



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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CAMERON: This is Blair Cameron with Innovations for Successful Societies. I'm here in Heredia in Costa Rica with Alvaro Ugalde. Mr. Ugalde, thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me today. If we could start—could you give me a bit of an introduction on your background and how—what you studied and how you came to be working for the National Parks—how you created the National Parks, just a brief introduction.

UGALDE: *Yes, I studied biology, general biology here in the University of Costa Rica. I got a Bachelor's degree from there. Then I studied Natural Resource Management at the University of Michigan. I actually went to that university for three years; one year first and then after nine or ten years, I went back for more studies in the same area. Even before I finished my BS in Costa Rica I was already a volunteer in the first national park, which existed but had no staff, no management. So I decided to start volunteering there, not because I planned to make a career with any future there. That never existed at that moment. What we have today—I had just gone through an international seminar on national parks and equivalent services which was taught—used to be taught by the U.S. Park Service, Canadian parks and the University of Michigan.*

They pulled together about thirty men and women from different continents and gave us the grand tour of teaching, learning, experiences, traveling together from Jasper National Park in Canada to the Grand Canyon in the U.S., stopping in fifteen, twenty national parks and meeting everyone from the superintendents to the rangers and even concessioners. We learned how those two countries ran their park systems. So that was like the introduction to my life—to my career for sure.

Even though I knew that I liked biology, I had never heard of conservation biology before. Even going to the seminar, I was a little bit reluctant because I was going to miss some semesters in my biology career. Then life worked its way out and I went, and of course that was the most inspirational experience you can probably ever have, not because of the countries themselves but because of the nature of the group and the nature of the course, which was with traveling for so many miles, so many protected areas and talking to so many people and being free to ask so many questions that if after a month you don't get it, then you're crazy, because you're really enthusiastic about—for example, I learned that there were park systems already in most countries of the world, some of them a hundred years old or more. Latin America was the exception to that.

At the end of that seminar, since I had lost my semester here, I decided to stay two more months at the Grand Canyon. I registered in Park Operations course that they were teaching there and just work with the rangers at the Grand Canyon for two more months. So it was actually a very intensive three-month period of my life traveling with people from around the world.

CAMERON: Then you came back to Costa Rica?

UGALDE: *Then I came back to Costa Rica one week after Congress had passed for the first time—that's not true, the first time was centuries back that we tried to do a little bit of conservation, but for the first time in the last century to regulate the use of forestry. There were one or two pages that referred to national parks. So those one or two pages were of most interest to me because I had just come back from seeing and learning about that. That is why I decided to volunteer until somebody would be able to pay me a salary to continue working in the park.*

I spent—between voluntary assignments and then being hired as park administrator—I spent three years at Santa Rosa National Park, 1970 to '73. It is actually the first national park although not the first protected area, but the first national park.

CAMERON: Then can you summarize the process of developing more national parks and how that came about? How did the amount of protected areas grew so much over the next couple of decades?

UGALDE: *The best resume probably is being inside a type five hurricane for thirty years. That's it. Once we started, once we made ourselves conscious that we could do it, yes it can be done in Costa Rica, nothing could stop us. Being a very small country with very good access to politicians, decision makers in general, two guys, Mario (Boza) and me, got—lucked it out. We were hired to build the park system in Costa Rica under the Ministry of Agriculture.*

All those things—of course, this is just beginning in one part of novel, right, because there is a lot of water going under the bridge before what I'm telling you, but I have to start somewhere.

CAMERON: At that time, there was no Ministry for Environment so things were done under the Minister for Agriculture. What sort of conflict did that cause because normally agriculture ministries are more interested in expanding agricultural production areas?

