

Case Study 2 Brazil's Private Natural Heritage Reserves: Private initiative as public policy

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In Brazil, PPAs are recognised by law in perpetuity; once declared they cannot be rescinded, by the owner or the government (Best Practice 4.1.1). Permanent protection is the main benefit to the landholder. The system is also supported by a strong and growing network providing technical and peer support (Principle 8.2).

Overview

Brazil has a well-established and growing system of what are known as Private Natural Heritage Reserves, or RPPN from the name in Portuguese (Pellin & Lima Ranieri, 2016). RPPN are protected in perpetuity and created at the initiative of landholders (De Vasconcellos Pegas & Castley, 2015). Activities allowed in these areas include scientific research and tourism and recreation and education, as long as such activities are not incompatible with the protection of the resources in the area. RPPN emerged in 1990 and have been incorporated in the national system of protected areas by federal law since 2000. This is significant because it provides permanent protection; land use cannot be changed, even by the government, except in exceptional cases. The land stays in private ownership. It can be sold or otherwise transferred, but the certificate of the protected area is transferred to a new owner.

Filling the gaps in a protected area network

There are nearly 1,500 PPAs in Brazil, totalling 772,000 ha. This is not a large area compared to over 76 million ha of federal protected areas, but RPPN are often well-placed to protect areas of high biodiversity. RPPN can also be better managed than their government counterparts. As one crude measure, there is only one manager per every 45,000 ha of federal protected area. Assuming a minimum of one manager per RPPN, the average is one per 550 ha. These are just averages over a huge country, but this metric provides some sense of scale. A recent assessment of management effectiveness in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul found that the RPPNs are indeed better managed than their government counterparts, though both needed improvement (Pellin & Lima Ranieri, 2016).

RPPNs can be certified by any level of government, federal, state or municipal, but do not receive much in the way of financial incentives from the recognising government. They do qualify for relief from property tax but, unlike in the US (see Case Study 11), that is not a major driver, except for



Snowy-crowned tern (*Sterna trudeaui*) at the RPPN Costau do Santinho © Brent A. Mitchell

the Pantanal biome, where the largest RPPNs are. They do support each other through a national network, including advice on how to achieve financial sustainability. For example, in the states of São Paulo and Paraná the RPPN owners' associations successfully advocated for the creation of a Payment of Environmental Services scheme. A leader in the network is working on a guidebook on this subject, and management skills within the network are growing. From the perspective of the national system, government is seeing greater conservation capacity with little direct investment.

RPPN are not evenly distributed across the country. There are relatively few of these PPAs in the wetland Pantanal, but on average they are quite large. In contrast, though there are now PPAs in all Brazilian states, by far the largest number of individual RPPNs is in the Atlantic Forest biome. But on average they are much smaller in size.

RPPNs came to international attention through the reintroduction of the golden lion tamarin (*Leontopithecus rosalia*) from captive breeding programmes in zoos around the world. PPAs provided the habitats. The Atlantic Forest is a biodiversity hotspot, where two-thirds of the country's population lives. So, only about 16 per cent of the original forest remains, and more than 80 per cent is privately owned. It is therefore difficult to create new public protected areas there. This is an excellent example of how PPAs can address habitat fragmentation and provide connectivity in areas where other approaches are less effective.



Jaguar (*Panthera onca*) © Project Oncafari

Summary

- RPPNs are protected in perpetuity; their status as protected areas cannot be changed, even by the government (except in cases of public utility development where no other local alternative is available) (Best Practice 4.1.1).
- RPPNs play a disproportionately large role in conservation as they often exist in biomes that are under-represented in public protected areas, and/or provide connectivity in mosaics of protected areas of different governance types (Principle 6.2).
- Networks of RPPNs at state and federal level are committed to provide technical and peer support to individual landowners (Best Practice 8.2.1).
- The national network maintains a database and RPPNs are considered part of the national system of protected areas. There is a national task force currently working to increase the registry of RPPNs in the World Database on Protected Areas (Best Practice 7.1.1).