmental ones. In his report for the year ending on 30 June 1931, Bureau of Biological Survey Chief Paul G. Redington highlighted the government purchase of park land as a means of relieving landowners of pressure and controlling pests to agriculture. Acquisitions of land for bird refuges were directed at regions where droughts had severely reduced bird numbers -- but also where land held low productive value and where landowners would otherwise have little opportunity for sale. Redington noted that this strategy had already helped somewhat to relieve unfavorable economic conditions in the US. Redington called attention to the Bureau's economic functions, including its leadership in the control of "injurious" forms of wildlife and its research into fur farming, rabbit raising, and the reindeer industry. But as the decade wore on, the Bureau and other government agencies -- while still concerned about the plight of farmers and the dangers

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<sup>21</sup>. Beinart and Coates, 75, 76; Alfred Runte, National Parks: The American Experience (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska

of injurious animals -- deemphasized the commercial and the human components of preservation, turning increasingly to preservation for preservation's sake.

In the decade before the Pan American Convention, the US government bought vast expanses of land to establish parks and preserves, including what would become Shenandoah National Park, as well as wildlife refuges in the areas hardest hit by the Dust Bowl. But government officials joined a public chorus demanding still greater environmental protections and raising the specter of environmental degradation as a consequence of government projects. In 1936, the Chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey (US Department of Agriculture), Ira N. Gabrielson gave a speech lamenting that with the exception of provisions for migratory birds under international treaty obligations, there was no "definite Federal recognition of wildlife as a national resource." No government program preserved wildlife, though there were national forestry, irrigation, flood control, and a range of other programs. Meanwhile, the national high way and agriculture programs made the preservation of species more precarious; in the latter case, more efficient cultivation meant the destruction of windbreaks, hedges, and patches of underbrush. Gabrielson also pointed out that there was no national program of wildlife cooperation between Washington and the states, and that while the federal government controlled more than 15 million acres in national parks and monuments set aside for spectacular scenic or historic value (and run primarily from that standpoint), no more than 4 million acres had been preserved primarily for wildlife. Although by no means its primary purpose, US compliance with the Convention was tantamount to the government program for wildlife protection that Gabrielson and others sought.

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Press, 1979), 11.

<sup>22</sup>. Gabrielson, "A National Program for Wildlife Restoration", Speech delivered at the American Wildlife Conference, Washington, 7 February 1936; Harry B. Hawes, "The Four Vital Factors of Wildlife Conservation," Address delivered before the North American Wildlife Conference, 3-7 February 1936, Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Wildlife Refuges, Box 19, Entry 146, RG 22, NA; Department of Agriculture, "Biological Survey Chief Hails National Movement for Wild Life," Press Release, 25 January 1934.



In addition to mounting public concern for preservation and federal government authority in the protection of wildlife, the strength of the relatively new science of ecology also helped fuel the 1940 Convention. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries specimen collection for natural history museums emphasized classification, examination of dead specimens, and recording proportions. The study of live animal behavior was a separate discipline, undertaken at zoological gardens. At the time of the Convention, there was an important change taking place in the nature of scientific inquiry. Investigators were becoming less preoccupied with bringing large animals back to "civilization" for study (a problem explored, for example, in the film King Kong, released in 1933); scientists began working increasingly in animals' natural habitats. The Pan American Convention was meant in part to facilitate that transformation in the scientific world by making research in Latin American parks and reserves more open to American naturalists. In another trend underlined by the Convention, scientists had begun to explore the interdependence of all plant and animal life. In the 1920s and 1930s, the US National Park Service -- as well as federal authorities in Cuba, Mexico, and a handful of other Latin American countries -- still slaughtered coyotes, wolves, and other predators in projects designed to preserve their prey. But there was little attention to the larger impact of these kills not only on park populations of deer and other prey, but on the plants now consumed in much larger quantities by the animals spared wolf or coyote attack. The Convention emphasis on cataloguing nature reflected a reorientation of American preservation objectives around larger objectives of environmental preservation beyond the problem of predators and their prey.<sup>23</sup>

In the creation of comprehensive new international standards for wildlife preservation, there was little attention to cultural alternatives in Latin America as to what might define parks, monuments, or

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<sup>23</sup>. Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 130-135; Thomas R. Dunlap, Saving America's Wildlife: Ecology and the American Mind, 1850-1990 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Susan Flader, Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude Toward Deer, Wolves and Forests (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1974); Frank Thone, "Americas Unite to Save Wildlife," Everyweek Magazine (Cleveland), 15 June 1941.

preserves. There was no reference to Indian spiritual conceptions of land, nature, or landscape in the Convention. Moreover, intrinsic to the American scientific orientation of the Convention language, drafted around advances in ecology, and the research conducted by the committee of experts in preparation for the Convention, was a distancing of indigenous peoples from the designation of wildlife preserves. The Pan American Union had, in fact, recognized Latin America's distinct indigenous cultures in the past. In the 1920s and 1930s, it had designated as historically important several archaeological sites. But like the Convention on Wild Life Preservation, this was less a recognition of traditional native cultures in Latin America than a reflection of American scientific (in this case archaeological) advances that, in turn, held up great civilizations of the past. As in other Pan American venues, the Wild Life Convention imagined Latin America and Latin Americans not so much as they were or wished to be seen, but through American perceptions and definitions of the region.