UGALDE: *Yes, it is not that they're more interested, it is that is what they were created for, and we were intruders, you know what I mean? If you go around the world you'll find parks under all kinds of weird management structures. In the US you have parks under Interior; you have forests under Agriculture and so on and so forth. Here, there was no Ministry of Environment. There was nothing equivalent or near equivalent or where to attach it to so Ag was the closest thing to the environment so to speak and that's where they put it. There was just no other logical ministry unless they created a new ministry with the same legislation, but they didn't, so they attached it to Agriculture.*

Now obviously you are—the horse of Troy I guess you call it in English, el caballo de Troja—they would destroy the environment for the good of mankind, and I'm not criticizing so we are transforming or pushing the transformation of all of the ecosystems into production systems, agro-eco systems, very efficient at it. Not efficient in the sense of doing the right thing technically speaking, but very efficient at tumbling trees down and transforming. They, meaning the Costa Ricans, us. I don't mean just the Ministry of Agriculture. It was created because we were an agricultural country.

There was no war, there was not an all-out war because some of the parks that we started with—actually most of the park system, were ecosystems that were still pretty much left out by the agricultural development, either because they were very steep mountains like all our mountains, especially the top part of them, or because they were swamps, beautiful wetlands of course but swamps nonetheless for agriculture and just by luck maybe, lack of action, something like that. But humans—nothing can stop humans. So it was a combination of steepness and wetness and conditions that weren't as good as this one where we're sitting now which should be a coffee plantation and not a home.

So they did—my ancestors destroyed the entire belt of what we call the coffee belt, or pre-coffee belt. They took, we took, the best soils first, which is the central valley, to start the small towns and communities, which then grew into this mess we have now that we call the metropolitan area of the central valley. Then, when coffee came they took everything that had forest that was good for coffee.

Our forest began to be transformed very rapidly into a coffee plantation and later came even worse things like banana and now pineapple, for example. Then came human urban areas. An attack on ecosystems that had remained clean until after World War II. So, the Indians used the entire country, no question about it. Anywhere you dig you find Indian remnants, Indian burials or pottery or stuff like that. But it was not a total change of use from forest to something else; they did it more intelligently. They farmed the beans and then left it alone and then moved. They were 50,000 or so compared to 5 million that we have today.

So the impact to the Indian culture I don't think was that major. The tobacco started when the Spaniards came.

CAMERON: I want to sort of move forward a bit. Could you speak about any political changes from when you took over the parks to maybe 1990, 1980s that really pushed along your agenda or really held it back? What were the big challenges and the big pushes forward.

UGALDE: *It became pretty evident that unless we did something with the parks we're going to end up bordering. The parks were going to end up bordering highways and pineapple and sugar cane and everything, and it was not going to be possible to have a gradient from an ecosystem to the agro-ecosystem. It is going to be islands with no connectivity.*

So our intention, when we learned—because we didn't know this at the beginning. Our parks were too small in general terms, we needed, around the parks, a properly managed agro-ecosystem as well, so when the ideas about how to do that began to surface and the incentives and forestry were first before FONAFIFO (Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento Forestal), before PSA, (Pago de Servicios Ambientales) it became a failure because they just came in and said to somebody to plant trees and then that person would sell the property with trees and it just became a real estate thing rather than an environmental thing.

*The main force behind promoting sustainable or friendly uses of the land everywhere in the country and especially around the protected areas was precisely the isolation or insularization—I don't know how you call it in English—the parks becoming islands, small, unconnected islands. In the process of going in that direction like the movie *Something Funny Happened on the Way to the Forum*, I think with good intentions we caused some good things and screwed up other things. We, as a nation, we keep bragging around the world about our parks and PSA but in reality we should be ashamed because parks are less protected now than they were before and PSA, it has worked, but is still full of flaws. The survival of PSA 500 years from now is very much in question even in the next fifty years.*

CAMERON: Let's go into that in a minute but first I want to go back a little bit and get a clearer picture before we build up to that. When you were thinking about having these buffer zones around the parks, as properly managed agro-forestry systems.

UGALDE: *What areas—properly managed.*

CAMERON: What ideas did you have and did you ever get the chance to discuss your ideas with ministers, with people making the decisions on this.

UGALDE: *You mean me?*

CAMERON: Yes, you, yourself.

UGALDE: *It was like a blind person in a new city. We knew it but we didn't know how to do it. At first, we decided that we were going to adjust legislation in a belt, in areas that would become belts around the national parks, buffers if you want to call them, but would have different legislation inside the park and obviously different legislation in a private property without regulations. It sounded nice, but it was politically impossible.*

CAMERON: Why?

