

Inform VI: COLOMBIA: A COUNTRY IN CONSTRUCTION OR IN DESTRUCTION?

Martha Fandiño-Lozano & Willem van Wyngaarden

Grupo ARCO, Bogotá, Colombia

info@grupoarco.info

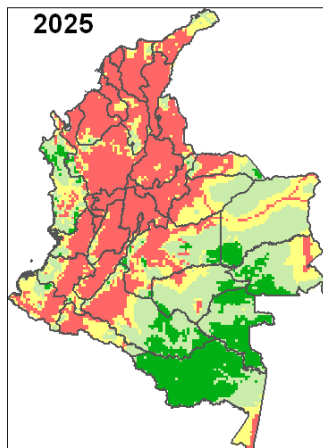
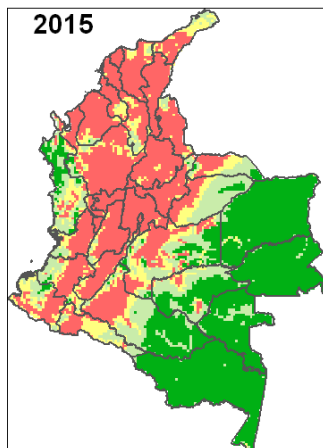
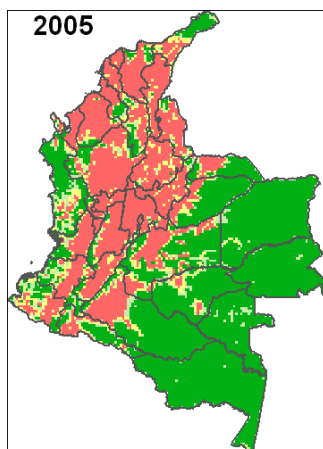
The tension between <development> and <conservation> of the country tends to be permanent, but unnecessary. It is not a matter of choice. The two can be achieved if the territory is divided correctly between different uses. This is called spatial planning. How to lower the knife to cut the cake depends on what we want to guarantee and how we believe that such aim can be achieved.

The first question is usually answered by means of normative principles which, through its fundamental character, can be considered State policy. The second question is more instrumental and, therefore, of a more dynamic kind. The quality of the spatial planning will depend on the plausibility of the normative principles and the merit of the technical or scientific solution.

When it comes to nature conservation, it would be sensible to ensure: (1) that all species and their habitats are preserved and (2) that the territory assigned for human use does not deteriorate. In addition, for this division to be effective, it should be inalienable. We cannot invade the part of the territory that is allocated to conserve wildlife. In this order of ideas, the spatial planning in Colombia is still incipient.

Speaking only about biological conservation, according to the Grupo ARCO data, 492.000 hectares are destroyed within the national parks, while 142 of the 337 terrestrial ecosystems remain excluded from these conservation areas; which belong to the most reliable category given the existing regulations.

What is happening in the rest of the territory does not give much time to overcome these gaps. Of the terrestrial part of Colombia, 31.8% has already been destroyed and 16.8% is being used, although keeping some of its natural features. Every year at least 350,000 hectares of nature disappears, and that number tends to increase fast.



Legend for land use transformation maps:
No transformado (Green)
0 - 25 % (Light Green)
25 - 50 % (Yellow)
> 50 % (Red)

In 2006 the National Parks Unit requested us to analyze the vulnerability of Colombia to the expansion of infrastructure, mining and oil exploration and exploitation and rural population growth. In 2015 only 41.2% of Colombia would remain in natural condition; and in 2025, only 32.0%.

With the recent decisions on the expansion of infrastructure and mining, the situation tends to worsen. It is thus urgent to complete the system of conservation areas as soon as possible on the base of sound science. Given the importance and the irreversible character of this decision, an open and constructive debate is needed among those that are prioritizing new conservation areas. While this does not happen and the decision to expand the park system is not made, Colombia will remain a country in the process of destruction.

Source of data and maps: Wyngaarden, W. van & M. Fandiño-Lozano, 2006. Prioridades de acción. Informe final del Convenio 022 de 2005. Grupo ARCO, Bogotá.