

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPING
ECOTOURISM IN THE SAN FRANCISCO MENÉNDEZ SECTOR
OF
EL IMPOSIBLE NATIONAL PARK, EL SALVADOR**

**A
PROJECT**

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ABSTRACT

El Imposible, the largest and most biologically diverse National Park in El Salvador, has been co-managed by SalvaNATURA, a Salvadoran environmental NGO, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment since 1991. The Park protects some of the country's few remaining sources of uncontaminated water, and serves as El Salvador's final refuge for several threatened animal species. One of the biggest challenges facing the Park's managers is that approximately 30 families inhabit the Park, 23 of which are located within the study area. With a high poverty level and few employment opportunities, the families depend on agriculture and the natural resources found within El Imposible for survival. These families inhabited El Imposible prior to it being declared a national park in 1989, and many do not have the option of relocating, if so desired, due to financial constraints.

SalvaNATURA, in recent years, has been encouraging ecotourism in the San Francisco Menéndez sector of El Imposible through the implementation of small-scale, community-based projects. The primary aim has been to conserve and protect the Park's biodiversity, while also creating alternative forms of income generating activities for local peoples, promoting environmental education, and sustainably developing the area as an attractive tourist destination. Many of the projects have not met with success, due in part to lack of follow-up and an absence of communication between SalvaNATURA and local residents. Two essential elements of ecotourism development are community-based control and the establishment of good communication between stakeholders, both of which are lacking in El Imposible.

The goal of this research was an assessment of the potential for ecotourism development in the San Francisco Menéndez sector of El Imposible National Park based upon the attitudes and opinions of local peoples and park managers. SalvaNATURA sees ecotourism development as a viable option for El Imposible, but has failed to ask community members their opinions on the matter.

The research design included a multi-method approach, consisting of informal, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and analysis of written materials. The aim was to purposefully select community members and park managers with knowledge of the research topic, and who could best address the research questions. The researcher lived in close proximity to the residents as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer for 18 months prior to the interviews.

Research findings show that the majority of local peoples support ecotourism development in El Imposible and believe the area is an attractive tourist destination, but think there is a lack of communication and trust between the community and managers; many are convinced that SalvaNATURA does not want to work with the community. Community members are willing to work with SalvaNATURA, and believe that relations between the two groups can improve through more frequent contact and regularly scheduled meetings. There is obvious potential for ecotourism development in El Imposible, but there are many issues that need to be addressed for it to become a reality.

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List of Acronyms

ADESCO	Local Development Association
COAL	Local Advisory Committee
CORSATUR	Salvadoran Corporation of Tourism
ISTA	Institute of Agrarian Reform
ISTU	Salvadoran Institute of Tourism
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MAG	Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry
MARN.....	Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment
MiTUR	Ministry of Tourism
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PANAVIS	Salvadoran National Parks and Wildlife Service
PNEI	El Imposible National Park
SANP	Salvadoran National Protected Areas System

** Acronyms have been translated from Spanish to English

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to determine the potential for ecotourism development in the San Francisco Menéndez (San Chico) sector of El Imposible National Park (PNEI), El Salvador, based upon the attitudes and opinions of local peoples and park managers. El Imposible is not only El Salvador's largest and most biologically diverse national park, but is also considered "home" to approximately 30 families. The families, all of which lived in the area prior to it being declared a national park in 1989, have little access to employment opportunities in the area, and are dependent upon agriculture and the Park's natural resources for daily survival. They live in extreme poverty and do not have the option of relocating outside the Park, if so desired, due to financial constraints.

The Park is co-managed by SalvaNATURA, a Salvadoran environmental NGO, and the Salvadoran Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MARN). SalvaNATURA, in recent years, has been encouraging ecotourism in the San Chico sector of El Imposible, which is one of two main entrances to the area, through the implementation of small-scale, community-based projects. The primary aim has been to conserve and protect the Park's biodiversity, while also creating alternative forms of income generating activities for local peoples living within the Park's boundaries, promoting environmental education, and sustainably developing the area as an attractive tourist destination. Many of the small-scale projects have not met with success, due in part to lack of follow-up and an absence of communication between Park managers and the local community. Two essential components of ecotourism development are community-based control and the establishment of good communication between all stakeholders, both of which are lacking in El Imposible.

SalvaNATURA sees ecotourism development as a viable option for El Imposible, but has failed to ask community members their opinions on the matter. The researcher set-out to capture the opinions and attitudes of all stakeholder groups involved in El Imposible to determine whether or not there truly is potential for ecotourism development. The research design included a multi-method approach, consisting of informal, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and analysis of written materials. The aim was to purposefully select both community members and Park managers, both from SalvaNATURA and MARN, with knowledge of the research topic and who could best address the research questions.

The main issues that will be addressed in this paper include:

1. History of conflict between managers and the local community, and how that has affected ecotourism development in the San Chico sector of El Imposible.
2. Whether or not the local community supports SalvaNATURA's development of ecotourism in El Imposible.
3. Managers' opinions on ecotourism development in the area, and the role the community within the Park should play in decision-making pertaining to its development.

2. DISCUSSION ON ECOTOURISM

2.1. Introduction

Since the 1970's, tourism has been one of the strongest and fastest growing industries worldwide (Boo, 1990). The tourism industry is increasingly having an impact on protected areas worldwide, and the rising number of tourists presents both threats and opportunities (Goodwin, 1996) to natural resources, and those who rely on them for survival. In recent decades, there has been a surge of interest in nature-based travel. More people are choosing to visit places that provide a sense of adventure, and are rich in natural resources. Many of the places people travel to are located in developing countries throughout the world, where indigenous and local peoples face a constant struggle to survive.

Ecotourism, which is frequently confused with nature-based travel, is a form of travel that enables people to visit some of the most awe-inspiring, and oftentimes remote, places throughout the world. It is distinguished from nature-based tourism, which refers only generally to tourism activity in a natural setting, and from adventure tourism, which involves physically exerting activities in a natural setting (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1998). Unlike nature-based travel, ecotourism not only promotes conservation of natural resources, but also provides the local peoples of an area with income-generating opportunities. It is a form of tourism that is based on nature travel, and includes principles of sustainability (International Ecotourism Society, 2004).

2.2. What is ecotourism? A look at its goals and objectives.

The term 'ecotourism' was first coined in the early 1980's by Hector Ceballos-Lascuráin of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and to this day there still exists a lack of agreement on a single, accepted definition. The Ecotourism Society definition is one of the simplest, and most widely accepted. It defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." A more detailed definition given by Ceballos-Lascuráin (1996) is:

Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local population.

Ecotourism is considered to be the fastest growing sector in the travel industry. It is different from most other forms of tourism in that it focuses not simply on the type of leisure activity, but also on its impact (negative and positive) and the responsibilities of both the tourist and those in the tourism industry (Honey, 1999); it is the tourism industry's leader in sustainability worldwide.

It is agreed upon by most participants that ecotourism should be characterized by the following principles:

1. Tourism activity is carried out in a relatively undisturbed natural setting.
2. Negative impacts of tourism activity are minimized.
3. Tourism activity assists in conserving the natural and cultural heritage.
4. It actively involves local communities in the process, providing benefits to them.
5. It contributes to sustainable development and is a profitable business.
6. Education/appreciation/interpretation component (of both natural and cultural heritage) must be present (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 2002).

The main objectives of ecotourism include: generation of financial support for the protection and management of natural resources, generation of economic benefits for residents living near natural resources, and generation of local support for the conservation of natural resources (due in part to the economic benefits) (Lindberg, Enriquez, & Sproule, 1996). Envisioned as a positive approach towards sustainable development, ecotourism programs and projects are becoming somewhat commonplace throughout the natural areas of the world (Rome, 1999). Not only are they found throughout many developing countries, with Costa Rica and Kenya being two of the most widely known, but they also exist in many developed countries, including the United States and Australia.

Ecotourism is the center of many developing countries' national economic development strategies and conservation efforts. A growing number of international conservation organizations, including IUCN, the Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and the World Wildlife Fund, have established ecotourism-linked departments, projects, and studies (Honey, 1999). There are also a variety of both nationally and regionally based ecotourism societies in countries and regions throughout the world.

Ecotourism projects occur on a variety of scales, ranging from village-based initiatives to small-scale joint initiatives with the private sector, to multi-million dollar private sector development (Epler Wood, 1998). Although not always true, small-scale development is generally less invasive than large-scale resorts and mass tourism because it introduces less stress on the social systems and physical environment of the given area (Long & Wall, 1995, as cited by Timothy & White, 1999). It is important to keep in mind, however, that "small-scale initiatives are likely to have only small-scale successes," and the ability of community-based ecotourism projects to address larger conservation threats in the long run is uncertain (Stem, Lassoie, Lee, & Deshler, 2003b). Community participation is crucial in ecotourism development in order to ensure that benefits actually reach the individuals who reside in the destination areas. One of the main underlying themes of all community-based ecotourism initiatives is that benefits, power, and decision-making lie in the hands of the local residents (Langholz, 1999).

Community-based ecotourism has great potential for creating long-lasting, positive changes for local peoples and natural resources throughout the developing world, but it certainly is not without its shortcomings. As Ceballos-Lascuráin clearly stated, “since ecotourism is a human invention, as all human inventions it is imperfect...there is no place in the world where ecotourism is happening in a ‘pure’ form” (2002). A crucial question that should always be asked is: can community-based ecotourism provide benefits to the local peoples of a given area, while also conserving the natural resources of the area? Ecotourism is designed to benefit both local peoples and natural resources without exploitation, and a project is successful only if *both* entities gain something from it (i.e. income, training, protected habitat areas, etc.).

Ecotourism’s appeal is its potential to provide economic benefits to local peoples while simultaneously conserving natural resources through low-impact, non-consumptive use. Some of the positive changes that can result from ecotourism include: employment and income generating opportunities, which lead to an improved standard of living; training and other educational opportunities; improved infrastructure; increased business for local stores; preservation of cultural traditions; maintenance of social, cultural, and spiritual values; improved self-esteem; and conservation of the natural environment. Many indigenous peoples have found ecotourism to be a worthwhile development alternative because it is a means of marketing traditional knowledge, and it allows for the utilization of natural resources without exploitation of the land or people. Some indigenous communities have become more organized as a result of ecotourism, and they are able to develop it on their own terms. It has the ability to “empower” local communities by helping them develop “a sense of pride in and awareness of the importance of their natural resources and control over their own development” (Scheyvens, 2000). Ecotourism also provides indigenous communities with international support from both environmental and community development organizations, which enables them to make more informed decisions as to the use of their natural resources.

While ecotourism has the potential of serving as a great development tool, many studies do show that it does not always produce positive results, and instead creates many challenges. Ecotourism’s success may actually be one of its greatest downfalls in that with increased interest in an area comes a greater number of tourists. If promising ecotourism projects are not prepared for the influx of tourists it may receive, or if it is not managed properly, negative impacts can quickly ensue. The costs of ecotourism can include, but are not limited to, the following: local peoples being marketed as objects; social inequality; increased access to drugs and alcohol; uncontrolled population growth; failure to provide widespread economic benefits; local peoples receiving limited access to decision making; contamination in the form of solid waste and noise; habitat disturbance; forest degradation from trail use; urbanization, which can bring with it a loss of customs and values; and leakage of tourism revenues to industrialized

nations (Nash, 2001; Place, 1991; Rodriguez, 1999; Stem, Lassoie, Lee, Deshler, & Schelhas, 2003a; Weinberg, Bellows, & Ekster, 2002).

Even though ecotourism has the ability to generate many benefits, the potential for negative impacts from unplanned tourism is quite great, as was previously mentioned. Many regions of the world, including Belize, Costa Rica, and Ecuador, are experiencing rapid, unplanned growth of ecotourism in remote, rural areas (Epler Wood, 1998). There have been problems related to the social and environmental impact of tourists moving through local communities without active community participation and/or management, and the increase in ecotourism in recent decades has attracted many unqualified guides who sell their services in gateway communities. Also of great concern is the viability of many community-based ecotourism ventures. Communities oftentimes choose ecotourism over other forms of development, but the viability of their choice is not always supported by the existing interest in the marketplace (Epler Wood, 1998). As ecotourism popularity continues to flourish, there is growing concern that local communities that are entering the market are doing so without a good understanding as to how to make their product “attractive” to potential tourists.

2.3. Ecotourism in Latin America

Ecotourism is widespread throughout much of Latin America, and, in 1997, it was reported that \$21 billion was invested in it (Honey, 1999). Review of the literature on Latin America, however, clearly illustrates that the standards of ecotourism are not always met, and that ecotourism can have negative effects on both the local people and the natural resources. Studies conducted within the last ten years have shown a variety of results, thus confirming the multi-faceted nature of ecotourism.

Whether or not ecotourism provides benefits for local community members and simultaneously protects the natural resources of the surrounding area depends on several factors. Oftentimes community-based ecotourism may provide benefits in the form of increased income and training to local peoples, but the natural resources may still be exploited to some degree. There are also instances where community-based ecotourism results in increased benefits for the natural resources, rather than the local peoples who are involved. Review of some of the available literature shows that the concept of “success” of ecotourism is not well defined. It certainly is not a cut-and-dry issue, and, as a whole, ecotourism, regardless of the scale of the project, is far from perfect in Latin America, as is the case in much of the developing world.

Costa Rica, where the number of foreign tourists visiting national parks rose 330 percent between 1985 and 1991 (Nash, 2001), is a country where ecotourism has been extensively promoted as both a conservation and development strategy, and projects have been in existence there since the term “ecotourism” was first coined. In the area around Costa Rica’s Corcovado National Park, it was found that local peoples have “largely abandoned” environmentally destructive practices in communities where

tourism has been an economically viable opportunity (Stem, et al., 2003a). It was determined, however, that time may play an important role in this result in that when individuals have full-time employment opportunities, they simply have less free time to hunt or cut trees; the change in destructive behavior may not actually be due to increased environmental awareness (Stem, et al., 2003a). If ecotourism only succeeds in keeping community members busy, or in creating economic incentives that make forests more valuable, it will fail as an effective conservation strategy. There will be lingering questions as to community members' commitment to conservation if attention is not given to creating awareness and/or respect for nature. Without some degree of a change in attitude, it seems quite unlikely that this ecotourism project will actually be sustainable.

The main conclusion drawn from this study is that "ecotourism should be considered a component of a larger plan that addresses protected area management through a variety of avenues..." (Stem, et al., 2003a). If community-based ecotourism initiatives such as this one were part of a larger plan, then perhaps it would be more successful in benefiting both the natural resources and the local communities simultaneously.

Belize is another popular ecotourism destination in Latin America that has received much attention by researchers. The Community Baboon Sanctuary (CBS), located in central Belize, is an excellent example of a community-owned private reserve that has experienced both the negative and positive effects of ecotourism (Alexander, 2000). Established in order to protect a black howler monkey population and to promote income generating opportunities, this community-based ecotourism initiative has resulted in an uneven distribution of jobs, inconsistencies with management, and the feeling among residents that they have very limited control over the development process that is occurring all around them. Regardless of such problems, most residents living either within or near the CBS have positive feelings towards protecting the howler monkeys and their habitat, and they feel that their perceived benefits (infrastructure and revenue) from tourism-related activities outweigh the cost of having to protect resources on their land. Even though many residents feel as though neither their households nor themselves are directly benefiting from ecotourism, this project has benefited the howler monkeys in that their numbers have increased (Alexander, 2000). Given that there is local ownership of a protected resource, a variety of ecotourism possibilities (canoeing, bird watching, horseback riding, and howler viewing), and a local population that seems to understand the importance of protecting their natural resources, the CBS has the potential of being a sustainable development project. With increased local participation in management decisions and more equal distribution of benefits, the CBS could become an excellent example of a well-balanced, sustainable community-based ecotourism project.

It is important to reiterate that success in ecotourism is achieved only when both the local communities and natural resources are positively affected by the project. Some individuals, however,

measure success by the amount of income that is generated, or the size of the area that is protected. A study (Timothy & White, 1999) conducted on the southern periphery of Belize found that even though ecotourism development in the area was not generating large profits, it still appeared to be successful. The area of Toledo, which is underdeveloped, isolated, and rich in natural resources, is under the local control of the Toledo Ecotourism Association, an entirely indigenous effort. With the continued growth of local control over time, community members are ensuring their ability to develop ecotourism villages and trails at their own pace, which in turn aids in the prevention of “leakages” of income to outside agencies. The area’s isolation also helps to promote the principles of sustainability because only small numbers of tourists visit the area. While many ecotourism projects throughout Latin America may be wrought with problems, the Toledo Ecotourism Association is truly an example of successful ecotourism. It is a community-based ecotourism initiative that is under local control, has some degree of income generation (even if it is minimal), and is helping to protect the natural resources of the area; the integrity of both the local culture and environment is not in jeopardy.