UGALDE: *The Forestry Department and any other department in the land opposed that. They didn't want to lose any jurisdiction in any belts of any kind to anybody. You know what I mean. We would be taking park service—we would be taking a lot of power in huge areas, which then wouldn't be entirely the jurisdiction of the Forest Service or Wildlife Service or other departments. Politically—I was very active at that time.*

It was at the early '90s that we tried that, and there was one minister who said "Okay, I will—let's do this, let's meet as a collective. Let's create this Superior Council which is you, Alvaro, Park Service. You, whoever was Forest Service and you all work with me together as a Council and we can go forward."

CAMERON: Who was this?

UGALDE: *I'll remember in a minute—it was the government of (Rafael Angel) Calderón (Guardia), Hernan Bravo. I was by myself in those structures. They didn't want to relinquish any authority to anybody else. They played the game, we met with the minister of this and that, but it was pretty obvious that the kingdoms were kingdoms and they continued to be kingdoms.*

CAMERON: So it was Mr. Bravo who first brought up this idea of merging the agencies to create something like SINAC (Sistema Nacional de Areas de Conservación/ National System of Conservation Areas)?

UGALDE: *I cannot say that it was him, but he represents the times when Dan Johnson—for example, I took Dan to Osa, Dan has always been working Guanacaste, to Osa to give me ideas of how to solve the mining problem in Corcovado. He came back after a month—totally brainwashed that unless we manage huge areas, biodiversity, and do it in conjunction with the communities—unless we change the structure from just basically a vertical hierarchy from the President to the rangers and made it more democratic, we might not be able to save the parks.*

He conceived this, what he called the Guanacaste Project, a fascinating document to read now. He actually—I can say that Dan was one of the main instigators of the change from what was to what is today, but sometimes, we promote changes, and at the end you don't like what happened. In politics that is very easy. You introduce a bird in Congress as a bill, and then you get a cat at the end. It is just the way it is.

Over the years, this legislation has been discussed, these changes, buffering, the connectivity idea, the principles of conservation biology and all that until one day—and because of this difficulty of creating these buffer areas with different regulations, opposition coming from—I’ve already mentioned.

There came this minister, René Castro. He was the Minister of Figueres Olsen, and they made decision which sounded brilliant at first, but in my opinion has been disastrous to the park system. They decided to divide the country, the entire country, I don’t mean the remnant forests, the entire country in regions called conservation areas. That chair where you’re sitting is in a conservation area called the Central Volcanic (Mountain) Range.

What happened though was that when they made that decision, the forests outside of the protected areas were pretty much gone already. The deforestation outside national parks and other protected areas was pretty much coming to an end. The forestry service structure, economy, sector was already losing its importance as bringing revenue to anybody including the institutions that were in charge of it like the Forest Service and they loved the idea of uniting themselves with the parks which produced so much money.

So instead of getting revenue from forests through taxes, they would be getting closer to the park entrance fees, for example. When René made this, what I call the blender culinar, just put everything together and at the end we’ve got this milkshake—we don’t know exactly what it is.

CAMERON: What was your role at that time?

UGALDE: *My role was strong when we were first trying to work it out with Hernan Bravo because I was in the government. Then I left—.*

CAMERON: As Director of the Park Service?

UGALDE: *Yes, as Director of the Park Service. For the second time. I had left and then came back. This is when Mario became vice minister of MIRENEM (Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mines) was the name of it when Hernan was Minister.*

So then I left the government and then many other actors took over the structuring of the law or laws because there was not just the law that you are referring to, then came the biodiversity law, which kind of sanctioned everything and even made things more difficult in many aspects. So I saw the situation going in the wrong direction in my opinion.

CAMERON: Why did you think the law sounded brilliant at the time—the changes sounded brilliant at the time?

UGALDE: *Because if you think globally, that’s the way the planet should be run. You should take the planet, and use the ecosystems in the proper way—proper meaning a way that is sustainable over time—period. If you have a beautiful cloud forest which makes “water for everybody” that is the role in perpetuity, make water. And of course beautiful biodiversity, but water would be made, the eternal benefit from that forest. I got lost.*

CAMERON: I just wanted to understand what—when these changes were happening to create SINAC what were your thoughts at the time?

