Defining the Institutional Arrangement and Identifying Relevant Stakeholders to Form the Advisory Council of Paru State Forest, in the Brazilian Amazon Forest

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Public participation through an Advisory Council, to manage and represent society preferences in managing State Forests (and other Conservation Units) is a need - and a privilege - required by law. The great challenge in assuring effective participation is to build councils which are representative: which consider several social sectors and respective interests involved in the management of the Unit and active.

Paru State Forest is a special case since it is the largest Conservation Unit for sustainable use in Brazil, with 3.6 million hectares, and it is located in a remote region, in which the main transportation options among cities are long boat trips or expensive air trips. Therefore, in this case, the time and cost to gather potential members of the Advisory Council is a major concern to form an effective – and even economically viable - Council.

Our team has conducted surveys, literature reviews and consultations with key informants to design a strategy to form the council for Paru and other State Forests in the Amazon. Three lessons learned appear to be important for future experiences: (i) social and economic assessments are important to identify potential counselors, institutions, and interests; (ii) it is vital to survey and identify potential conflicts and take corrective measures before establishing the council; (iii) criteria to identify potential stakeholders should consider the institutional roles in the particular region and the availability and institutional interests contributing with the present moment.

How we identified stakeholders for the creation of Advisory Councils for State Forests.

Imaflora, Imazon and SEMA led systematical interviews with all existing organizations in the Calha Norte cities, which are potentially interested in participating of the council, or which have been acting within, or in the surroundings of the State Forests. A specific questionnaire was designed to collect and systematize information about the types of organizations and main projects, number of members, time of existence, relations with other groups, understanding about the State Forests, and strengths and limitations that may affect positively or negatively the implementation of State Forests.

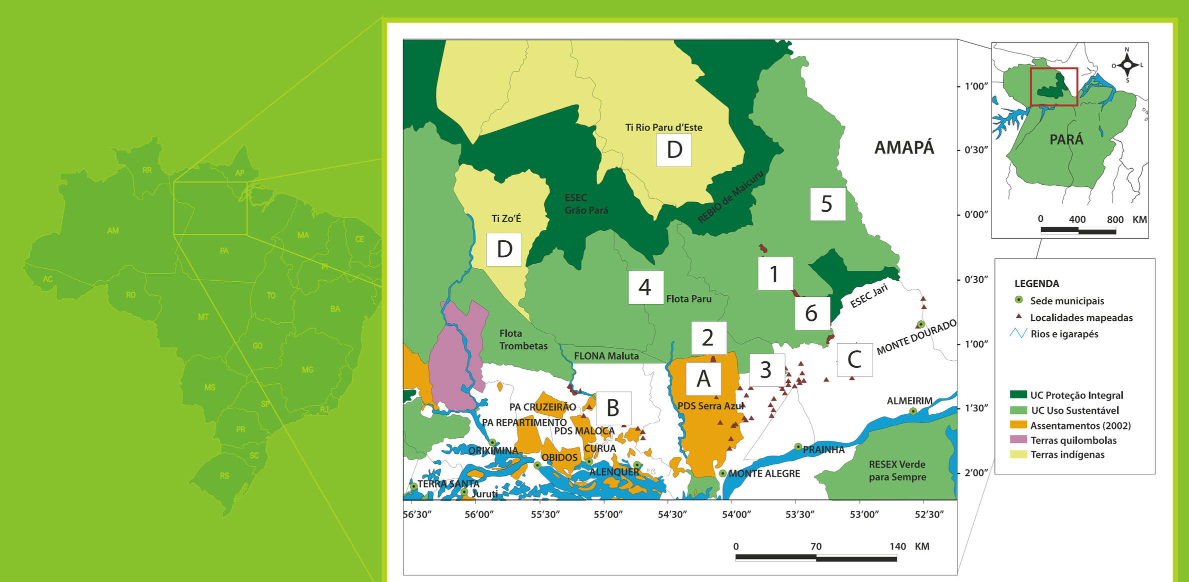

Figure 1.
Uses Identified in Paru State Forest: 1 – Collection of brazil nuts, 2 – Timber forest stewardship, 3 – Cattle raising and agriculture, 4 – Mineral research, 5 – Gold mining, 6 – Hotel; and settlement in the vicinity: A – PDS Serra Azul, B – PDS Paraíso, C –Recreio and Cafezal communities, D - Indigenous communities.