The general belief surrounding conservation and development is that interventions designed to increase local residents’ incomes will lead to a reduction in livelihood strategies that are ecologically destructive (Borrini-Feyerabend, 1996; Brandon & Margoulis, 1996; Tisdell, 1995). Contrary to this belief, research in the Maya Biosphere Reserve of Guatemala shows that economic improvement does not always result in biodiversity conservation (Langholz, 1999). Results of a study showed a declining level of dependence on destructive practices, with 2/3 of all households in the reserve reporting that they were less dependent on forest products than in previous years. A few households, however, reported that they wanted to use their newly generated income to increase the size of their farms, but were unable to because they could not find workers, or did not have quite enough money to do so. These results suggest that income opportunities from ecotourism do relieve pressure on the reserve, but there are clearly other factors that require attention, such as the fact that women receive the income that is generated from the ecotourism project, while the men are the ones who are deforesting the land through agriculture and logging. Even though many households are less dependent on destructive forest practices, such a sentiment could quickly change if something happened that prevented tourists from reaching the area, such as military-guerilla activity.

This example is one of many that show the complexity of ecotourism, and how its success and sustainability are determined by a multitude of factors. It brings to mind the thought of whether or not a developmental strategy such as ecotourism can be considered successful if only *some* of the people benefit, and/or only a *portion* of the natural resources are protected. What is the sustainable level of ecotourism development, and how can it accurately be measured? A look at the literature shows that there is no cut and dry answer to either of these questions. This example illustrates the fact that “ecotourism or

alternative tourism is at best a micro solution to what is essentially a macro problem” (Wheeller, 1991, as cited by Liu, 2003). Ecotourism can certainly aid in both the achievement of a better standard of living for local peoples and the protection of natural resources, but there are many locations throughout the developing world where the problems are too numerous and/or complex for ecotourism to be successful on its own.

Lack of communication and trust between local groups and the private sector has been one of the main barriers for development in Latin American countries. While the private sector may consider local peoples to be “untruthful and indolent,” local organizations may view private ventures as “abusive institutions eager to exploit indigenous culture and resources” (Rodriguez, 1999). When ecotourism projects are being designed and managed with a great deal of assistance from the private sector, local peoples run the risk of exploitation; they may lose whatever control they had over their natural resources while also receiving few economic benefits.

“Top-down,” centralized environmental management in areas such as Mexico’s El Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve has hindered the “development of conservation infrastructures that integrate local needs, concerns, and priorities into the program planning” (Young, 2000). As two residents of the reserve interestingly stated, “In reality, we don’t know what the reserve is for...if there were a reserve, it shouldn’t be in name only, it should be set up to take care of the lagoon (Young, 2000).” How are community members going to benefit in any way if they do not know they live in a reserve, or even understand what a reserve is? When there is an absence of community-based control, it is difficult for local peoples to be actively involved, whether they want to or not, in what is taking place around them. Without the establishment of good communication between the private sector, local communities, and other stakeholders (i.e. government, NGOs), an ecotourism project, such as the one in Mexico, will not succeed, especially in terms of providing benefits to the local peoples.

2.4. Conclusion

Review of the literature brings to light conflicting evidence and mixed feelings of ecotourism’s contribution to conservation and its ability to serve as a sustainable development strategy. Many studies have shown that ecotourism is not necessarily a non-consumptive use of natural resources, as many believe, and it oftentimes does not result in the adoption of environmentally friendly attitudes and beliefs, on behalf of local peoples, towards the use of natural resources. While such aspects of ecotourism development are essential to examine, it is also important to consider the overall effect ecotourism has on the tourist’s experience. Whether or not they come away with a greater appreciation of the local culture and environment as a result of their experiences is very much dependent on the quality of the ecotourism services provided.

Some of the main issues preventing benefits from being generated include continued dependence on destructive practices even with the availability of alternative income opportunities, lack of local control, uneven distribution of benefits among community members, and lack of communication. Ecotourism may not only adversely impact conservation, but it also has the capability of leading to undesirable social, cultural, and economic consequences as a result of unintended “side effects;” one example of which is the “commodification” of culture where people and their cultures become marketable commodities (Stem, et al., 2003b). Rather than view ecotourism as a non-consumptive use of resources, it should perhaps instead be considered as being less consumptive than other forms of tourism and development that are in existence throughout much of the developing world.

As discussed in this paper, there are a multitude of factors that influence ecotourism and whether or not it can generate income for local people while, at the same time, providing incentives to conserve natural resources. It is important to keep in mind that the success of ecotourism depends, in part, on the size of the project and the people who are involved; the steps towards ecotourism development, and their subsequent effects, are very much case-specific. Ecotourism has its share of both critics and supporters, and examples from throughout Latin America and the rest of the world point to the fact that it has a long way to go if both people and natural resources are to benefit in a sustainable way. It may not be reaching its full potential in many countries, but the literature does show that there are situations where both the environment and local people are benefiting, to at least some degree, from ecotourism initiatives.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. General Information about El Salvador

El Salvador, comparable in size to Massachusetts, is the smallest country in Central America (roughly 21,000 square kilometers) and borders Guatemala to the west, Honduras to the east, and the North Pacific Ocean to the south. With a population of approximately 7.1 million people (CIA, 2009), 52% of which is women and 47.3% men, it is the most densely populated country in Central America. It is a country that has a relatively young population, as 61.6% of Salvadorans are under the age of 30, and approximately 60% of the population lives in urban areas (MARN, 2006). El Salvador leads the region in remittances per capita, and they are among the nation’s largest sources of income, nearly equaling income earned from exports.

Known for the friendliness of its people, El Salvador, unfortunately, is a county that has experienced much turmoil in recent decades. The country’s 12 year Civil War came to a close in 1992 with the signing of a UN Peace Accord. The war claimed the lives of an estimated 75,000 individuals, caused thousands to flee their country in search of safe refuge, destroyed communities, depleted resources, and left El Salvador in poverty. With a high population density and approximately 49% of the

rural population living in poverty (MARN, 2006), exploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation is a serious problem facing the country.

3.2. Environment

El Salvador is faced with a myriad of environmental issues, including deforestation, soil erosion, air and water pollution, contamination of soils from the disposal of toxic wastes, and over-exploitation of natural resources. Due to the social and economic pressure of having a population density of over 300 inhabitants per square kilometer, El Salvador's natural resources cannot meet the ever-increasing demand of the growing population, over 35% of which live in poverty (MARN, 2006).

Human activities, over time, have led to a loss of ecosystems, and have left El Salvador with the distinction of being the most deforested country in the region, possessing a mere 2% of its original forest cover, which is defined as untouched forest that remains in its original condition. It is estimated that only 12.6% (2,665 square kilometers) of the territory is forested, with coffee plantations accounting for about 10 percent of the forested area. Much of this deforestation is due to El Salvador's agricultural history as an exporter of indigo (a plant that produces a dye), coffee, and cotton. Until the end of the 19th century El Salvador was a main producer and exporter of indigo and, beginning in the mid-1800s, focus was shifted to coffee production. Cotton production experienced a shorter lifespan, taking place from the 1950s to the 1980s. With focus being placed on production and exportation, little attention was given to the effects such practices were having on the natural environment.

In addition to deforestation, water contamination is widespread throughout El Salvador, greatly affecting the health and well being of Salvadorans. Over 90% of all surface water in El Salvador is believed to be contaminated, due in part to inadequate management of water resources, lack of forest cover, and unsustainable agricultural practices. Erosion of soils is a major problem in El Salvador, further contributing to the contamination of water. Approximately 70% of the country's soil has erosion problems, with 40% categorized as severe erosion. (MARN, 2003)

Despite the many problems facing El Salvador's natural environment, the country does contain a great deal of biological richness. It is part of the Mesoamerican Biodiversity Hotspot, which spans most of Central America and includes all subtropical and tropical ecosystems from Central Mexico to the Panama Canal. The biodiversity of El Salvador is comprised of 1,410 species of vertebrates, including over 500 bird species, 3,411 species of plants, and 130 species of amphibians and reptiles. Of all species found in El Salvador, approximately 720 are threatened with extinction (295 animals and 425 plants) (MARN, 2003). El Salvador is also included in the Mesoamerican Biologic Corridor project, which is a conservation initiative to link protected areas between the United States and Colombia, running the entire length of Central America.

3.2.i. Natural Protected Areas in El Salvador

El Salvador's natural resources are under constant pressure from agricultural use and subsistence activities, and a great deal of environmental degradation has taken place over the years. There is a growing need for the development of infrastructure of protected areas, as such steps are crucial to the sustainability of the future of El Salvador's ecosystems, and the people who depend on them.

In an effort to protect El Salvador's remaining biodiversity and conserve its natural resources, there has been a move in recent decades to establish natural protected areas throughout the country. The IUCN defines a protected area as "an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means" (Weeks & Mehta, 1996). The idea of creating a national protected areas system in El Salvador began with the founding of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (PANAVIS) in 1974 under the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (MAG). By 1976, there were 47 natural protected areas declared. The agrarian reform process of the 1980's expropriated approximately 20% of country, which included 22,000 ha of potential natural protected areas that were under the jurisdiction of the Agrarian Reform Institute (ISTA). In 1990, by which point there were 118 areas under the jurisdiction of MAG, the creation of the Salvadoran Natural Protected Areas System (SANP) was first proposed. There was a bit of a "gray area" surrounding these 118 areas in that many of them pertained to ISTA, municipalities, and private landholders, yet were under the jurisdiction of MAG. In 1998, El Salvador's first national environmental law, *Ley del Medio Ambiente*, was established, simultaneously legally creating the SANP and transferring its responsibility to the newly created Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MARN).

El Salvador's 118 protected areas constitute approximately 3.03% of the country, and include a mix of State, municipal, and private lands. They are grouped into 15 conservation areas, only three of the which have official legal title; Montecristo and El Imposible National Parks have Executive Decrees and La Laguna El Jocotal has a Legislative Decree. The majority of protected areas in the system does not have clear boundaries and are considered "parks on paper" due to their unresolved legal status. MARN, unfortunately, does not have adequate economic nor human resources to complete the lengthy legalization process for such a large quantity of areas. With inadequate legal framework and minimal physical protection, El Salvador's protected areas are under constant threat. As the already dense population of El Salvador continues to grow, increased pressure is placed on these areas for the natural resources they contain. Population growth creates a higher demand for resources such as water and soil, which leads to changes in land use as urbanization spreads and land is overworked to meet agricultural needs. Biodiversity is threatened and wildlife displaced as people encroach on protected areas in search of places to live. Some of the greatest threats to El Salvador's protected areas include, but are not limited to, the

following: lack of legal status; lack of infrastructure and signs; inadequate management; people entering illegally; deforestation; unsustainable agricultural activity; and conflict with surrounding communities (MARN, 2003).

Approximately 84% of protected areas in El Salvador are owned by the State, several of which have established agreements of co-management. PANVIS, under MAG's jurisdiction, first initiated the process of involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local community development associations, commonly referred to as an ADESCO in Spanish, in the management of natural areas in the early 1990s. The first agreement was signed in 1991 between MAG and SalvaNATURA (also known as the Ecological Foundation of El Salvador) for the co-administration of El Imposible National Park. This was followed in 1994 by the signing of four similar agreements with other organizations in additional natural areas. The signing of these agreements paved the way for a new model of citizen participation in the conservation of natural areas in El Salvador. Once responsibility of the SANP was transferred to MARN in 1998, they continued with the development of co-management agreements, and went on to create the *National Strategy for the Participation of Society in the Management of Natural Protected Areas* (MARN, 2006).

As of 2006, there were 30 NGOs and one ADESCO that had established co-management agreements with MARN, 14 of which were agreements of technical cooperation (SalvaNATURA, 2008). The role(s) of the co-managers vary according to the particular protected area, but generally all co-managers are involved in the development and execution of projects, and/or the management of the area.

3.3. Tourism in El Salvador

Although El Salvador occupies a strategic position in the central region of the Central American isthmus, it does not have the status of being a popular tourist destination like many of its neighboring countries. Its foreign image is plagued by memories of the civil war that ended nearly 17 years ago, and many believe El Salvador to be an unsafe, violent country that has nothing to offer. El Salvador suffers from the reputation of being one of the most dangerous countries in the Western hemisphere, due primarily to gang-related violence. Although Salvadoran gangs are not known to target tourists, they are a major, widespread problem that requires much needed attention if the government wants to see a rise in visitation numbers to the country.

El Salvador benefits from having political and economic stability, and the government realizes tourism's potential as a useful strategy for the revitalization of the national economy. Efforts are being made, both nationally and internationally, to promote the country as a worthwhile tourist destination. Tourism activity represented 3.8% of GDP in 2005, and over \$8 million was generated from tourism in 2006, representing a 35.91% increase from the previous year (CORSAATUR, 2006).

Tourism development and promotion in El Salvador is divided among three entities. The Salvadoran Institute of Tourism (ISTU), formed in 1964, is the original institution that was responsible for promoting the country both nationally and internationally. In 1996, the responsibility of international promotion was transferred to the newly created Salvadoran Corporation of Tourism (CORSATUR). One of the main objectives of CORSATUR is to negotiate the establishment of a basic regulatory framework that allows for the development of tourism activities in an orderly, safe, and reliable environment (MiTUR, 2006). The Salvadoran Ministry of Tourism (MiTUR), established in 2004, is comprised of the Minister and Vice-Minister, among a few others, and is the main governing agency responsible for overseeing all tourism related activities. The creation of MiTUR has enabled an increase in the funneling of funds from the government to CORSATUR for the international promotion of the country.

The National Tourism Plan 2014 was created in 2006 with the aim of developing a complete strategic framework for tourism development, and providing private and public sectors with an understanding of how tourist growth should develop in a transparent manner. As of 2008, 62% of the Plan had already been implemented (personal correspondence, September 11, 2008). Due to the unexpected rapid execution of the Plan, the 2014 Plan is expected to end in 2009, and a new 2020 Plan will then be implemented.

One of the main objectives of the National Tourism Plan is to create a more positive image of El Salvador, which is being done through the development of a “brand name” for the country – *El Salvador ¡Impresionante!* The country’s slogan is: *Do you believe in love at first sight? El Salvador will conquer you. El Salvador, the essence of Central America. We have so much to offer.* Approximately \$5 million is spent yearly on publicizing the attractiveness of El Salvador throughout North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and they are working at targeting Europe and Asia as well (personal communication, September 11, 2008).

Another important objective of the Plan is to reach the point where 2 million tourists are entering the country annually, and are contributing 6% of the nation’s GDP (MiTUR, 2006). There has been an increase in the number of tourists visiting El Salvador in recent years, but there is still a long way to go before El Salvador reaches its objective of 2 million. From 2005-2006 there was an 8.97% increase in the number of foreign arrivals, with 2006 receiving a total of 1,257,952 tourists; this total far exceeded the Plan’s goal of 1,213,150 tourists for 2006 (CORSATUR, 2006).

Two of El Salvador’s greatest assets are its small size and it being centrally located in the region, both of which have become a main focus in tourism promotion. The size of the country and its well-developed road infrastructure allow for the interconnectivity of many different products, resources, and tourism zones. It is feasible, for instance, for someone to eat breakfast in San Salvador (the capital), have lunch in the mountains after a hike, and then end the day with dinner at the beach. El Salvador’s

centralized location in Central America and its easily accessible international airport make it a strategic place for holding meetings, conventions, congresses, and other types of events. Those attending meetings in El Salvador are able to “get-out” and explore the country, or at least parts of it, in the short time they are there. They are able to have the El Salvador *experience*. El Salvador also happens to be located along an internationally renowned surf break that creates world-class waves, attracting surfers from around the world. The beaches of El Salvador are one of the most well marketed tourist sectors in the country, and a lot of effort has been devoted to expanding infrastructure and ensuring that beach communities are safe for tourists.

In an effort to change peoples’ views of El Salvador as being an unsafe country for tourists, the Ministry established the National System of Tourism Security. Approximately three years ago they started creating posts for the National Tourism Police (10 existed as of September 2008), and began training police officers in a variety of skills, including helicopter rescue and underwater rescue in areas where there are severe undertows, as well as in English language skills (personal communication, September 11, 2008). El Salvador is currently the only Central American country with a National System of Tourism Security. It is hoped that the presence of tourism security will benefit the country by creating a better image, and by allowing potential tourists to feel safe and confident in traveling within El Salvador. Tourism security will create more trust in the country as a whole.

3.3.i. Types of tourism development in El Salvador

Tourism development in El Salvador is in its beginning stages when compared to what is seen in neighboring Central American countries. Tourism-related activities are very much small-scale and community-based, with the focus being placed on the expansion of tourist “routes” that pass through different communities throughout El Salvador. There are currently four routes that have been developed and are being widely promoted: Route of the Flowers, Route of Peace, Route of Archeology, and Route of Artisan Paradise. Each “route” highlights a particular attraction of El Salvador, such as culture and history, and is located in different regions of the country. The idea is that the “routes” enable tourists to take a multi-day trip through a scenic area, allowing them to visit a variety of communities and sites along the way, thus enhancing the overall El Salvador *experience*.

