Narco-Cattle Ranching in Political Forests

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Abstract

In Central America, drug traffickers are deforesting the region's remaining forests and protected areas through a process known as narco-ganadería, narco-cattle ranching. Drawing on the case study of Laguna del Tigre National Park, this article argues that narco-cattle ranching is a key driver of deforestation in Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve. Using ethnographic and remote-sensing methods, we describe narco-cattle ranching's money-laundering practices, its territorial dynamics, and its environmental impacts. We draw on theorisations of “political forests” to explain how drug trafficking organisations transform land use in the reserve, and along the way, remake its ecology, territories and subjects. Our work illustrates that drug policy is inextricably linked to conservation policy in the Americas. More specifically, we argue that community-based resource management improves forest and protected area residents’ abilities to resist drug-trafficking related land use change by strengthening local governance and land tenure regimes.

Read the full article in Antipode [1].

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