

TCD Practitioner Grant Report: Dissemination of Research Results

Wildlife-Friendly certification: a case study of Patagonian cashmere producers and buyers.

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Certification schemes are one popular example of market-based strategies which hold promise to meet natural resources conservation and development goals. Several certification schemes emerged to promote conservation of nature and human well-being. Long-term success of conservation and development efforts through certification schemes is also relevant and relies on continuation of both product supply and a steady market demand. Certified Wildlife-Friendly scheme is a relatively new certification that aims to conserve threatened wildlife and their habitat while improving communities' livelihoods. With the support of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), this certification has been launched in Patagonia on the basis of cashmere production to reduce human-wildlife conflict, promote sustainable goat-herding, and improve producer's livelihoods. WCS through its Patagonian and Andean Steppe Program has been working since 2011 with two communities of goat-herders to produce Certified Wildlife-Friendly cashmere. WCS have been working in Patagonia for more than 20 years and founded the project Patagonian 'Green' Cashmere in Neuquén. I partnered with them for my field research to collaborate in the continuance and potential expansion of this certification throughout Patagonia.

In the summer of 2017, thanks to the TCD Practitioner Grant, I was able to travel to Argentina and return my master's research results to my WCS collaborators from Neuquén and WCS leadership in Buenos Aires. My results were presented to Susan Walker and Andrés Novaro, directors of the Patagonian Steep Program in Neuquén; Guillermo Harris, director of WCS Argentina; and Martín Mendez, director of WCS for the Southern Cone. This opportunity also involved the discussion of possible implications for current and future decisions and practices regarding the certification in Patagonia as well as decisions and plans about my results for publication. Currently, WCS is not longer working with the cashmere certification of communities I visited during my fieldwork because of logistic difficulties and financial constraints. However, they started working with ranchers to certified wool from Península Valdés, Chubut. This new scenario modified my plans to return my results to the INTA agency that works with herders in Neuquén as well as cashmere buyers in Buenos Aires and deliver through WCS pictures to herder's communities. I believe the dissemination of my research results provided information useful for the continuance of a certification initiative of wool that also attempts to improve communities' livelihoods and conserve threatened wildlife in the Patagonian region.