An advisor from MiTUR stated that there is a need to work with NGOs to target local communities in order to assist locals in looking for and generating their own projects (personal communication, September 11, 2008). There are efforts being put forth to work with local communities and Mayors to establish Tourism Development Committees in those areas that possess natural, cultural, and historic attractions. The objectives are to promote and support sustainable tourism development that guarantees a balance between the environment and the integral development of the population, and to

motivate communities and businesses to work towards creating conditions that are adequate and necessary for tourism development (CORSATUR, 2006).

While the Plan 2014 does not talk specifically of ecotourism development, there is an attempt to promote agro-tourism in rural El Salvador. Ecotourism and agro-tourism are similar in that the guiding principles of both involve providing benefits for locals, protecting the local environment and culture, and educating both locals and tourists. Agro-tourism activities, however, revolve around farming activities, such as the process of growing and harvesting locally grown food that the tourist may not encounter in their home country. El Salvador has a long history of coffee cultivation, and it continues to play an important role in the lives of many Salvadorans. The coffee *fincas*, or plantations, of El Salvador possess great potential for community-based agro-tourism development; they are characterized by outstanding views, biological diversity, and interesting histories and traditions. CORSATUR and MiTUR see the promise in agro-tourism, and are working towards further developing this sector of the tourism market.

MiTUR does not currently work on tourism development in the natural protected areas, as they fall under the jurisdiction of MARN. They do, however, promote several of the more well-known protected areas, such as the national parks, on their website (www.corsatur.gob.sv) and in promotional brochures. One of the programs listed in the Plan 2014 includes coordinating with MARN on their work in protected areas, something that has not occurred in the past.

4. EL IMPOSIBLE NATIONAL PARK

4.1. History

El Imposible is the country's largest national park with a current size of approximately 3,947.68 hectares (9,754.88 acres). Prior to its declaration as a national park in 1989, the area that is now El Imposible was considered the last "wilderness," and last great hunting reserve, of El Salvador; it was one of the only remaining habitats for many animals that once roamed the country (Alvarez and Komar, 2003).

The majority of what is currently considered the Park was once the property of two large haciendas — Hacienda El Imposible and Hacienda San Benito. In 1975, the Forest Service of El Salvador received a request for a permit to cut timber and convert vegetation to crops on a large portion of Hacienda San Benito, an area that today serves as the core of the Park. A request for a "technical opinion" was submitted to the newly created National Parks and Wildlife Service, who used butterflies as indicators due to there being more known about them at the time than forest flora. In ten short days, there were 13 reports of new butterflies for El Salvador, indicating that the forest was a distinct biological community, representing one of the only remnants of mid-elevation forests that had been destroyed in other areas for growing coffee. Additional studies were conducted that not only identified two tree species

new to science, but also revealed reports of species that were previously unknown to the country, or were thought to have become extinct in El Salvador. As a result of such findings, the request for the permit to cut timber was denied, and efforts were undertaken to protect the area.

In 1978, the Hacienda El Imposible (846 hectares / 2,030 acres) was purchased by the national government, and, in 1980, the Hacienda San Benito (2,284 hectares / 5,480 acres) was expropriated under the agrarian reform process; both of which are now legally referred to as Imposible I and II respectively. The government passed a forestry ban for the area in 1986 that protected 5,000 hectares (12,000 acres), including the two state properties, as well as several neighboring private properties. By 1987, formal transfer of the lands to the government was accomplished and, in March 1989, El Imposible National Park was officially established, encompassing an area of 2,985.98 hectares (7,512 acres). It took nine years from the time the property was obtained by the government for the area to be declared a national park. The delay was due to El Salvador being engulfed in what became a 12-year civil war, which took priority away from land conservation. Fortunately, however, El Imposible and its surrounding communities were never directly involved in the conflict.

In 1991, SalvaNATURA, a Salvadoran environmental NGO also known as the Ecological Foundation of El Salvador, signed a co-management agreement with MAG (the government ministry responsible for protected areas at the time) giving them authority to manage El Imposible. SalvaNATURA has been co-managing the Park ever since. During their first 10 years as managers, SalvaNATURA purchased additional property linking the two former haciendas. There still remains valuable property in the area whose acquisition would further enhance the park.

4.2. Geography, Hydrology, and Biodiversity of El Imposible

El Imposible is El Salvador's largest and most biologically diverse national park. Located in the Department of Ahuchapán in southwestern El Salvador, it is situated between the municipalities of San Francisco Menéndez, Tacuba, and Concepción de Ataco at the western extreme of the Apaneca-Llamatepec Mountains. The Park ranges in elevation from 250 meters above sea level in San Francisco Menéndez, up to 1,425 meters above sea level in Cerro Campana. El Imposible protects a unique forest habitat that is comprised of Central American dry forests (critically endangered), Central American pine-oak forests (critically endangered), and Central American montane forests (vulnerable). These three forest types are considered to be some of the last tropical forests of their kind in El Salvador.

The Park is the source of eight rivers, making the area an extremely important watershed that numerous surrounding communities depend upon. The water flowing from El Imposible is crystal-clear and uncontaminated, a rarity in a country where 90% of all surface water is contaminated. The rivers flow southward for approximately 15 km, passing through many densely populated communities along the

way, before reaching the mangroves of Barra de Santiago, another valuable natural protected area in El Salvador.

Studies carried-out over the years in El Imposible have revealed a wide array of flora and fauna, and there still remains much to be discovered in this “jewel” of El Salvador. El Imposible contains one of the most diverse collections of plants in El Salvador, with over 1,000 vascular plants having been identified. There are also more than 40 species of orchids within the Park, and numerous medicinal plants that continue to be used by local peoples to this day. Butterflies have been well studied in the Park, with estimates of there being 540 different species. Given the dry climate of the region encompassing El Imposible, there exist only 56 species of amphibians and reptiles, which is a relatively low number when compared to the diversity found in other Central American countries. Mammals represent the least studied group in El Imposible, the majority of which are nocturnal. There are 104 species of mammals reported in the area, and some of the larger ones that may be spotted include the nine-banded armadillo, Deppe’s squirrel, Central American agouti, white-nosed coati, white-tailed deer, collared anteater, and the collared peccary. Birds are the most studied and well-documented group of fauna in El Imposible, with 286 species having been identified to date. Of these species, 140 are residents of the Park, while the remaining 65 are migratory birds that regularly visit the area.

4.3. Management of El Imposible

El Imposible is managed as a “national park,” as defined by El Salvador’ Natural Protected Areas Law. According to the Law, a “national park” is defined as:

a protected area principally managed for the conservation of ecosystems that provides a frame for cultural and recreational activities. It should contain representative examples of important regions, characteristics, or natural scenes in which species of animals and plants, habitats, and geomorphologic sites have special ecological, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational, and touristic importance. It should have an extension that includes one or more ecosystems that have not been significantly altered (translated from Spanish, Article 14, Natural Protected Areas Law, El Salvador, 2005).

This designation under the Natural Protected Areas Law is equivalent to category II of the IUCN’s protected area categories, which states that national parks should be managed in a way that supports both ecosystem functions and recreation (Weeks & Mehta, 2004). The management objectives of El Imposible National Park, as taken from the Park Management Plan 2008-2012, include:

Management Objectives of the Conservation Unit:

- Protect the original ecosystems of El Salvador
- Protect natural spaces and landscapes of local importance
- Maintain environmental goods and services
- Promote scientific investigation
- Contribute to ecotourism and recreation

- Encourage environmental education and interpretation of nature
- Maintain cultural and traditional attributes

Management Objectives of the Zone Bordering the Park:

- Sustainable use of resources derived from natural ecosystems
- Contribute to improving the quality of life of surrounding populations
- Harmonize the interaction between nature and human activities

(SalvaNATURA, 2008)

El Imposible is co-managed by SalvaNATURA and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MARN). SalvaNATURA was founded in 1990 by a group of professionals who were interested in the conservation and recuperation of El Salvador's environment and natural resources. Their mission is to contribute to the recuperation and conservation of natural resources in order to achieve sustainable development, helping to improve the quality of life of the population of El Salvador and the region. The objectives of the foundation are to protect and manage natural areas, develop scientific knowledge about biodiversity, promote good agricultural practices and sustainable certification, and develop environmental education programs.

The first co-management agreement for El Imposible was signed in 1991 between SalvaNATURA and the MAG, who, at the time, was responsible for the management of all natural areas in the country. This union symbolized the first public-private co-management agreement in El Salvador. After MARN was created in 1997 and the responsibility of overseeing the protection and conservation of all natural areas was transferred to them, a new co-management agreement was signed between them and SalvaNATURA. Signed in 2001, it was officially referred to as a *management delegation*, and lasted five years, as do all management agreements with MARN. The agreement between SalvaNATURA and MARN was reviewed in 2006, and resulted in the signing of an agreement of *technical cooperation* between the two groups, which exists to this day.

The first management plan for El Imposible was developed in 1996 with the collaboration of SalvaNATURA and MAG, as well as consultants hired with the assistance of USAID. Input from surrounding communities and park workers, including others, was used in the plan's creation, signifying the first time that a participatory model was employed in developing a management plan for a protected area in El Salvador. Ten years after the implementation of the first plan, efforts were made to begin the process of writing a new plan, also using the participatory method. The resulting Management Plan 2008-2012 is an example of a collaborative effort between MARN, SalvaNATURA, and other local stakeholders. El Imposible represents one of only three protected areas in all of El Salvador that has a legally recognized management plan (SalvaNATURA, 2008).

While MARN possesses the authority to be involved in any activities related to El Imposible and the natural resources it contains, SalvaNATURA is responsible for the administration of the area and the

development and execution of projects. SalvaNATURA has invested approximately \$3.5 million since beginning their work in El Imposible 18 years ago, and they continue to have a strong presence in the area to this day (SalvaNATURA, 2006); MARN's financial support consists of the payment of salaries for 6 of the 25 park guards who patrol the area. SalvaNATURA's efforts have led to a considerable reduction in the illegal extraction of natural resources, and have created an increased awareness amongst nearby communities as to the importance of sustainable, environmentally friendly practices.

Over the years, SalvaNATURA has worked at promoting such things as sustainable agriculture, water conservation, community development, and environmental education in more than 50 communities located within the park's zone of influence. The aim has been to help improve the quality of life of the local peoples so that they are less dependent on the natural resources provided by the park. Since the signing of the co-management agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (MAG), SalvaNATURA has worked diligently at conserving and protecting El Imposible and the biodiversity it contains.

4.3.i. Zoning of El Imposible

El Imposible has two entrances and is divided into four sectors: San Francisco Menéndez; La Fincona; San Benito; and Cerro Campana. The San Francisco Menéndez and La Fincona sectors are located in what is referred to as Imposible I, and are most easily accessed from the San Francisco Menéndez entrance to the Park; a paved road running through the town of the same name dead-ends at the Park's entrance (Figure 1). The San Benito sector, on the other hand, is located in what is referred to as Imposible II, and is accessed via a 13km gravel road that passes through several small communities before ending at the San Benito entrance (Figure 1). There are no developed roads or trails within the Park that unite the two entrances, making it virtually impossible to travel from one entrance to the other without having to drive; it takes over an hour to travel from one entrance to the other in a personal vehicle, and considerably longer when using public transportation. The Cerro Campana sector, a much more remote area, is located on the north side of the Park and does not have an official entrance. A team of 25 well-trained park guards, some of whom live within El Imposible, patrols all four sectors of the Park.

The general zoning of the area in and around El Imposible consists of the Unit of Conservation, the Buffer Zone, and the Region of Influence, all of which have a combined total size of 66,036 hectares (163,179 acres). The Unit of Conservation, which is the Park itself, has an area of 3,983 hectares (9,842 acres), the Buffer Zone has an area of 3,099 hectares (7,658 acres), and the Region of Influence has an area of 58,954 hectares (145,679 acres) (Figure 1). The Region of Influence has a significant effect on El Imposible because of its high population density, and the subsequent pressure it places on the Park for its natural resources. The Region consists of four municipalities, with a combined population estimated to be

141,911 people (Figure 2). The municipality of San Francisco Menéndez has the largest border directly touching the Park, and, with a population size of approximately 56,400 people, it is also the largest of the four municipalities in the Region. (SalvaNATURA, 2006)

The Unit of Conservation is divided into four distinct management zones, including the No Use Zone; the Extensive Use Zone; the Intensive Use Zone; and the Special Use Zone (Figure 3). The purpose of the No Use Zone is to restrict all use, with the exception of scientific investigations and patrolling by park guards. The Extensive and Intensive Use Zones allow for varying levels of public use, and the Special Use Zone is designated for administrative use, and also includes the homes of all Park inhabitants.

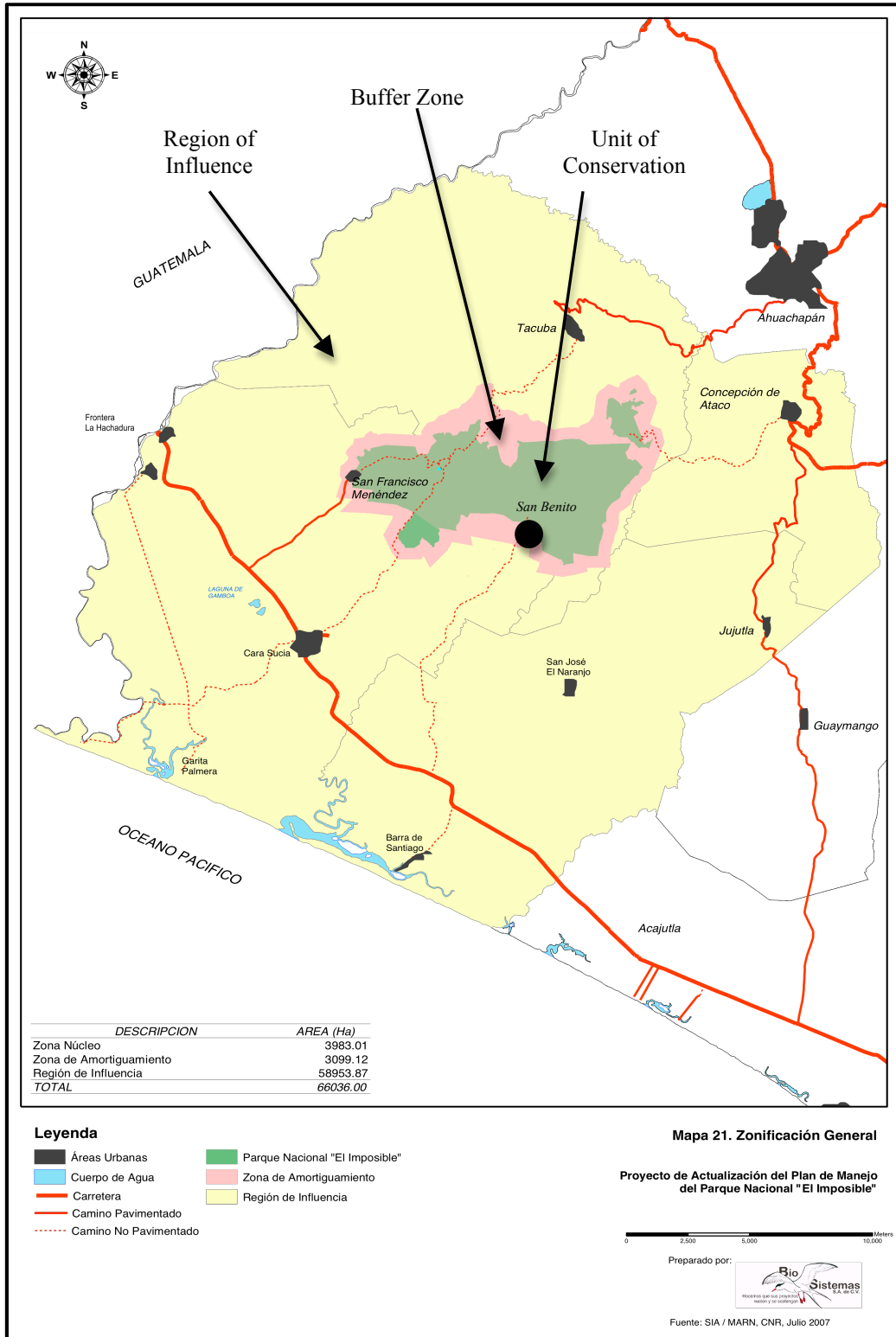


Figure 1: GENERAL ZONING OF EL IMPOSIBLE NATIONAL PARK AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