All relevant cities in Calha Norte were visited (Almerim, Monte Alegre, Alenquer, Óbidos, Oriximiná, Faro, Prainha, Laranjal do Jari), and 138 representatives from different stakeholder groups were interviewed. Very few people had ever been in the State Forests, even before their creation. Therefore, there was limited information offered by stakeholders about the area. For this reason, the Imaflora team joined the Imazon and SEMA staffs in field expeditions to the State Forests. The assumption was that visiting the State Forests is critical to understand which sectors and institutions are relevant in their implementation (Figure 1).

Lessons learned - Reviewing experiences in how to build and operate advisory councils for Protected Areas.

We reviewed some experiences on how to create and operate an advisory council in the region by participating of two workshops, participating of two meetings of the Advisory Council, and interviewing key people in a set of Conservation Units where the council is operating. We participated in workshop to reorganize the council of the Reserva de Desenvolvimento Sustentável do Iratapuru River in March 2008, in Amapá. We also participated in another workshop on the exchange of experiences about creating and operating councils for protected areas in July 2008 in Acre, where we presented and discussed our experience in Calha Norte. Thirteen other experiences in the Amazon were also presented. We attended two council meetings of the Floresta Nacional de Saracá Taquerá, and Parque Estadual da Serra do Mar. Finally, we interviewed the counselors and other key people of the council of the Tumucumaque National Park, Amapá National Forest, Amapá State Forest, Algodoal Environmental Protected Area, and Antimary State Forest.

We also surveyed publications on councils for protected areas and other references. This survey helped us avoid some mistakes that we identified in other experiences in implementing a councils. The main issue we identified was when there were NGOs working with Government as in like our case was that the local stakeholders misunderstood the role of the NGO. In some cases, the NGO assumed the role of the Government, instead of helping the Government to strengthen its relations with the local population. We avoided that by planning and executing all activities with the Government State of Para's team to assure they improved their abilities and knowledge and established direct relations with the stakeholders. It's relevant to assure the success of the process in the long term when the Government has not NGOs and extra resources from other projects.

Another lesson was to build the council only with local institutions and involve other important institutions by other ways such as by consultations via the internet and meetings to discuss specific issues. A large number of issues discussed in the council was relevant only for the participation of local institutions.The experience of the other Conservation Units showed us that the council was very a relevant venue for these institutions. Institutions based in the capital that can be easily accessed by phone and e-mail are not critical for all meetings.

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Uses of the Paru State Forest

Traditional collection of Brazil nuts

Hotel for fishing; tourists arrived by small airplanes

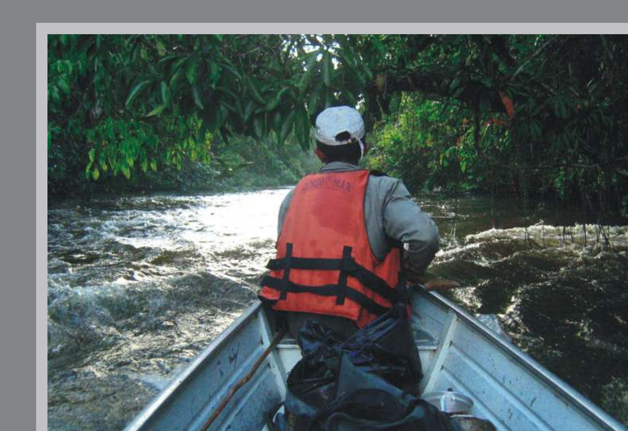
Plenty of sites for tourists – waterfalls combined with a huge tropical forest

Cattle raising and agriculture in a small scale

Small companies doing Forest management

Settlement in the vicinity

Natural obstacles demand tough logistics to reach all communities and site of stakeholders



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