

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

The Southern Patagonian Ice Field is the third largest ice mass on the planet and the largest in the Americas. It stretches from north to south over 350 km, from 48°20' S to 51°30' S. It has an extension of 16,800 km², of which 85% belongs to Chile and the rest to Argentina. Although the “Campo de HieloSur” and its surroundings are perhaps the best-preserved territory in Patagonia, the Lake O'Higgins basin is its only portion that currently lacks formal protection of any kind. As such, it is highly vulnerable to megadevelopment - roads, dams, and mining. In order to face these threats and promote a community vision of conservation in Chilean Patagonia, we are proposing to expand the lands under legal protection through the creation of a new protected area under the category of Bien Nacional Protegido (National Protected Good) the most recent category of the National system of public Protected Areas in Chile, which we have named “Río Pascua”, which encompasses around 80,000 hectares of the O'Higgins Lake basin and its imposing drainage the untamed Pascua River.

By protecting the Pascua, it would be possible to effectively conserve the biodiversity and the ecological and hydrological processes of the northeast portion of the Southern Patagonian Ice Field. In addition, it would be possible to protect public access to the Bernardo O'Higgins National Park (BONP), the largest National Park of the country, ensure the landscape and ecological integrity of a fragile ecosystem with increasing pressure for tourist use, develop a plan for the conservation and sustainable management of this buffer zone. BONP and carry out scientific research to protect one of the most important populations of the endangered huemul deer worldwide.

This article reviews the history of the process of the scientific and community-based conservation work to create this new protected area at the same time all the administrative steps to declare the first river basin under legal protection in Chile and its state of the arts on its sixth year