Source: SalvaNATURA, Plan de Manejo 2008-2012

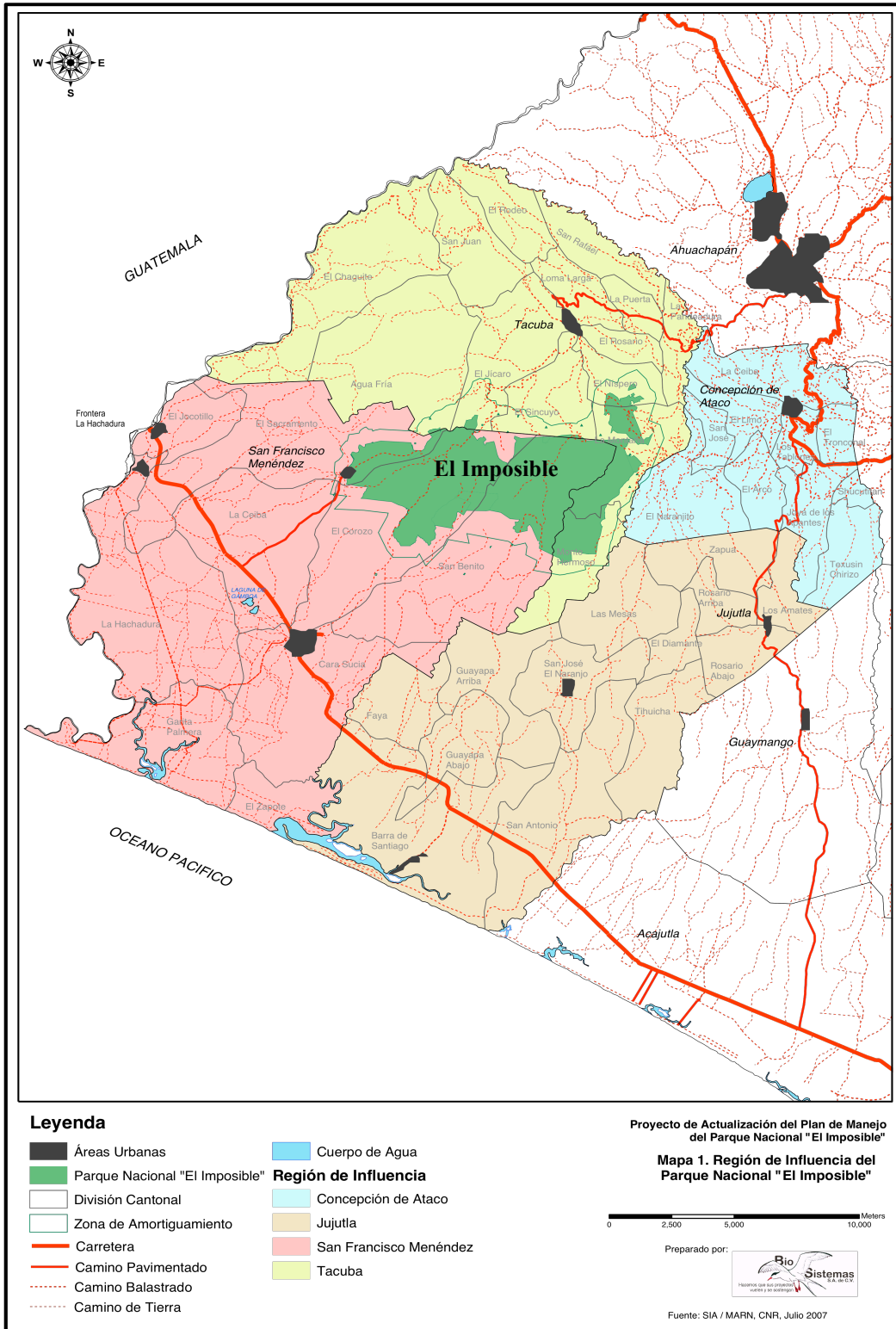


Figure 2: EL IMPOSIBLE NATIONAL PARK REGION OF INFLUENCE (Zoned by color into municipalities)

Source: SalvaNATURA, Plan de Manejo 2008-2012

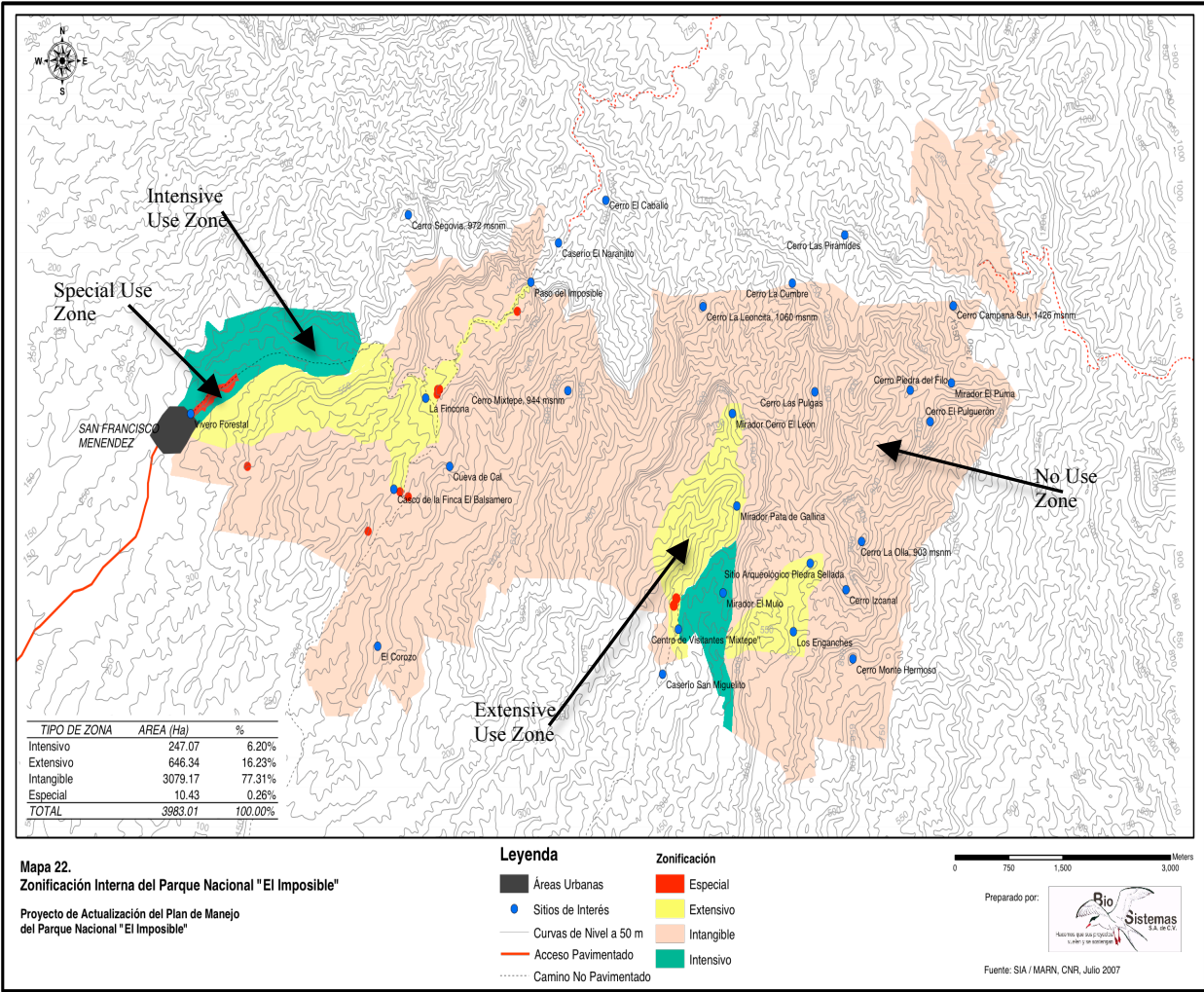


Figure 3: INTERNAL ZONING OF EL IMPOSIBLE NATIONAL PARK
 Source: SalvaNATURA, Plan de Manejo 2008-2012

4.4. El Imposible and Local Peoples

When the Salvadoran government purchased the Hacienda El Imposible in 1978, it did not just come with the flora and fauna of the area – it came with several families as well. These were poor, landless laborers who lived on the land and worked for the owners of the haciendas growing crops, raising cattle, and cutting coffee. Commonly referred to in Spanish as *colonos*, these individuals were allowed to build houses and grow crops for subsistence use in exchange for their work. The original owner did not compensate them prior to selling the land to the State, but MAG assigned a small parcel of land to each family group in the La Fincona and San Francisco Menéndez sectors of the Park. The idea was that the *colonos* would continue living in the area while funds were raised for their relocation, but adequate funding was never acquired. When the area was declared a national park in 1989, it restricted the use of the property, implying that the families should no longer live within the Park’s boundaries. Many of the families continue to live in El Imposible to this day, and have lived in the area for over 40 years.

According to one individual who works for SalvaNATURA and has been involved in El Imposible for many years, a big mistake was made in the beginning when the State bought the land from Don Pedro Mezquite (owner of one of the haciendas) with the people living on it – something should have been done from that very first moment (personal communication, October 22, 2008). While over time several families have left El Imposible, there are currently 36 families comprised of 178 individuals living within the Park’s boundaries. The majority of these families are located in a small community in the San Francisco Menéndez sector of the Park within 150 meters of the Park’s entrance of the same name (SalvaNATURA, 2006).

Given that El Imposible is a relatively small park, its natural resources are not able to withstand the continuous pressure that is placed on it by a population that continues to grow. MARN, unfortunately, does not have norms in place as to how to control the internal population of the Park, nor do they have a strong presence in the area. Park administration, in the past, met with community members on multiple occasions to discuss the issue of relocation. They have tried to explain to community members that relocation is necessary in order to not only guarantee the conservation of the natural area, but to also improve their quality of life. According to the Park Management Plan 2008-2012, there are four alternatives for consideration in resolving the issue of relocation:

1. Relocate the inhabitants outside of the Park to a place near the town of San Francisco Menéndez.
2. Declare a portion of the Park as no longer being parkland and relocate the inhabitants to that area, guaranteeing them, with legal papers, that they are the official landowners.

3. Relocate them to another of SalvaNATURA's properties, and compensate each family with a certain quantity of money so that they can acquire land where it is convenient for them (SalvaNATURA, 2006).
4. Compensate each family with a certain amount of money so that each one can purchase land where it is most convenient for them.

Of the four alternatives, number two and four seem to be the easiest to implement, but the money that is necessary to realize such a project has never been raised, nor do community members want to leave the area. This is an extremely sensitive issue that has caused much conflict over the past 18 years between managers and community members, and it has yet to be resolved; it has led to the build-up of a great deal of distrust towards managers by community members. There does not exist a good working relationship between Park managers and the community, and there is a great lack of communication between the two groups, both of which stemmed from the previous talk of relocation.

4.5. Ecotourism in El Imposible

The number of tourists visiting El Imposible National Park has increased over time, climbing from 371 visitors in 1997 (first year of recorded data) to 8,206 visitors in 2008. From 1997 to 2007 El Imposible saw 57,430 visiting the Park, with numbers varying significantly from year to year (Figure 4). As of 2002, SalvaNATURA has kept a record distinguishing the number of forest tourists versus national tourists visiting the Park, and data shows that approximately 95% of those visiting El Imposible are Salvadorans, whereas 5% are from outside the country (Figure 5).

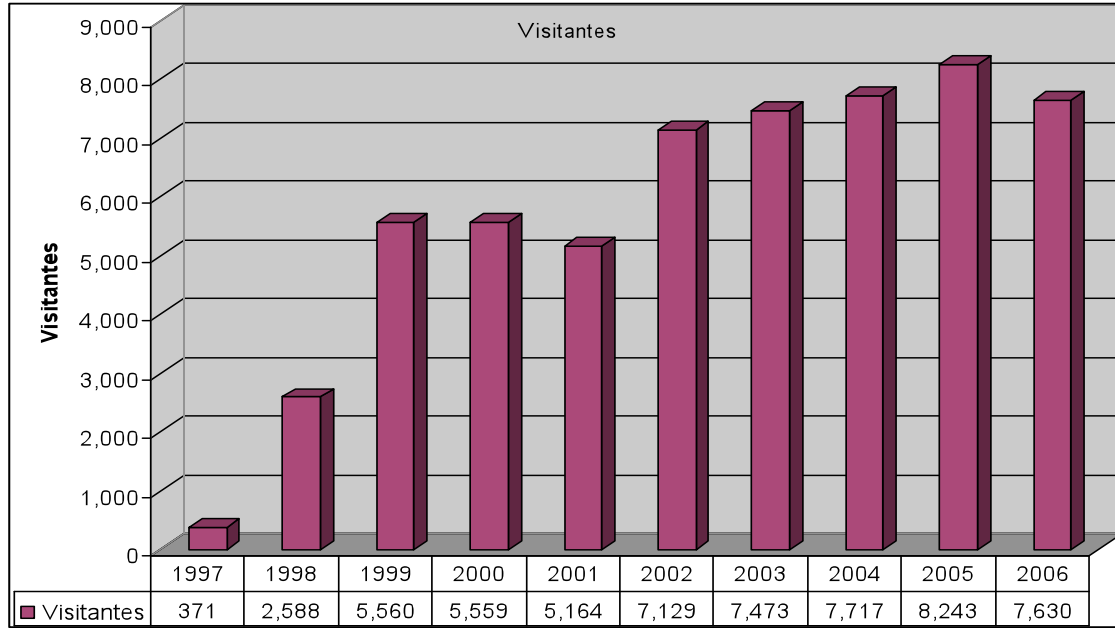


Figure 4: ANNUAL NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS VISITING EL IMPOSIBLE NATIONAL PARK FROM 1997-2006

Source: SalvaNATURA, Plan de Manejo 2008-2012

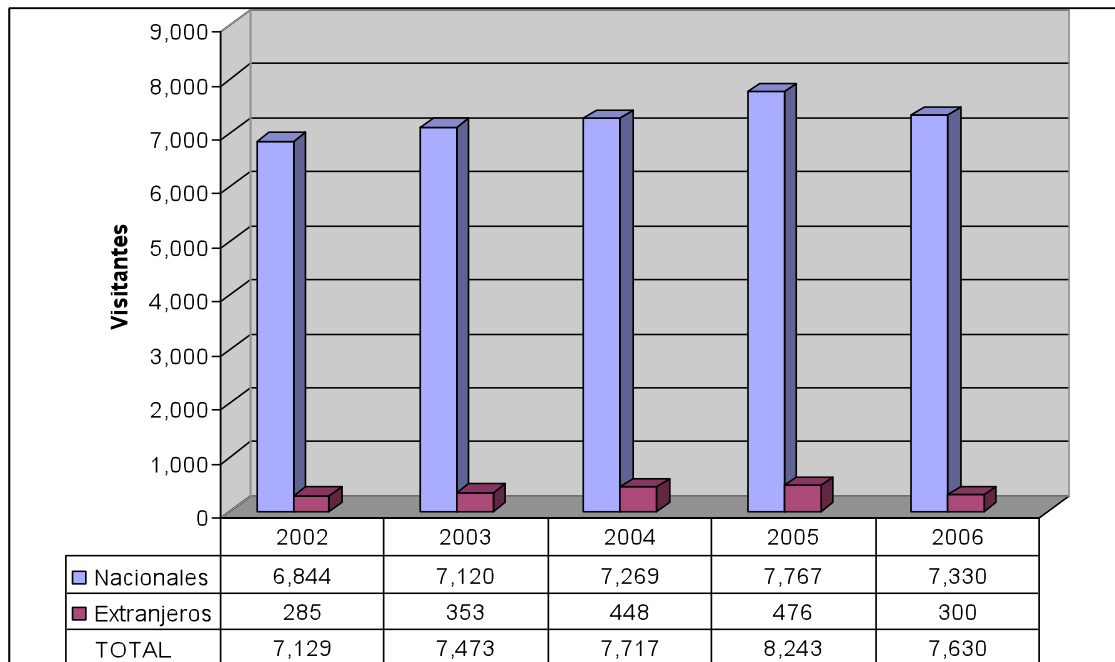


Figure 5: ANNUAL NUMBER OF SALVADORANS (Nacionales) AND FOREIGNERS (Extranjeros) VISITING EL IMPOSIBLE NATIONAL PARK FROM 2002-2006

Source: SalvaNATURA, Plan de Manejo 2008-2012

SalvaNATURA charges an entrance fee of \$3 for Salvadorans and \$6 for foreigners, and generally offers a discount for school groups. The entrance fee is actually a donation, as is stated on the entrance ticket, but one cannot enter the Park without paying it - it is an obligatory donation. SalvaNATURA is not legally authorized to charge an entrance fee, which is why they refer to it as a donation. MARN, however, is permitted to charge entrance fees in El Imposible, as well as other natural protected areas, but are currently not doing so.

