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"Why Exchange Values are Not Environmental Values: Explaining the Problem with Neoliberal Conservation"

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In recent years, scholars have critiqued neoliberal conservation, asserting that neoliberal conservation policies tend to have ineffective outcomes and reinforce existing power relations. I build on this research by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data from research in the Bellbird Biological Corridor, Costa Rica. I demonstrate that only a small subset of values for sustainable land uses align with monetary exchange values for ecosystem services, and I suggest that this may result in neoliberal conservation policy in the region having a perverse impact on long-term sustainability. Mixed methods data show that across the study area landowners engage differently with neoliberal conservation mechanisms, and market fluency is one of the factors shaping this interaction. Results further show how policy that emphasises an exchange value view of environmental benefits reflects an over-simplification of values that can undermine ecological sustainability by promoting short-term values of "competitive land uses." This research highlights that integrating ecosystem services into marketable goods renders neoliberal conservation policies inadequate, and subject to volatile market fluctuations. I suggest that conservation policy should reinforce multifaceted social values toward sustainable landscapes, rather than promote economic incentives that reduce environmental benefits to exchange value. (Text from author's abstract)

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