In most Latin American countries, recognition of an indigenous vision of parks or wildlife preservation remained decades away. In Argentina, a 1934 decree authorized the capture of vicuZas by native peoples for purposes of domestication. This and dozens of other Latin American provisions specifically directed at aboriginal people were now subject to classification systems designated through the Pan American Union and associated national scientific bodies. In Brazil, the 1917 civil code declared native peoples legally "incapable", a child-like status common in the jurisprudence of several nations. The 1937 Constitution continued to permit the Brazilian government to deny property rights to native peoples, issuing colonial era usufruct permits in their place. This confirmed both a weak legal position for aboriginal peoples, as well as their marginal uncivilized status. Not only was there little opportunity for native peoples to exercise their views on wildlife preservation at national or international levels, but the Brazilian government

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<sup>24</sup>. Judith K. Kenny, "Climate, Race, and Imperial Authority: The Symbolic Landscape of the British Hill Station in India," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 85:4 (1995): 694-714; T. Barnes and J. Duncan, *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1992); H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London:

specifically challenged native land claims and other requests for distinct aboriginal rights at the Eighth Pan American Conference by putting forward a motion that rejected the designation of identifiable ethnic minorities in Latin America. In many countries, the 1930s marked a consolidation of central government authority over indigenous communities. In Argentina, the frontier regions of Formosa and Chaco were still under "threat" of Indian attack as late as the early 1930s. In 1927, the Chilean government abruptly ended special land rights accorded to Araucanians in a deliberate effort to erase their integrity as a community. Pan American Wild Life Convention provisions for the creation of park lands and preserves further jeopardized inherent and treaty-based indigenous land rights and cultural sovereignty across the Americas.

The Wild Life Convention represented one of several US Pan American initiatives in the late 1930s and early 1940s designed to break down the operations of the Pan American Union into more technically-based meetings and bureaucracies. In a compartmentalized Pan Americanism, American authorities hoped to exert more direct influence on the Pan American Union but in a manner that stressed problem-solving as well as practical, immediate solutions. The key imperative in US Pan American policy at this time was the Second World War and the need to shore up security in the Americas. Beginning in 1939, the Pan American Union launched a series of Meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Less unwieldy than the larger Inter-American meetings, the Foreign Ministers meetings were more focused around US-directed strategic initiatives. Often more informal as well, they tackled specific problems requiring immediate attention and prompt decisions. The result of the first such meeting was the General Declaration of Neutrality and the establishment of a Security Zone in the Western hemisphere. The second Foreign Ministers Meeting came

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Routledge, 1994).

<sup>25</sup>. Claudia Menezes, "Estado y minorías étnicas en Brasil," *América Indígena*, vol. 49 (1989): 158; Roque Roldán Ortega, "Notas sobre la legalidad en la tenencia de la tierra y el manejo de los recursos naturales de territorios indígenas en regiones de selva tropical de varios países suramericanos," in *Derechos territoriales indígenas y ecología en selvas tropicales del América*, edited by Martha Cárdenas, Hernán Darío Correa, and Mauricio Gómez Barón (Bogotá: CEREC/GAIA Fundación, 1992), 47-48; Leo S. Rowe, *Documentary Material on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in Latin America*, vol. 1, part 1 (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1940), 7; Daniel W. Gade, "Landscape, System, and Identity in the Post-Conquest

at the time the Wild Life Convention was released, in July 1940. In Havana, ministers responded to the threat that European possessions in the Americas might be transferred to new European powers as a result of wartime upheaval. In 1940, an Inter-American Institute on Indian Affairs was created encompassing all matters relating to native populations. In 1939, the Inter-American Financial and Economic Advisory Committee was created. Like the Wild Life Convention and the Foreign Ministers Conferences, the Financial and Economic Advisory Committee was meant as a quick response body, designed to solve problems efficiently and in a manner that previous Pan American bureaucracies had proved unable to do. Also in 1939, technical and scientific progress in the United States was recognized in the creation of the Inter-American Radio Office. Wildlife, then, was only one new area of Pan American concern in the 1930s and early 1940s accenting pragmatism, scientific problem solving, and US direction.

The Wild Life Convention never achieved the success its planners envisioned. It proved impossible for the Pan American Union to monitor adherence to the pact. International law proved ineffectual in regulating illegal threats to wildlife and parks. At the same time, the convention achieved some goals. It helped entrench preservation policy in many countries, served as a starting point for the international classification of endangered species in the Americas, and contributed to the exchange of scientific information on wildlife and parks. In the US, it prompted an accelerated interest in domestic and inter-American preservation; a proposed advisory group for an Inter-American Conference on Conservation of Renewable Natural Resources in 1948 included the American Farm Economic Association, the American Fisheries Society, the National Audubon Society, the National Grange, among more than forty other groups. In addition, the National Parks Association used the Convention to buttress complaints against Congress for weak protection of national parks against mining interests. The Wild Life Convention also represented a new Pan Americanism in the 1930s and 1940s, characterized by renewed American efforts

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Andes," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 82, no. 3 (1992): 460-467.

to influence the direction of Pan American policy, the compartmentalization of Pan American Union activities, and the growing technical orientation of the body. Finally, it helped initiate an accelerated inter-American interest in environmental issues during the Cold War period, beginning with the transfer of the Barro Colorado island research station in Panama to the Smithsonian Institution in 1946 for use by scientists from throughout the Americas.

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<sup>26</sup>. Division of International Conference, US Department of State, "Proposed Members of the Advisory Group," 7 September 1948, Box 100, Alexander Wetmore Papers, SI; "Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation," Science, 20 June 1941.