The majority of people visiting the Park enter through the San Benito entrance, as it is more habilitated for tour groups, and is the only entrance that is “officially” open to the public. SalvaNATURA, since 1996, has worked towards developing the San Benito sector of El Imposible for ecotourism development, and, with donated funds and grant money, they have been able to open the Mixtepe Visitor Center, erect an observation tower, construct three camping areas and bathrooms, build an interpretative trail, and create look-out points. Projects carried-out in El Imposible are very much dependent on monetary donations from donors, the majority of which have always gone either towards improving the San Benito sector of the Park, or towards the implementation of projects in buffer zone communities.

There is a team of volunteer local nature guides in San Benito who accompany all visitors hiking in the Park, as no one is permitted to enter the Park unattended. The guides have received several trainings over the years thanks to SalvaNATURA and supporting organizations, and are equipped with uniforms, binoculars, radios, and first aid kits. Given that the guides are volunteers and that adequate funding to pay them a salary does not exist, they are completely dependent on tips from tourists (\$10 tip per hike is recommended). Many guides depend on the tips as a primary source of income, which makes for a difficult situation when visitation numbers are down.

All the brochures and marketing materials available on the Park highlight attractions and activities in San Benito, will little to no mention of what is available at the San Francisco Menéndez entrance (will be referred to as San Chico through the remainder of the paper). Even though the San Chico entrance is more easily accessible due to the paved road leading up to it, San Benito has always appeared to be the main priority of SalvaNATURA. Most available funding and human resources support has focused on improving services and infrastructure in San Benito in an effort to generate increased visitation. Due to lack of publicity, many people who visit El Imposible are unaware that there even exists an entrance to the Park in San Chico; one could almost say that there are actually “two parks,” with San Chico being the forgotten one. When representatives from SalvaNATURA were asked why the San Benito entrance was developed prior to San Chico, one responded by saying that San Benito has more aesthetics (personal communication, October, 16, 2008), while another commented that it was due to the presence of the community living within the San Chico sector (personal communication, October 22, 2008).

4.5.i. Ecotourism development in the San Chico sector of El Imposible

The San Chico sector of El Imposible is located at the extreme southwest corner of the Park, and SalvaNATURA considers it to be an area with great potential for ecotourism development due to its easy accessibility for tourists. As a result of this potential, SalvaNATURA, in 2005, began to focus on ways to improve the area to attract more tourists.

Between 2005 and 2006, SalvaNATURA, with financial assistance from the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) GEF Small Grant Programme and the Embassy of Great Britain, implemented a project entitled "Enhancement of tourism benefits in El Imposible National Park through the creation of communitarian micro-enterprises and promotion of local development, in the Municipality of San Francisco Menéndez, Department of Ahuachapán (SalvaNATURA, 2006)." The aim of the project was to seek the conservation and sustainable use of the biodiversity of the area, while also promoting the participation of local communities in sustainable tourism development. The project funded the construction of three sets of restrooms, a picnic and camping area, and tourism market where local crafts and food could be sold, as well as the creation of six eco-touristic, small businesses. SalvaNATURA also conducted environmental education activities related to trash management in an effort to make local community members aware of the importance of tourism in the area and necessity to create an inviting, trash-free environment for visitors.

The San Chico sector of El Imposible has always received significantly fewer visitors than the San Benito sector, and sometimes several months pass without a single tourist entering the Park. This project represented one of the first attempts to develop ecotourism in the San Chico sector of El Imposible through the active involvement of the community. The project was an effort to make the area more attractive and inviting to potential tourists, while also providing benefits to local people. One of the outcomes of the project was going to be the "official" opening to the public of the San Chico entrance, which was to be marked with increased publicity and promotional materials of the San Chico sector. The small businesses that were developed included a plant nursery, bee keeping and honey production, a woman's artisan group, a women's cooking group, a team of trained local nature guides, and horseback riding. Along with these projects, SalvaNATURA commenced a trash management pilot project with the hopes of educating and training the community on trash separation and the benefits of composting. SalvaNATURA held community meetings and trainings in 2006, but by late 2006/early 2007 everything was basically at a standstill.

SalvaNATURA solicited a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer (the researcher) to be placed in San Chico to work with the community in El Imposible on trash management, and to also provide support to community members with the development of their small businesses. Upon the volunteer's arrival, it was apparent that several of the small businesses were not functioning, and that SalvaNATURA was not

providing follow-up in the form of meetings and/or communication with any of the project participants. As a result, all of the projects failed, with the exception of the team of local volunteer nature guides; even this project went from having six participants to only two.

Many community members involved in these small projects were motivated to participate, and were excited at the potential the projects posed as an alternative form of income generation. When the projects failed and there was no more communication with SalvaNATURA, community members became frustrated and disappointed. This failure, coupled with past talk of relocation, has done nothing but anger community members and widen the divide between the community and SalvaNATURA, making the success of future projects, if there are any, questionable.

While there have been no further attempts specifically aimed at ecotourism development in San Chico since 2006, the two local nature guides of San Chico have been involved in a project, funded by a Salvadoran foundation, to strengthen small business development in the buffer zone of El Imposible. The project was implemented in 2008 with the objectives of improving ecotourism services, creating a connection between tourism activity in the Park and in the buffer zone, increasing knowledge about the environmental services of El Imposible, and facilitating the creation of a tourism committee in each community. With the exception of the two guides/small business owners from San Chico, all project participants are located near the San Benito entrance to the Park. Participants worked with a consultant hired by SalvaNATURA in developing and/or improving their small business, and were then provided with the financial support necessary to realize their respective projects. The participants formed a small business committee as a way in which to work together and provide support to one another, and a representative from SalvaNATURA began meeting with the committee once or twice a month.

Once the financial support was received and the committee met a few times, problems arose and the representative from SalvaNATURA was unable to meet with the committee. As a result, the committee slowly disbanded and there has been no mention of it since. The two business owners from San Chico continue to operate their businesses but, due to lack of visitation to the San Chico sector, they basically do not have a market for selling their products. Had the committee been provided with more support and training, perhaps they would still be meeting to this day, and would be helping to attract more tourists to the area. This project is another example of how lack of follow-up and communication prevented the successful execution of the project.

The San Chico sector of El Imposible provides hiking, camping, and swimming opportunities, not to mention wildlife and beautiful vistas, but unfortunately very few people visit the area. SalvaNATURA considers the area to be an ecotourism destination, however, whether or not the area can be considered as such is questionable. For instance, one of the essential components of any ecotourism project is the active involvement of the community in the process, providing benefits to them. In San Chico, the only

community members directly benefiting from tourism are the two local nature guides, and that is only when tourists actually visit the area.

4.5.ii. A glimpse at El Imposible's Park Management Plan 2008-2012 and what it means for the future of the San Chico of the Park

El Imposible's Park Management Plan 2008-2012 is the second management plan to be written for El Imposible, and was developed with the involvement of public participation, as is required under the national environmental law (*Ley del Medio Ambiente*, Art. 80). The objectives listed in the Plan are the result of an extensive analysis and discussion of management necessities and threats to El Imposible, all of which were determined in a variety of workshops and meetings. The Plan is divided into several Programs, one of which is the Program of Public Use. This Program, which involves ecotourism, is further divided into the subprograms of recreation, tourism, environmental education, environmental interpretation, and public relations, and includes details on the objectives, goals, and activities of each subprogram.

While the majority of the objectives and goals of the Plan refer to El Imposible as a whole, some do refer specifically to the San Chico sector. One of the goals listed under the Subprogram of Recreation is that there exists the necessary, basic infrastructure to receive tourists both in San Benito and San Chico. Achieving this goal calls for improving the restrooms, establishing an additional camping area, and finishing the parking area in San Chico. A second goal is to create a team of local nature guides in each sector of the Park, with one of the planned activities being the identification and training of new guides to complement the two current guides in the San Chico sector.

The general objective of the Subprogram of Tourism is to stimulate and promote tourism in El Imposible. It mentions how the existence of strategic natural resources and abundant biodiversity are indispensable for the generation of environmental services and the development of ecotourism. This is the only section under the Programs of Management where there is mention of ecotourism. This section focuses on involving other agencies, such as CORSATUR, in the task of developing promotional materials for El Imposible.

The Subprogram of Environmental Education was established to create awareness within communities bordering the Park of the importance of participating in an active way in the management and conservation of the area, and to contribute to the development of abilities and skills of the local people. One of the objectives of this subprogram is the elimination of solid waste from within El Imposible, which will directly affect those living in the San Chico sector of the Park. This subprogram also has the objective of developing and distributing information about ecosystem conservation and the sustainable management of natural resources, which ties in with the educational component that is necessary in all ecotourism projects.

The Plan 2008-2012 also includes a section entitled Social Program of Sustainable Development, and mentions the improvement of the quality of life of the local population. Although nothing is said specifically of San Chico, there is the objective of developing initiatives of sustainable use of the natural resources in a way that provides economic benefits for the habitants in the area. Some of the activities highlighted include a study of the feasibility of producing crafts made from wood, and the identification of animals that could be raised for future commercial purposes and/or consumption. The latter activity is quite similar to a project that took place in San Chico when the area was under the management of MAG. Many community members talked fondly of the project, and mentioned how several local peoples were employed by it; unfortunately the project ended due to lack of funding.

SalvaNATURA and MARN, in writing the Plan 2008-2012, have illustrated that while conservation and protection of El Imposible are the main priorities, sustainable tourism development and the involvement of local peoples are also of utmost importance and concern. According to this Plan, the San Chico sector will experience improvements and see further efforts being made towards ecotourism development. Whether or not local community members will be directly involved in the process remains to be seen. The implementation of many of the proposed activities will very much depend on the amount of donations and grants received.

5. RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND DESIGN

5.1. Introduction

This study was developed during the researcher's Peace Corps service in El Salvador from September 2006 – November 2008. As a Peace Corps volunteer in the agroforestry/environmental education program, the researcher was assigned to live and work with a small, rural community located within the San Chico sector of El Imposible National Park (PNEI). Due to lack of available living space in the community, the researcher lived in the bordering town of San Chico within a 5 minute walk of the Park entrance. She spent two years living in the study area and working closely with community members, sharing in their daily lives and becoming immersed in Salvadoran culture.

Upon arrival to El Salvador, the researcher was placed in a 10-week home-stay near the Peace Corps Training Center, and began intensive cultural and Spanish language training with her fellow Peace Corps trainees. By the end of training, Spanish instructors evaluated her as an intermediate Spanish speaker, and by the end of her 2-year service she had reached the level of an advanced Spanish speaker. The researcher communicated only in Spanish while in her community, as very few Salvadorans in rural El Salvador speak English.

5.2. Study Area

The town of San Chico, located in the department of Ahuachapán in extreme southwestern El Salvador, is situated 124 km from the capital of San Salvador, and is 210 meters above sea level. It is the urban center of the municipality of the same name, and has an estimated population size of 1500 people. The municipality as a whole has a population of 56,400, with approximately 70% of the urban population having access to potable water and 98% having access to electricity (Alcaldía de San Francisco Menéndez, 2008).

San Chico, unlike many of its surrounding communities, has excellent access to educational facilities. The town has two separate school buildings, with one offering preschool and kindergarten and the other first grade through high school, and most students only have to walk a short distance to go to school. The town also has a small health clinic, a police station, several churches, regular access to reliable public transportation, and Internet access.

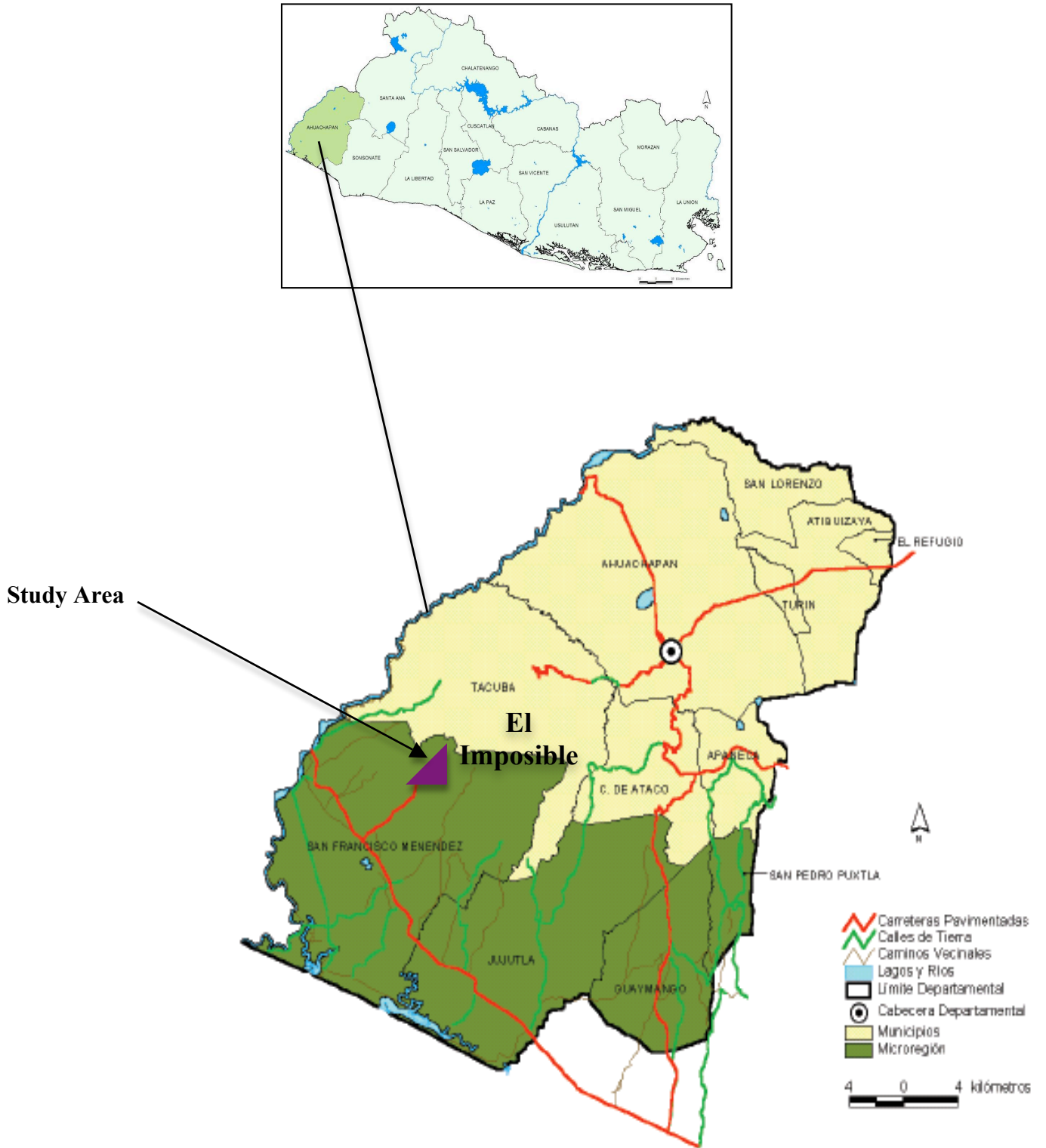
The paved road leading into San Chico dead-ends at the entrance to the San Chico sector of El Imposible National Park, which is marked by an entrance sign and gate. The “road” from this point on is a combination of dirt and rock, eventually turning into a footpath. There is a small community of 23 houses located within the first 150 meters of the Park, with it being no more than a ten-minute walk from the Park entrance to the last house in the community. It was within this community that the researcher spent the majority of her time as a Peace Corps volunteer and conducted much of the research. The community itself does not have an official name, but it is generally considered a *barrio*, or district of San Chico. For the purposes of this paper, the community will be referred to as the *bosque*, or forest, as that is what most of the local peoples refer to it as.

Even though the bosque is literally within minutes of San Chico, there is an obvious disparity of wealth between the two communities, with the majority of the families in the bosque living in what could be considered extreme poverty; the World Bank defines extreme poverty as living off of \$1.25 or less per person per day (2008). Approximately 115 individuals live in the bosque, with the average household size being 5.4; the largest family has 11 members and the smallest has 1. The principle economic activity of the area is agriculture, as almost all of the families grow corn, as well as beans, for subsistence use. There are virtually no employment opportunities in the area. Some of the women from the community work in San Chico doing domestic chores in other homes from time to time, and at least three men from the community work as security guards in larger cities, which requires that they live away from home during weekdays. There are also three men who work as park guards in El Imposible, two employed by MARN and one by SalvaNATURA. Overall, the economic situation in the bosque is dire and the unemployment rate is high, which leaves the families struggling for day-to-day survival.

The majority of the houses in the bosque are not what one would consider to be “dignified,” as they are constructed of either *bahareque*, which is a combination of mud and bamboo, or adobe, and almost all have tin roofs and dirt floors. Only half of the homes have latrines, and all rely on firewood collected from within El Imposible for cooking purposes. With the exception of the three homes closest to the Park entrance, community members do not have electricity in their homes, and only two have running water. There is a communal spigot at which community members can retrieve potable water that flows from the tank that provides water to San Chico, and some families have rigged their own ways of accessing water from other water sources. Community members are very dependent on the San Francisco River that flows through the bosque, utilizing its uncontaminated water on a daily basis for bathing, washing dishes and clothes, and, in some cases, for drinking and cooking. As a result of the poverty in which the families live, the community, out of necessity, places constant pressure on the natural resources of El Imposible.

