

Linking Commercial Success to Community and Conservation Benefits: An Analysis of Tour Operators and Agencies in Costa Rica

Lisa Seales^{1, 2} and Taylor Stein²

¹ School of Natural Resources and Environment, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

² School of Forest Resources and Conservation, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

Throughout the world people are attempting to use tourism as a tool for economic growth, conservation, and improved quality of life for local residents, but negative environmental impacts and economic leakages are common. Since the impacts of tourism are variable, it is important to understand which businesses are providing conservation and community benefits. Commercial viability is often cited as an important determinant of sustainable behavior. However, little research examines the relationship between commercial success and the provision of benefits. This study explores the possible link between commercial success and conservation and community benefits, and seeks to answer the following question: *Is success associated with conservation behavior and the provision of benefits to local communities?* Tour operators and agencies offering tours and travel services in Costa Rica comprised the population for this study. A cross-sectional research design and a purposive, cluster sampling approach were used. The sample size for the study was 167 entrepreneurs, a response rate of 86.1%. Success was operationalized using indicators such as growth, longevity, number of visitors and employees, and the entrepreneur's perceptions of success and profitability. Nine conservation behaviors and thirteen community benefit variables were examined using Likert scales. Relationships between commercial success and conservation and community benefit variables were analyzed using Spearman Correlations. Results demonstrate there is a clear relationship between the size, growth, and relative success of a business and certain conservation behaviors. However, there may actually be a negative relationship between longevity, size, and socially responsible behavior.

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Contact Information: Lisa Seales, School of Forest Resources & Conservation, University of Florida, 227 Newins-Ziegler Hall, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA; Phone: 541-554-2290; Email: lisaseal@ufl.edu