



Taming the Jungle, Saving the Maya Forest

The Military's Role in Guatemalan Conservation

Megan Ybarra
Willamette University



Associated Press

Obama Family Arrives in El Salvador

Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)

“Ranchers and Drug Barons Threaten Rain Forest”

-- NY Times, 17 July 2010

“There’s traffickers, cattle ranchers, loggers, poachers and looters,” said Richard D. Hansen, an American archaeologist who is leading the excavation of the earliest and largest Mayan city-state, El Mirador, in the northern tip of the reserve. **“All the bad guys are lined up to destroy the [Maya Biosphere] Reserve. You can’t imagine the devastation that is happening.”**

¿Mini-Narco-State or Maya-Themed Vacationland?

Jungle to be Tamed, Forest to be Saved

- ▣ Taming the Jungle
- ▣ Saving the Maya Forest
- ▣ Jungle Reprised
- ▣ Implications

Taming the Jungle: Colonization



“Come to the conquest of your own territory!”

– Samayoa Rivera (nd)

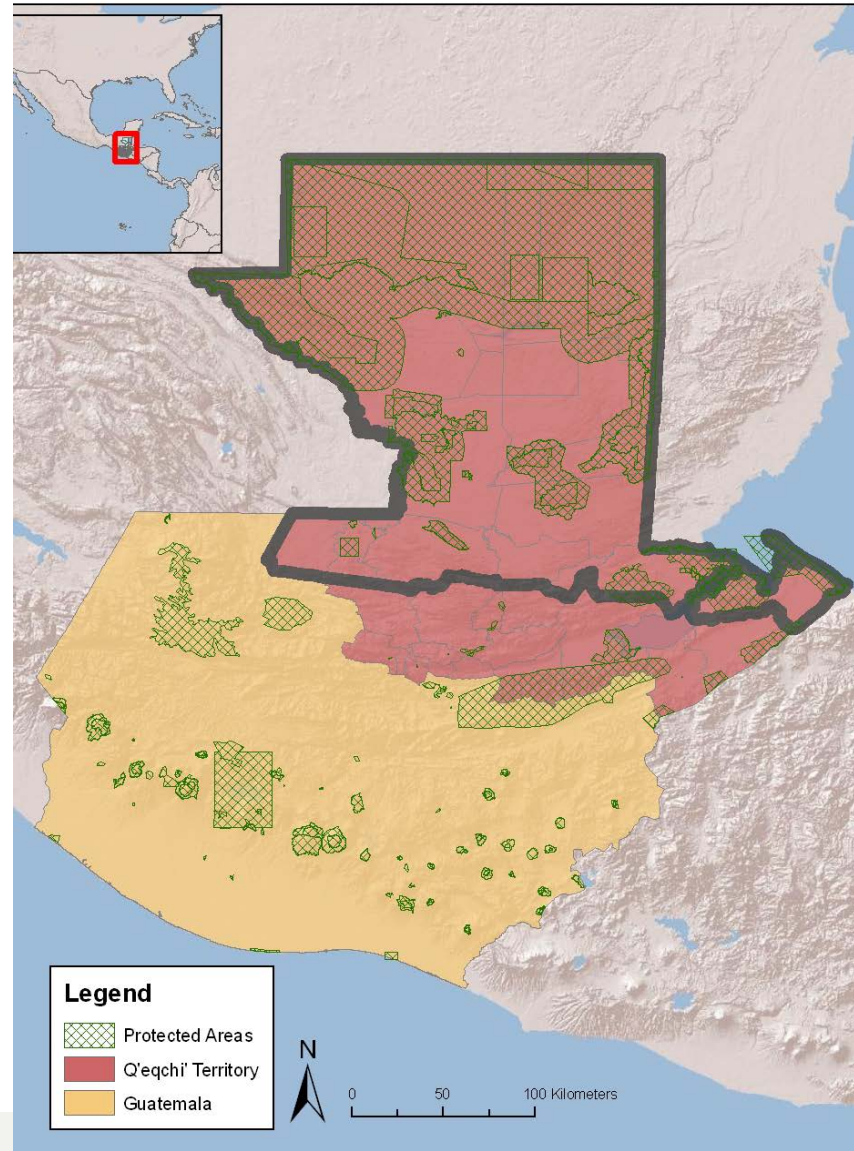
Taming the Jungle: Counterinsurgency



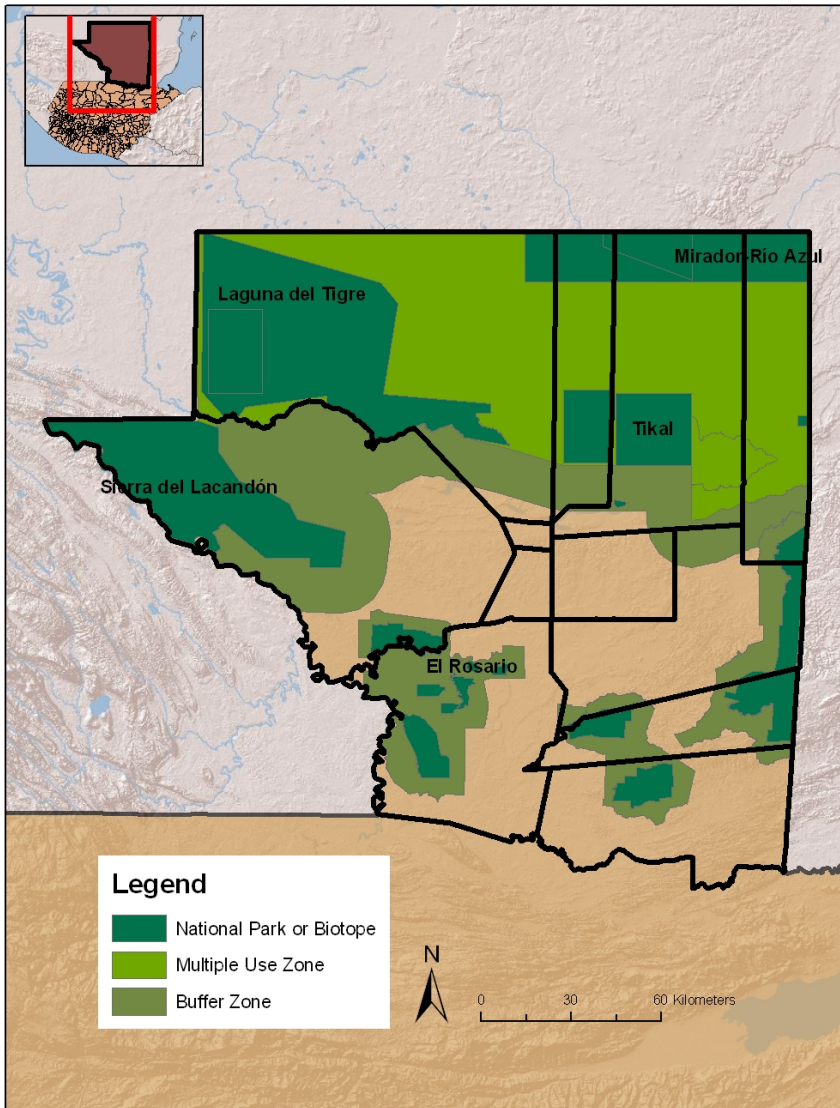
Inventing the Maya Forest?



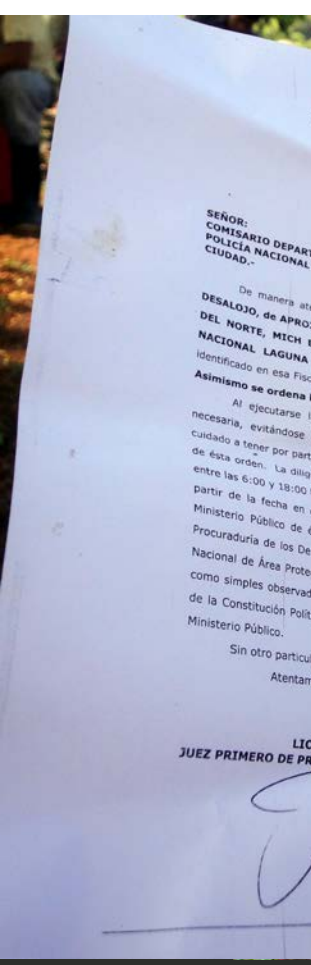
Whose woods are these, anyway?



Save the Maya Forest!



- 1990: Maya Biosphere Reserve becomes heart of Guatemala's new protected areas system
- Mayarema project (USAID) -- \$27 million
- 1996: Peace Accord on "Agrarian Situation"



Living on Scorched Earth

“We didn’t invade the park, the park invaded us!”

– Sepac community members



¿Guerrilla?

¿Park Invader?

¿Narcocampesino?



Is saving the Maya Forest remilitarization by another name?

This research was funded by an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship, NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant, and UC Human Rights Fellowship. I am grateful to Oxlaju Aj Tz'i', Proyecto Lachuá, APROBA-SANK, CONGCOOP, Mercy Corps, and all those who invited me into their homes and onto their lands.