Map 1: STUDY AREA LOCATION

Source: Alcaldía de San Francisco Menéndez, 2008



5.3. Overview of Research

A qualitative study was developed to assess the potential for ecotourism development in the San Chico sector of PNEI, and 3 methods were employed in collecting data: interviews, participant observation, and analysis of written materials/documents. A multi-method approach, commonly referred to as triangulation (Glancy, 1986, p. 66; Taylor, 1998, p.80), was employed in order to “gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the setting and the people being studied” (Taylor, 1998, p.80). The triangulation provided a method to “check-out” insights, similar findings, and supportive data gathered from multiple sources, thus helping to validate the data. Research methodology involved immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for the study, and it consisted of the researcher entering the informants’ world and seeking their perspectives and meanings through ongoing interaction; all key elements of the qualitative research paradigm (Creswell, 1994, p.161).

The primary goal was to interview individuals who would potentially be directly affected by ecotourism development, as well as those who would be involved in, and responsible for, such development. On the one hand there are the individuals living and working in the area who could be directly affected, both positively and negatively, by ecotourism development (community members, park guards, business owners), while on the other hand are the managers of El Imposible who have the final say on what takes place in PNEI (SalvaNATURA, MARN). The researcher also interviewed individuals currently working on developing and promoting tourism at the national level (MiTUR, ISTU), as well as those assisting on community-based ecotourism development projects in western El Salvador (USAID), in order to gain a better understanding of the current state of tourism development in the country and where ecotourism fits, if at all.

5.4. Research Goals and Objectives

Goal: Assess the potential for ecotourism development in the San Francisco Menéndez sector of El Imposible National Park based upon the attitudes and opinions of local peoples and Park managers.

Objective 1: To accurately describe the attitudes and opinions of local peoples (community members, business owners, park guards) towards ecotourism development in El Imposible in order to integrate their perspectives into management recommendations for SalvaNATURA.

Objective 2: To describe the current situation in El Imposible, explain the history of conflict between community members and managers, and offer suggestions for creating a better working relationship between community members and Park managers.

Objective 3: To describe the thoughts and opinions of Park managers towards current and future ecotourism development plans in the San Chico sector of El Imposible, and to explain SalvaNATURA's management goals for the Park, in order to make recommendations pertaining to ecotourism development.

5.5. Methods

5.5.i. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed because of the flexibility they offer informants to expand upon matters important to them. The open-ended nature of the questions aids in gathering information on identifying general feelings, attitudes, and concerns, which was one of the primary objectives of the study. The use of interviews provides an attempt to ensure that key topics are always covered, although not all informants are always willing to answer certain questions, and provides the researcher with rich, in-depth information on qualitative elements. Another important benefit of interviewing is that it permits the interviewer to tailor questions depending on the informant. If the informant does not understand the question, or would rather not answer it, then the interviewer has the ability to rephrase the question, or change topics completely.

Informants included in the interviews were selected based on the researcher's experience working with different groups and organizations in El Imposible, and on the knowledge she had gained as a result of living in San Chico for 1-½ years prior to the study (Table 1). The aim was to purposefully select informants that possessed the knowledge to best address the research questions, as that is one of the basic ideas of qualitative research; there was no randomness involved in the selection of informants (Creswell, 1994). Of key interest to the study were community members and Park managers. This was because community members represent the group most directly affected by changes occurring in El Imposible, while the Park managers are the ones responsible for initiating the changes. Because community members had never previously been specifically asked their opinions towards ecotourism development, yet they would be the ones most directly affected by it, a main concern was obtaining an accurate representation of their attitudes and opinions.

Table 1:

List of stakeholder groups included in the interview plan, and the number of informants that were intended to be selected from each group.

San Salvador Interviews		El Imposible/San Chico Interviews	
SalvaNATURA	4	Community Members	21 *
MARN	2	Park Guards	4
MiTUR	1	Business Owners	4
ISTU	1		
USAID Sustainable Tourism Project	3		

** 3 of the 21 community members were also employed as park guards in El Imposible and are therefore counted twice in the table. Their interviews were to be based upon their roles both as members of the community and as employees of the Park.*

An interview guide was used to provide general direction to the conversations and to ensure that the researcher covered all major key points, while also allowing informants the flexibility to share their individual thoughts and opinions (see Appendix A for interview guides). Many researchers who conduct multiple-informant studies use interview guides to serve as a reminder to make sure that all key topics are explored (Taylor, 1998), which is what was done in this study. The researcher created a separate interview guide for each group represented in the interviews. This was done because not all questions were applicable to each group, and therefore required the use of individualized interview guides. All interview questions received approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Alaska Fairbanks prior to being used in the field. The researcher also intended to tape-record all interviews, as tape-recording “allows the interviewer to capture more than he or she could by relying on memory” (Taylor, 1998).

Community Interviews

Due to the relatively small size of the community in El Imposible, the researcher planned to interview the head of every household so that all families would be included. This would prevent community members from feeling left out, and would provide the researcher with more representative data.

The owners of roadside eateries, as well as small *tienda*, or mini-convenience store, were also to be included in the study based on their location in San Chico. San Chico has 2 small outdoor restaurants, and over 10 small stores based out of individual homes. The interviewing plan included both small restaurants, and the two stores located closest and farthest from the park entrance.

There are five park guards employed in the San Chico sector of El Imposible, three of which are also community members. The researcher intended to interview the three who live in the community based on their role not only as park guards, but also as heads of household in the community, as well as one of the two park guards who live in a neighboring community.

Management Agency Interviews

SalvaNATURA is comprised of seven departments, one of which is responsible for managing El Imposible. The department of Protected Areas and Sustainable Tourism is a relatively small department that was comprised of four individuals at the time the study was carried-out, two of which were to be included in the study - the head of El Imposible who is responsible for the 25 park guards employed by the Park, as was the individual responsible for the promotion and development of sustainable tourism. In addition to interviewing informants from the Protected Areas department, the research plan also included interviewing the Director of SalvaNATURA and the Director of the Science Conservation Department. SalvaNATURA's Director is one of the Foundation's founding members and has been involved in activities in El Imposible since before the area was established as a national park, and the Director of the Science Conservation department has worked extensively in El Imposible, and it was felt that he could provide a different perspective on the issues facing SalvaNATURA and the Park.

Two representatives from MARN were selected for the study given the Ministry's involvement in the management of El Imposible. The head of the Natural Heritage Department, which oversees all of El Salvador's protected areas, as well as the one technician from MARN who is assigned to work in El Imposible, were included in the research plan.

5.5.ii. Participant Observation

Participant observation is an unobtrusive way to obtain data, and it entails that the researcher play the role of decision-maker throughout the investigation and is responsible for the quality of the data gathered. It grants the researcher the freedom to change the direction the research takes based upon new observations that are made in the field.

As a participant observer, the researcher's objective was to become fully immersed in Salvadoran culture and establish rapport among community members; this was the focus of her first year in-site, and continued throughout the two years. Considerable time was spent gaining the trust and respect of the community. Collecting data was considered secondary to getting to know the setting and the people. This allowed the researcher to slowly gain insider knowledge and a better understanding of the history of the area, which was essential to developing the research design and generating research questions. Without taking the time to observe and participate directly in daily life, the researcher would not have been successful in gathering reliable data. The first hand knowledge obtained through participant observation

of what people say and do served as a complement to the verbal accounts of how people act, and what they feel, that was drawn from the interview process (Taylor, 1998).

5.5.iii. Analysis of Written Materials

Analysis of written documents provides the research with greater insight on the issue(s) being studied, and can be used as means to clarify and confirm data. They also have the potential to “alert the researcher to fruitful lines of inquiry” (Taylor, 1998) that may have otherwise gone unnoticed by the researcher. Written documents such as the Park Management Plan 2008-2012 for El Imposible, the National Tourism Plan for El Salvador, files provided by SalvaNATURA, minutes of meetings, published material on El Imposible, tourism brochures, among others, were an important source of data. The researcher was able to access the documents at a time convenient for her, and they served as an unobtrusive source of data.

6. RESULTS

6.1. Interviews

A total of 33 informal, semi-structured interviews, representing an 89% response rate, were conducted between June and October 2008; completed interviews were consistent with the study plan (Table 2). Interviews were carried-out in a variety of locations, ranging from community member’s homes in the bosque and small-businesses in San Chico, to government ministry offices and coffee shops in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. They were conducted in the bosque and San Chico with generally a one-day notice, whereas interviews carried-out in San Salvador had to be arranged weeks in advance via email and telephone calls. This was due to the hectic, ever-changing schedules of the interviewees, as well as to the researcher being unable to make the 3-½ hour bus trip to San Salvador on a regular basis. Interviews varied in length from 30 minutes to 1-½ hours depending on the amount of detail the informants were willing to provide in answering the questions, and all but three (two at SalvaNATURA and one at USAID) were conducted in Spanish.

Table 2:

List of stakeholder groups, number of representatives from each group interviewed, and general location of interviews.

San Salvador Interviews		El Imposible/San Chico Interviews	
SalvaNATURA	4	Community Members	17*
MARN	2	Park Guards	4
MiTUR	1	Business Owners	4
ISTU	1		
USAID Sustainable Tourism Project	3		

** 3 of the 17 community members were also employed as park guards in El Imposible and are therefore counted twice in the table. Their interviews were based on their roles both as members of the community and as employees of the Park.*

The researcher intended to tape-record all interviews, but after conducting the first few in the bosque, it was decided that tape-recording could jeopardize the quality of the data being received. Informants appeared to be nervous, or ill at ease, upon seeing the tape recorder, and although they consented to being recorded, the researcher did not want to place the informants in an uncomfortable situation. It was decided that it would be better for the researcher to rely on memory than to risk the quality and accuracy of the information the informants were sharing, as tape-recording could have potentially led informants to provide false information in fear of reprisal from managers or fellow community members. A small notebook was carried to each interview in which key points and/or quotations were recorded during the interview. Upon finishing each interview and after leaving the presence of the informant, the researcher recorded, in detail, the responses to the interview questions, and any other valuable data, in a notebook.

6.1.i. Community Interviews

Bosque Interviews

A total of 17 heads of household from the bosque, which included both men and women, were included in the study, representing 80.9% of the community; only 17 of 21 heads of household were interviewed due to scheduling conflicts and/or willingness to talk with the researcher. While “household” is a term that is generally used in referring to individuals residing in the same dwelling, in two instances in this study a “household” was defined as two houses that were either attached, or were within a few feet of each other, and were inhabited members of the same family; they represented a “compound” of sorts. There were a total of 21 households in the study area, representing 23 houses.

Interviews with community members produced interesting results, and proved to be quite

insightful. While the focus of the research was on the potential for ecotourism development, in many instances the conversation switched to the history of the area and past projects, and the relationship the community has with SalvaNATURA. Given that this was the first time community members had ever been interviewed specifically on ecotourism and asked their opinions in a one-on-one situation, it appeared as though many took it as an opportunity to truly express their feelings and, to an extent, vent about the current situation in the community. It can be said that community member's feelings about the current situation in the bosque were reflective of their opinions of ecotourism. The majority of informants believe that the current situation is due, in part, to the absence of communication with SalvaNATURA, and, at the same time, they feel that in order for their to be ecotourism development, communication needs to be improved.

All of the informants were either born and raised in the bosque, or moved there at a very young age. They identify strongly with El Imposible, and all like living in the area even though they live in poverty. One informant referred to living in the bosque as “una vida pobrecita, pero bonita” – it is a poor, but nice life (personal communication, July 29, 2008). When asked if they would be willing to move out of El Imposible if the opportunity arose, only three said that they would. Several stated that they are *nativos*, or natives, and that they have clean air to breathe, as well as plenty of water and firewood; they have everything that they need close by. Community members feel that they are better off in the bosque than in other places, and one informant said that he felt he would die if he left the bosque.

When asked if they felt their lives had been affected by the bosque becoming a protected area, 11 informants responded that their lives had changed, and only two felt that they had changed for the better; those two benefitted financially from the establishment of El Imposible. Those who felt their lives had been negatively affected stated that there used to be more work, and that there was more land available for cultivation in the past. Many informants spoke very highly of the previous owner of the Hacienda, saying that he would give the people food, and provided them with work. It was also mentioned that when MAG managed the area, they initiated projects and employed community members in them. Three informants specifically mentioned SalvaNATURA, stating that they felt conditions were considerably better before they became involved and that SalvaNATURA has done nothing to help the community. Despite such responses, all respondents felt that it was important to have protected areas, stating that they protect animals, provide clean air and water, and that the trees prevent the surrounding area from becoming too hot.

It was not until informants were asked their opinions on ecotourism development, and whether or not they thought it was a good idea to try to develop it in the area, that many of their attitudes toward SalvaNATURA were expressed. This question certainly hit a nerve with several informants, making it clear that it was not just an issue of ecotourism development, but was also about the long, tumultuous

relationship between SalvaNATURA and the community. There is overwhelming support for ecotourism development in the San Chico sector of El Imposible, with 15 of 17 respondents (88.2%) in favor of its development. The driving factor of this response is ecotourism development's potential for providing economic benefits to the area. The majority of those in favor mentioned that it could provide benefits, and that they could start a small business and/or sell food to tourists; there was no mention of any potential benefit other than money. Of the two respondents who were not in favor of ecotourism development, one thought the area should be protected and that only scientific studies should be allowed. He held the opinion that it could be both good and bad, and that tourism is a business, thus implying that El Imposible is not a place for a business.

Community members, overall, feel the area has something to offer tourists, and the river was mentioned numerous times as one of the attractions of El Imposible; swimming in the river and experiencing nature (seeing birds, learning about medicinal plants, etc.) were the two most frequently talked about activities. Regardless of the attractions El Imposible possesses, there is a reason why efforts towards ecotourism development of the area have been minimal over the years, and informants did a lot of finger pointing at SalvaNATURA when the issue was brought-up. Many feel that there is a great lack of unity in the community, and that SalvaNATURA does not have a presence in the area. In their opinions, there is little trust between SalvaNATURA and the community, which stems from the talk of relocation, and SalvaNATURA needs to make more of an effort to build trust or work with community members. One informant said that “de tantas promesas no hemos visto nada,” which basically means that there have been many promises in the past, but nothing has ever come of them (personal communication, August 10, 2008). In addition to blaming SalvaNATURA, informants also cited lack of money for projects, the poor condition of the road leading into the Park, and lack of education as some of the biggest obstacles to ecotourism development. One informant stated “no hay consciencia...no hay valor en los recursos según la gente (personal communication, June 25, 2008). She believes that many people are not environmentally aware, and that they do not see the value in the resources that are found in the bosque.

With regard to the relationship between SalvaNATURA and the community, interviews revealed that although the majority of the community feels as though there is not enough communication, and that SalvaNATURA has forgot them, all but one informant thinks the situation can be improved and that the two groups can work together. Recommendations of ways in which to improve the current situation, as given by the informants, included the following:

- Form a committee within the community
- Bring someone from outside the community and SalvaNATURA to help unite the people and serve as a leader
- Hold organized meetings with SalvaNATURA and the community, and

- Offer trainings to community members that are motivating

In addition to improving communication and contact with SalvaNATURA, informants stated that in order to successfully develop ecotourism in the San Chico sector of El Imposible there needs to be more trails with signs, swimming holes with restrooms nearby, and the road within the Park needs to be repaired so as to make the area more accessible to older people and children.

Results from the interviews with community members clearly show that there is support for ecotourism development, and that there is willingness and desire to improve relations with SalvaNATURA. What is questionable, however, is the extent to which the informants truly understand what ecotourism is, and what its underlying principles are. Even though the researcher explained what is meant by ecotourism prior to beginning each interview, it appeared as though the informants did not differentiate between ecotourism and tourism in general, and that the common belief is that tourism equals money. Given the living conditions and the quality of life experienced by those in the bosque, it is not surprising that they would support ecotourism development, or any other type of development for that matter, that could potentially provide them with economic benefits. This type of attitude, however, has the potential of leading to problems in the future in that if there ever was a large influx of tourism in the area, local peoples could benefit economically, but also end-up being displaced from an area their families have called home for several generations.

Park Guard Interviews

The San Chico sector of El Imposible has five park guards, four of which were interviewed. The three who live in the bosque were interviewed based on their role not only as park guards, but also as heads of household in the community; an additional park guard who lives in a neighboring community in the buffer zone of the Park was also interviewed. Two of the guards interviewed are employed by MARN and have worked in El Imposible for 29 and 30 years respectively, whereas the other two are employed by SalvaNATURA and have been working there for four and nine years respectively.

Three of the four guards who were interviewed hold the opinion that it would be a good idea to develop ecotourism in the San Chico sector of the bosque, whereas one thinks the area should be left for conservation and protection purposes. They feel that the area has a lot to offer tourists, and that visitors would enjoy hiking, being in nature, swimming, breathing clean air. One guard also mentioned that El Imposible offers individuals the opportunity to study and learn about the different types of plants, trees, and animals that exist in the Park.

Despite the fact that each of the guards work directly with SalvaNATURA and report to SalvaNATURA's head of the Park, the three who are in favor of ecotourism were open in telling the researcher that they think SalvaNATURA needs to do their part in making it a reality; they did not hesitate to share their opinions of SalvaNATURA. There was unanimous agreement that ecotourism could

provide benefits to the community, but there needs to be more communication between SalvaNATURA and community members.

One guard said that SalvaNATURA has talked about officially opening the San Chico sector to the public for as long as he has worked there, but it still has not happened. He says that SalvaNATURA says things that do not become the truth, and that he does not think about tourism development anymore because SalvaNATURA does not do anything. Another guard said that if there were incentives for the community, they would collaborate more with SalvaNATURA and relations would improve. He gave the example of how several years ago a community located in the buffer zone was given solar panels after agreeing to stop illegally hunting in the Park, and mentioned how that would be a good project for the bosque. In the same breath, he went on to say that the community has not received projects like that because SalvaNATURA does not want the people to feel like *dueños*, or owners, of the area; the greater the sense of ownership, the more difficult the situation will become. In addition to incentives and improved communication, two guards cited a need for trails and a source of funding for ecotourism development to become a reality.

San Chico Interviews

Due to San Chico's close proximity to El Imposible and the fact that all those visiting the San Chico sector of the Park have to pass through the town to arrive at the park entrance, 4 business owners, all of whom were women, were included in the study. There are over 10 small stores based out of homes in San Chico, but only the one located closest and the one located farthest from the park entrance were included. The owners of the only two roadside eateries in San Chico were also interviewed. It was deemed that those interviews provided sufficient information that accurately represented the opinions and attitudes of local peoples, and that it was not necessary to interview all business owners.

All informants stated that tourists visiting El Imposible occasionally stop by their business, but that the money generated is not significant enough to have an affect on their income. All four business owners felt that ecotourism development was a good idea, and that it would create "algún movimiento," or some movement in the area. Currently very few people from outside the area visit the town or Park, and businesses are not doing as well as they could be if there was more activity. One informant, however, said that there is nothing in the bosque, and that animals are not visible. She believes the area should be developed, but she seemed to be indifferent to the Park and did not appear to understand the ecotourism concept.

When asked what they thought was needed in order to develop ecotourism, the two main suggestions were collaboration from the community (San Chico and the bosque) and swimming pools with restrooms. There was no mention of SalvaNATURA, and one informant asked me if SalvaNATURA

was even still working in the area. Three of the four women felt there was a need for more organization, and that a committee of people enthusiastic to work should be formed.

Even though the town of San Chico and the bosque are neighbors and are within a 10-minute walking distance of each other, there was a noticeable difference between the responses given by the business owners compared to those of the community members from the bosque and park guards. The business owners did not mention SalvaNATURA, and they did not seem to appreciate the Park nearly as much as those who reside within it. While they felt ecotourism development was a good idea, they did not honestly seem very interested in it, and were not nearly as willing to elaborate when responding to questions. One reason for this could be due to the fact that they have businesses and are making some money, even if it may be very little, whereas the majority of those in the bosque are unemployed and struggle much more for daily survival; all four business owners also receive family remittances from the United States, whereas only three households in the bosque receive any economic support.

6.1.ii. Management Agency Interviews

SalvaNATURA

The researcher interviewed two staff members of the Protected Areas Department, the Director of SalvaNATURA, and the Director of the Science Conservation Department. Interviews indicate that there is a lack of communication within SalvaNATURA, and that there is very little collaboration within the Foundation on projects/activities related to El Imposible. The detail in responses varied among interviewees. One interview did not provide any new information related to ecotourism development, or the relationship between SalvaNATURA and community members from the bosque, and his interview therefore will not be discussed in this section.

The two informants from the Protected Areas Department, as well as the Director of SalvaNATURA, all believe there is potential for ecotourism development in the San Chico sector of the Park, but hold differing opinions regarding the inhabitants of the bosque. When asked why the San Chico sector has not seen much in terms of ecotourism development over the past 18 years, one informant said it was due to lack of funding, whereas the other two informants said it was due to the community's presence in the bosque; visitors to the area do not like seeing houses in the Park, and their presence in the area means that visitors have to walk considerably further before actually reaching the forest. One informant held the opinion that the community, he referred to them as *colonos*, was the biggest threat to El Imposible. He said they are a greater threat than illegal hunting and fishing because they cannot be controlled, whereas the other two issues can be thanks to the park guards and the environmental division of the police. One of the other informants, on the other hand, would not comment on anything regarding the community, with the exception of saying that SalvaNATURA used to have meetings with them.

When the researcher asked one of the informants whether or not the area should be left for conservation, his response was that it had never been mentioned, and that the Director of SalvaNATURA has always been in favor of ecotourism development. During the course of these three interviews, there was never any mention of upcoming projects in the bosque, leading the researcher to believe that there really are no immediate plans for that sector of the Park and that things will remain at a standstill. One informant did state that SalvaNATURA had recently received a grant, with some of it hopefully going to the San Chico sector, but he did not further elaborate. One of the biggest constraints facing SalvaNATURA is that there is no financial security when it comes to developing projects in El Imposible. There is no budget for tourism development, forcing them to rely solely on donations; not enough is generated from entrance fees to develop and sustain projects.

When asked whether or not they thought community members should be involved in decision-making, or that they should have some sort of participatory role, all three responded affirmatively. Two felt it was a good idea, but that only leaders should be involved, and that other community members could be reached via the leaders. The two local nature guides are the only community members, with the exception of the park guards, that collaborate with SalvaNATURA and, as a result, SalvaNATURA views them as the leaders in the community. They are also members of a legalized Local Advisory Committee (COAL) and participate in monthly meetings that are attended by representatives from SalvaNATURA, MARN, and other communities that lie within the Park's buffer zone. One informant stated that the COAL is an "experiment" managed by SalvaNATURA, and that it is a way for local peoples to be involved in a participatory manner. Another informant felt that community members should be involved, but that it can be difficult because they become accustomed to being given things, and that ends up being all they want; the people need to act more independently.

One informant, in particular, was very candid in speaking with the researcher. His opinion as to why past projects have not met with success, he used the example of the small-business committee, was that "no se da seguimiento," meaning that there is no follow through on the project's progress (personal communication, October 2, 2008). He believes this is due, in part, to people (the participants) not being motivated, and is also the fault of the institution (SalvaNATURA). In his opinion, there needs to be a "más flexible forma de pensar," as well as "acercamiento a la gente," meaning that there needs to be more creativity in working with people, and that the institution needs to work more closely with local peoples; this, he feels, is the future (personal communication, October 2, 2008).

NGO's, in his opinion, are very set in their ways with regard to their functions, but they do not always function well. There is a need for alternatives and creativity in order to make any progress. He stated that SalvaNATURA says there will be ecotourism development in the bosque and all sounds good, but the reality is very different. Part of the reality has to do with the fact that regardless of whether or not

there is ecotourism development, there needs to be tourists, both national and internationals, willing to visit the area, and more of an effort needs to be made to attract them to the area. In making this statement, he used the example of how the San Benito sector has been receiving tourists for over 15 years, yet the area is not even close to reaching its potential, and that progress has been very slow. The area can tolerate a greater annual visitation rate, but the reality is that not enough has been done to promote the area.

It was also mentioned in the interviews that politics are involved in everything, and that they oftentimes dictate what does and does not happen. One informant feels that things could move forward in the San Chico sector of the Park with the help and support of the Mayor of San Chico, but that has yet to happen. He also holds the opinion that relocation of the community is the only real solution, stating that there have been other cases of much larger relocations (not in El Salvador), and that it could definitely be feasible. Another interesting comment was that MARN does not have much of a presence in the area, which is a problem because the community does not understand MARN's role, and in many cases does not realize they even exist. He stated that the community places all the blame on SalvaNATURA, when in fact MARN has the final say and should be held more accountable and have more involvement in the area.

MARN

Two informants were interviewed at MARN, one of which has been affiliated on and off with El Imposible since 1976 and is currently the Ministry's technician assigned to the Park, while the other works in the Natural Heritage department as the head of protected areas and has been with MARN for 10 years. Both informants were in favor of ecotourism development in the San Chico sector of the Park, but they did not elaborate on the how or why it should be developed. One informant, however, did say that the San Chico sector should have been developed first because San Benito is more biologically diverse and should be preserved, and also that San Chico has better access.

Interviews with these two informants tended to focus more on MARN's relationship with SalvaNATURA, as well as the issue of people inhabiting the Park. Both informants stated that they are in frequent contact with SalvaNATURA, primarily with the head of the Park. According to one informant, it is the role/work of the NGO, in this case SalvaNATURA, to work with the local peoples, and not that of MARN. The informant stated that SalvaNATURA does not have a good plan for local development, but that the situation could improve if there were other managers. In the two years that SalvaNATURA has been monitoring the management of the area (they have a yearly workshop with local stakeholders to "rate" the management of the area), there have been no advances; SalvaNATURA always receives a low rating in terms of working with the community and financing. It did not appear as though MARN was making any efforts towards improving the situation, which seemed to illustrate that even though there is a

co-management agreement between MARN and SalvaNATURA, MARN really has minimal involvement in terms of what takes place in the Park.

When asked whether or not they believed that community members should be involved in decision-making, as well as the development of ecotourism, the researcher received two very different responses. One informant held the opinion that local peoples should not be involved in any management decisions, mostly due to lack of education, but that maybe that will change in another 50 years. It was also stated that the biggest problem with local peoples' involvement has to do with the government because it is their responsibility to provide four basic necessities to all Salvadorans – “salud, vivienda, educación, y empleo (health, home, education, and employment).” If people were provided with such things, they would be more capable of being involved (personal communication, August 12, 2008). The other informant, on the other hand, stated that one cannot manage the area without help from the inside (the community), and that community members should be involved in decision-making. The informant feels there should be an “asociación fuerte entre la ONG y la comunidad,” meaning that there should be a strong association between the NGO and the community (personal communication, October 16, 2008).

6.2. Participant Observation

Key informants were an essential element to the researcher's participant observations. While the researcher developed close, open relationships with many informants, there were two individuals in particular who played a vital role in the research and provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of the setting. A community member born and raised in the bosque, and who currently volunteers as a local nature guide, provided detailed, in-depth information about the history of El Imposible, the community, and the relationship between local peoples and SalvaNATURA. She played a crucial role in introducing the researcher to many community members, and she became a close, trusted friend of the researcher by the time data collection was complete. The head of El Imposible National Park, who is employed by SalvaNATURA, served as a key informant among the managers. He has been involved in El Imposible since it was first established as a national park, and was able to provide the researcher with insightful, detailed information on the history of the area, past and present management concerns facing El Imposible, and advances SalvaNATURA has made towards the conservation of the area. He also provided the researcher with numerous documents produced by SalvaNATURA regarding the management of El Imposible. Both key informants spoke frankly and honestly, and were more than willing to answer any questions and assist the researcher whenever necessary.

Data acquired through participant observation was recorded in a notebook immediately after meetings, conversations with individuals, and other encounters that were significant to the research. Effort was also made to quote informants in the written record so as to lessen the chance of bias. Keeping a

written record of the data ensured that relevant information would not be forgotten, and made it feasible for the researcher to go back and review/analyze the data at a later date.

The researcher was an active participant observer for 1-½ years prior to beginning the study. She lived and worked in the study area as a Peace Corps volunteer, which resulted in her gaining the trust and respect of would-be informants. Had she not be such an active participant observer, there is no doubt that she would not have received such in-depth, truthful responses from the informants. Participant observation could, without a doubt, be considered the most important aspect of this research. It resulted in the shaping and development of the research study, and ultimately determined the direction the research took.

6.3. Analysis of Written Materials

Written materials were used extensively in an effort to corroborate information received through participant observation, as well as interviews. Materials were made available by several organizations in El Salvador, and were also accessed via the Internet. Literature published by SalvaNATURA, MiTUR, CORSATUR, and MARN, among others, was utilized as sources of background and statistical information, and oftentimes provided the researcher with new ideas to explore/research throughout the study.

Although analysis of written materials was not an essential component of the research, it did contribute to additional quantitative elements to the research. Information gleaned from the variety of written sources led to a more thorough, detailed explanation of the issues addressed in the research.

7. CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to assess the potential for ecotourism development in the San Francisco Menéndez sector of El Imposible National Park based upon the attitudes and opinions of local peoples and Park managers. The project could be considered a success in that each of the objectives were accomplished and, overall, it achieved what it set out to do, as is illustrated in the results chapter.

7.1. Review of Results

Research results show that 88.2% of informants from the bosque support ecotourism development in the San Chico sector of El Imposible and view the area as an attractive tourist destination. It is unmistakably obvious, however, that there is a lack of communication and trust between community members and Park managers. Regardless of whether or not SalvaNATURA moves forward with promoting ecotourism development in the area, the lack of trust community members feel towards managers will be a deterrent to any progress. Without good communication between both stakeholder groups, SalvaNATURA will most likely not be successful in their pursuits. As stated previously in this

paper, two essential components of ecotourism development are community-based control and the establishment of good communication between all stakeholders, both of which are presently absent from the San Chico sector of El Imposible. It is an encouraging sign that community members support ecotourism development and are willing to work with SalvaNATURA, despite the tumultuous history between them. Regardless of the support expressed by community members, managers will not achieve anything if they do not make more of a concerted effort in improving relations with the community. It is true that there have been meetings between both stakeholder groups in the past, some of which were apparently quite heated, but a significant amount of time has past since then, with no obvious improvements having been seen.

Interviews with SalvaNATURA revealed that the idea of leaving the San Chico sector to conservation and preservation has never been considered, and that the intent has always been to promote ecotourism in the area. Before efforts can be made to develop projects and encourage ecotourism, it would be beneficial to address the current situation that exists between community members and SalvaNATURA. If a working relationship is established and more trust is built, the groundwork will be laid for developing ecotourism in a participatory, sustainable manner. The majority of community members are open to working with SalvaNATURA, but it is not explicitly clear whether or not SalvaNATURA is genuinely interested in working with the community. The Park was established 20 years ago, and there has been very little change with regard to the relationship between managers and the community in that time. SalvaNATURA deserves to be praised for the substantial advancements they have made towards the conservation and protection of the area, but at the same time it seems as though they are avoiding the fact that the community exists; this is further illustrated through community member's comments of feeling isolated and forgotten by SalvaNATURA.

One gets the impression, in looking at the results, that the San Chico sector of El Imposible is not a priority of SalvaNATURA, yet in a sense it is perhaps the area that should be most considered for development. The fact that there is a community of individuals born and raised in the bosque who have extensive knowledge on the history and biodiversity of the area, and who are also willing to work, could be thought of as an advantage. Interview responses, however, show that not all those in the management positions share that sentiment. The community, characterized by extreme poverty, less than adequate living conditions, and a lack of formal education among many adults, is in a position where they could certainly benefit from ecotourism development in the area if it became a reality. However, regardless of SalvaNATURA's intentions for the San Chico sector and the support expressed by community members, it is evident that there is a lack of funding to support the development of ecotourism. SalvaNATURA relies primarily on donations in developing projects in El Imposible, and history seems to show that the

majority of available funds, as well as human resources support, has gone to support projects in San Benito.

The few past projects initiated by SalvaNATURA in the bosque have not met with success, due in part to there being no follow through and/or additional trainings. These “failures” could also be attributed to the high turnover rate among SalvaNATURA staff responsible for El Imposible. During the researcher’s two years of collaboration with SalvaNATURA, the director of the protected areas department position was filled three times, the responsibility of sustainable tourism development and promotion changed hands twice, and soon after the researcher left the country, the director of SalvaNATURA stepped-down. A high turnover rate makes it difficult to accomplish anything, as with every change comes new ideas and adjustments, and things are ultimately lost in the shuffle. It seems unlikely that SalvaNATURA will make any progress towards ecotourism development in the San Chico sector without having the involvement of dedicated individuals who are devoted, truly believe in its potential, and, most importantly, are willing to work with community members.

7.2. Recommendations

This research has helped to shed some light on El Imposible National Park, and has shown that there is great potential with regard to ecotourism development. At the same time, however, there are obstacles to overcome and efforts to be made before ecotourism can truly become a reality in the San Chico sector of the Park. Included here are recommendations that could be taken into consideration by SalvaNATURA in their future work in El Imposible.

Regularly scheduled meetings should be held between managers and community members.

Holding regularly scheduled meetings with the community in the bosque will provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, and will help build trust amongst the two stakeholder groups. The meetings could also serve as an opportunity for community members to learn about the roles of SalvaNATURA and MARN in El Imposible, as there seems to be many misconceptions related to this. Most importantly, the meetings could be a way in which to “break the ice” in an effort to improve relations between the two stakeholder groups, and would illustrate that SalvaNATURA is not avoiding the community.

Efforts should be made to improve the promotion and marketing of the El Imposible.

An increase in visitation to the San Chico sector has the potential of stimulating community members to be more interested in collaborating with SalvaNATURA. More tourists would most likely generate a higher demand for ecotourism services, which the community could provide, so long as SalvaNATURA is willing to work with the community in developing them. Without the “official” opening of the San Chico sector of the Park and increased promotion, a sustainable, somewhat steady

increase in the quantity of tourists visiting the area will never be achieved. SalvaNATURA and the community in the bosque both support ecotourism development, but ecotourism development needs tourists in order for it to be a worthwhile endeavor; without tourists visiting the area, no one will benefit from ecotourism.

In order to better market the area, SalvaNATURA could contact MiTUR and CORSATUR and collaborate more with them. Interviews with the tourism industry revealed that the two stakeholders are currently not collaborating, which is quite unfortunate. Not only does MiTUR have a significant budget devoted to tourism promotion in the country, but they also, in a sense, are the country's "expert" in the field. Working together could result in attracting greater numbers of Salvadorans and foreign tourists to El Imposible, which, at this point, is a tourist destination that is frequently overlooked.

A local leader could be employed to serve as a liason between the community and SalvaNATURA.

Employing a local leader to serve as a liason could help improve the relationship between SalvaNATURA and the community. This was actually done in the San Benito sector of the Park, and the individual who was employed was responsible for organizing meetings, relaying information from SalvaNATURA to the local peoples, and was also the go-to person in the community if locals had a question regarding SalvaNATURA, or needed to contact them. From what the researcher observed, this individual was well respected by local peoples and SalvaNATURA, and served as a constant link, which had previously been non-existent, between the two stakeholder groups. This could also be a beneficial approach in the bosque, so long as the right individual was chosen for the position. It would have to be someone that is liked by the community, and has some semblance of leadership skills, although more would be gained through work experience. The community in the bosque, if assisted, could form a local development association, and the chosen local leader could serve as the association's link to Park managers. This approach has the potential of opening the lines of communication, and helping SalvaNATURA establish a greater presence in the area.

Local nature guides could be employed as environmental educators.

There are currently two local nature guides from the bosque who have received extensive training in recent years, but are unable to put their skills to use due to low visitation to the area. Their knowledge and skills could be utilized in the buffer zone of the Park by way of outreach to local schools. This would by no means be a full-time job, but rather guides could receive a small sum of money for every talk given in a local school. SalvaNATURA currently has an environmental education program, one of whose responsibilities is to work with several local schools in the area. However, due to lack of human resources and time, the one environmental educator employed by SalvaNATURA, who has to travel 3 ½ hours by bus to reach the Park, is never able to accomplish much in the local schools. The local nature guides are

an untapped resource that could be employed to help raise awareness of the importance of the Park, and the need to conserve its natural resources, among local peoples. This could benefit the guides not only economically, but also in terms of leadership skills and confidence gained. It has been made clear that SalvaNATURA lacks sufficient funding for the implementation of projects, but funds could be solicited to help realize this project.

A decision should be made regarding the future of the community in the bosque.

Many community members feel unwanted in the bosque and believe SalvaNATURA wants to relocate them. This is an issue that has been hanging over the heads of both the managers and the community for over 20 years, and a decision has yet to be made. If managers want to relocate the community, then a plan should be developed immediately and grants should be written to fund the project. Community members are going to continue to have the issue of relocation in the back of their minds, and if it is not dealt with, the community will most likely never completely trust managers. There needs to be some sense of closure to the issue so as not to jeopardize the success and sustainability of future projects in the area.

Given that community members support ecotourism development and are willing to work with SalvaNATURA in making it a reality, it seems as though it would be beneficial to allow the community to remain in the bosque. The best option may be one that was stated in the Park Management Plan 2008-2012. It involves declaring a portion of the Park as no longer being parkland, and permitting the inhabitants to live in that area, guaranteeing them, with legal papers, that they are the official landowners.

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Appendix A

Interview guides used in the research process

Note: Although most interviews followed the general outline of the interview guides, some questions were changed and adapted depending on the informant.

Interview guide for park inhabitants

1. What do you like about living in El Imposible?

1. *¿Qué le gusta de vivir en El Imposible?*

2. What makes a protected area, or national park, different from other places? Has living within the boundaries of a national park affected the way in which you carry-out your daily activities? If so, how and why?

2. *En su opinión, ¿cuál es la diferencia entre un área protegida, o un parque nacional, y otros lugares? ¿Cree usted que su vida diaria ha estado afectada por vivir dentro de un parque nacional? Si contesta "sí," explique porque ha estado afectada.*

3. What do you think are the most important economic activities of the community? Are community members often away from the community during the day in order to take part in economic activities in other surrounding areas?

3. *En su opinión, ¿cuáles son las actividades económicas más importantes de la comunidad? ¿Hay miembros de la comunidad que trabajan fuera de la comunidad durante el día por causas económicas?*

4. What are your thoughts on ecotourism development in San Francisco Menéndez and in El Imposible? Do you think it is a good idea to try to develop ecotourism here?

- If no, then why?
- If yes, then what, in your opinion, needs to be done in order for ecotourism to be successfully developed here? Why would tourists want to visit El Imposible? What might attract visitors to the area?

4. *¿Qué piensa usted sobre el desarrollo de ecoturismo en San Francisco Menéndez y en El Imposible? Cree usted que es una buena idea tratar de desarrollar el ecoturismo aquí?*

- *Si contesta "no," explique porque no es una buena idea.*
- *Si contesta "sí," en su opinión ¿Qué se necesita hacer para desarrollar exitosamente el ecoturismo aquí? ¿Qué cosas atrae a los visitantes a San Francisco Menéndez y al Imposible?*

5. How could your community organize itself in order to facilitate ecotourism development?

5. *¿Cómo se puede organizar su comunidad para facilitar el desarrollo del ecoturismo?*

6. What, in your opinion, have been the major restrictions to ecotourism development in El Imposible in the past?

6. *¿Cuál, en su opinión, ha sido las restricciones mas grandes al desarrollo de ecoturismo en San Francisco Menéndez y El Imposible en el pasado?*

7. Do you think you and/or your family could ever benefit from ecotourism development in the community?

- If no, then why?
- If yes, then in what ways could you and/or your family benefit?

7. *¿Cree usted que su familia se puede beneficiar con el desarrollo del ecoturismo en la comunidad?*

- *Si contesta "no," explique porque no se puede beneficiar.*
- *Si contesta "sí," explique como se beneficiaría.*

8. How are relations between community members and the managers of El Imposible? Do you feel restricted in what you can and cannot do as inhabitants of El Imposible? How do you think the situation can be improved, if necessary?

8. ¿Cómo son las relaciones entre la comunidad y los gerentes del Imposible?; ¿Se siente usted restringido para hacer actividades por vivir dentro del Imposible?; ¿Cómo cree usted que se puede mejorar la situación entre la comunidad y los gerentes, si sea necesario?

9. Gender, age, education level, how long has she/he lived in the area, number of people living in the house, what he or she does for work.

9. Género, edad, educación; ¿Por cuanto tiempo ha vivido en el bosque?; ¿Cuántas personas viven en su casa?; ¿En que trabaja usted?

Interview guide for park guards

1. What do you like about working in El Imposible?

1. *¿Qué le gusta de trabajar en El Imposible?*

2. What makes a protected area, or national park, different from other places? Has working in a national park affected the way in which you view and/or treat the environment? If so, how and why?

2. *En su opinión, ¿cuál es la diferencia entre un área protegida, o un parque nacional, y otros lugares? ¿Cree usted que el medioambiente se ve diferente a usted y que se lo trata diferente que otra gente por trabajar en un parque nacional? Si contesta “sí,” explique como y porque..*

3. What are the rules of the El Imposible? Do people break the rules? If so, who breaks them (community members or tourists), and which rules are broken more often?

3. *¿Cuáles son las normas del Imposible? ¿Hay gente que no las respeta?*

- *Si contesta “sí,” ¿quien no las respeta (gente de la comunidad o turistas), y cuales de las normas no son respetadas con mas frecuencia?*

4. What are your thoughts on ecotourism development in San Francisco Menéndez and in El Imposible? Do you think it is a good idea to try to develop ecotourism here?

- If no, then why?

- If yes, then what, in your opinion, needs to be done in order for ecotourism to be successfully developed here? Why would tourists want to visit El Imposible? What might attract visitors to the area?

4. *¿Qué piensa usted sobre el desarrollo de ecoturismo en San Francisco Menéndez y en El Imposible? Cree usted que es una buena idea tratar de desarrollar el ecoturismo aquí?*

- *Si contesta “no,” explique porque no es una buena idea.*
- *Si contesta “sí,” en su opinión ¿Qué se necesita hacer para desarrollar exitosamente el ecoturismo aquí? ¿Qué cosas atrae a los visitantes a San Francisco Menéndez y al Imposible?*

5. What are the activities in El Imposible that visitors would be most interested in observing or taking part in?

5. *¿Cuáles son las actividades del Imposible que les interesarían más a los visitantes?*

6. How could the community organize itself in order to facilitate ecotourism development?

6. *¿Cómo se puede organizar la comunidad para facilitar el desarrollo del ecoturismo?*

7. What, in your opinion, have been the major restrictions to ecotourism development in San Francisco Menéndez and El Imposible in the past?

7. *¿Cuál, en su opinión, ha sido las restricciones más grandes al desarrollo de ecoturismo en San Francisco Menéndez y El Imposible en el pasado?*

8. Do you think you and/or your family could ever benefit from ecotourism development here?

- If no, then why?
- If yes, then in what ways could you and/or your family benefit?

8. *¿Cree usted que su familia se puede beneficiar con el desarrollo del ecoturismo en la aquí?*

- *Si contesta “no,” explique porque no se puede beneficiar.*
- *Si contesta “sí,” explique como se beneficia.*

9. Do you think your job would be affected if ecotourism were developed here? Why or why not?

9. *¿Cree usted que el desarrollo del ecoturismo puede afectar su trabajo? Explique porque sí o porque no.*

10. How are relations between the park guards/police and the managers of El Imposible?

10. ¿Cómo son las relaciones entre los guardaparques/la policía y los gerentes del Imposible

11. Gender, age, education level, how long has she/he lived and worked in the area.

11. Genero, edad, educación; ¿Por cuanto tiempo ha vivido y trabajado aquí?

Interview guide for business owners in San Chico

1. What do you like about living near El Imposible?

1. *¿Qué le gusta de vivir cerca del Imposible?*

2. What makes a protected area, or national park, different from other places? Has living near the boundaries of a national park affected the way in which you carry-out your daily activities? If so, how and why?

2. *En su opinión, ¿cuál es la diferencia entre un área protegida, o un parque nacional, y otros lugares?; ¿Cree usted que su vida diaria ha estado afectada por vivir muy cerca de un parque nacional? Si contesta “sí,” explique porque ha estado afectada.*

3. What do you think are the most important economic activities of San Francisco Menéndez? Are community members often away from the community during the day in order to take part in economic activities in other surrounding areas?

3. *En su opinión, ¿cuáles son las actividades económicas más importantes de la San Francisco Menéndez?; ¿Hay miembros de la comunidad que trabajan fuera de la comunidad durante el día por causas económicas?*

4. Do tourists go to your store/restaurant, or use your transportation services, when visiting El Imposible?

4. *¿Vienen a su tienda/comedor, o usan sus servicios de transporte, los turistas cuando visitan El Imposible?*

5. What are your thoughts on ecotourism development in San Francisco Menéndez and in El Imposible? Do you think it is a good idea to try to develop ecotourism here?

- If no, then why?
- If yes, then what, in your opinion, needs to be done in order for ecotourism to be successfully developed here? Why would tourists want to visit San Francisco Menéndez and El Imposible? What might attract visitors to the area?

5. *¿Qué piensa usted sobre el desarrollo de ecoturismo en San Francisco Menéndez y en El Imposible?; Cree usted que es una buena idea tratar de desarrollar el ecoturismo aquí?*

- *Si contesta “no,” explique porque no es una buena idea.*
- *Si contesta “sí,” en su opinión ¿Qué se necesita hacer para desarrollar exitosamente el ecoturismo aquí? ¿Qué cosas atrae a los visitantes a San Francisco Menéndez y al Imposible?*

6. What are the activities in your community that visitors would be most interested in observing or taking part in?

6. *¿Cuáles son las actividades de su comunidad que les interesarían más a los visitantes?*

7. How could your community organize itself in order to facilitate ecotourism development?

7. *¿Cómo se puede organizar su comunidad para facilitar el desarrollo del ecoturismo?*

8. What, in your opinion, have been the major restrictions to ecotourism development in San Francisco Menéndez and El Imposible in the past?

8. *¿Cuál, en su opinión, ha sido las restricciones mas grandes al desarrollo de ecoturismo en San Francisco Menéndez y El Imposible en el pasado?*

9. Do you think you and/or your family could ever benefit from ecotourism development in the community?

- If no, then why?
- If yes, then in what ways could you and/or your family benefit?

9. *¿Cree usted que su familia se puede beneficiar con el desarrollo del ecoturismo en la comunidad?*

- *Si contesta “no,” explique porque no se puede beneficiar.*
- *Si contesta “sí,” explique como se beneficiaría.*

10. How are relations between community members and the managers of El Imposible?

10. *¿Cómo son las relaciones entre la comunidad y los gerentes del Imposible?*

11. Gender, age, education level, how long has she/he lived in the area, number of people living in the house, how many people do you employ.

11. *Genero, edad, educación; ¿Por cuanto tiempo ha vivido en el bosque?; ¿Cuántas personas viven en su casa?; ¿Cuántas personas emplea?*

Interview guide for SalvaNATURA and Government Ministries

1. What do you like about your job?

1. *¿Qué le gusta de su trabajo?*

2. What makes a protected area, or national park, different from other places?

2. *En su opinión, ¿cuál es la diferencia entre un área protegida, o un parque nacional, y otros lugares.*

3. What is the history of the relationship between SalvaNATURA, MARN, and the community of El Imposible, and how has it changed over time?

3. *¿Cómo es la historia de las relaciones entre SalvaNATURA, MARN, y la comunidad del Imposible, y como ha cambiado durante los años?*

4. What are SalvaNATURA's and MARN's goals for the future of El Imposible, primarily the San Francisco Menéndez sector?

4. *¿Cuáles son las metas que tienen SalvaNATURA y MARN para el futuro del Imposible, mas que todo en el sector de San Francisco Menéndez?*

5. How would you define ecotourism?

5. *¿Cómo define usted ecoturismo?*

6. What are your thoughts on ecotourism development in San Francisco Menéndez and in El Imposible? Do you think it is a good idea to try to develop ecotourism here?

- If no, then why?
- If yes, then what, in your opinion, needs to be done in order for ecotourism to be successfully developed here? Why would tourists want to visit El Imposible? What might attract visitors to the area?

6. *¿Qué piensa usted sobre el desarrollo de ecoturismo en San Francisco Menéndez y en El Imposible?; Cree usted que es una buena idea tratar de desarrollar el ecoturismo aquí?*

- *Si contesta "no," explique porque no es una buena idea.*
- *Si contesta "sí," en su opinión ¿Qué se necesita hacer para desarrollar exitosamente el ecoturismo aquí? ¿Qué cosas atrae a los visitantes a San Francisco Menéndez y al Imposible?*

7. What are some of the challenges facing ecotourism development in the San Francisco Menéndez sector of El Imposible, and how do you think they can be overcome?

7. *¿Cuáles son unos de los retos en el desarrollo del ecoturismo en el sector de San Francisco Menéndez del Imposible, y como los puede superar?*

8. How has the community of El Imposible and San Francisco Menéndez been included in development projects initiated by SalvaNATURA and MARN over time? In your opinion, how important is it to include community members in the development of ecotourism in El Imposible?

8. *¿Cómo han sido incluidas las comunidades del Imposible y San Francisco Menéndez en proyectos del desarrollo iniciados por SalvaNATURA y MARN durante los años? ¿Cree usted que es importante incluir los miembros de la comunidad en el desarrollo del ecoturismo en El Imposible?*

9. How could the community organize itself in order to facilitate ecotourism development?

9. *¿Cómo se puede organizar la comunidad para facilitar el desarrollo del ecoturismo?*

10. Gender, age, education level, and how long has she/he worked here.

10. *Genero, edad, educación; ¿Por cuanto tiempo ha trabajado aquí?*