UGALDE: *My thoughts were very strongly in favor of buffer areas, large buffer areas. I acknowledge that is very difficult to define, because if your river is born 50 km from here, is that buffer or not? The river goes through the park. Anyhow, the concept of the terrains or parts of the country that will affect the affected area is a very difficult thing. To see in such a rugged country—because watersheds are born miles away from the park and they're messed up before they come into the park.*

Anyway, there was a long discussion as to what to do about that. We always kept giving it to the executive branch to decide. Congress will enact and the executive branch would make decisions as to what were the borders, etcetera, etcetera. At the end René made this decision. Okay, I'll divide the country in ten sections and every section is a conservation area, which is a very misleading concept because most people think that a conservation area is a protected area, and by all means it is not. It is just a chunk of Costa Rica. That brought many confusions. I'll tell you why.

That equivalency of conservation area to protected area opened the door for the entire country to get a benefit from park agencies. We are one—you know what I mean? Park Services is no longer Park Service, we are all one and we'll work together and we'll spend the money together, etcetera, etcetera. It ended up being the foresters, the forest minded people, not the parks that fell on the top as directors of SINAC and directors of conservation areas. The Parks Service and system immediately went under, lower in the hierarchy and the priority. They slowly moved to the beautiful parks that make so much money for all of us, forgetting that those beautiful parks are being killed and destroyed as well.

CAMERON: Why was it the forestry people got the top positions at SINAC?

UGALDE: *That's politics. As they say, the one that screams the loudest.*

CAMERON: They had been a lobbying power?

UGALDE: *I imagine. We were just very unlucky for that. I don't think it was done by design; it was simply done when the moment came. The powers that be, with René as minister and many of the top technical staff as foresters; they got the positions, the decision-making positions.*

CAMERON: Do you think that the percentage of Costa Rica that are protected areas and national parks is sufficient as it is now? Do you think it should be greater?

UGALDE: *Sufficient for what?*

CAMERON: For the country.

UGALDE: *Well it is very hard to say this is sufficient for a country. Actually for Costa Rica, given its topography, its climate, its position in the isthmus, and other reasons, I think the country should probably go back to about 70% of forest covered. The protected areas don't do the trick. There has been a growing and very motivated private system of protected areas but obviously it is small. It's probably more than 1% of the country now. Luckily, most of them locate themselves outside the*

parks because that's where the wildlife is. So by doing that, they enlarge the park a little bit.

I'm also working now on a project with communities, not with government, not with rangers, not with nonprofits, but with communities, trying to restore their watershed. But they are doing it by their own intelligence beginning at the top next to a national park which is the one that produced their water. They have been buying land, stretching the park towards their cities because of water. So it doesn't really matter in my opinion, who owns it. What really matters is how well do they manage it. That is what the government does not do well.

CAMERON: I want to ask a somewhat controversial questions. Some people have said that the national parks were formed—criticized that the formation of the national parks by saying it misappropriated land from private interests without duly compensating them. What is your comment on that?

UGALDE: *I am a very happy person because I never confiscated one single square meter. The courts wouldn't let us do that. So it is the rule of law in Costa Rica if nobody claimed ownership of something, okay, thank God we got it. But if somebody had claims about it, regardless, the first question you ask the people who fell inside a national park is—or at least that was my policy in my personal way of acting—you go meet the people, you introduce yourselves and make friends. Then you try to explain what happened to them or what is about to happen and why. And why [it's happening] to them. Then before you know you actually start talking to them about the old days when you used to have to run away from jaguars and other things to the days where now they hardly see anything. From the days when they enjoyed water pouring out of everywhere to the days when water was becoming scarce. It was not a difficult conversation with them.*

No matter how polite it was, the conversation, how enlightened, how many cups of coffee and cigarettes you smoked together, at the end it was always the same answer. "Well, that sounds like a good thing but what about us? Where do I go? Just what would happen to us?" At least I can go to Hell for lying if that's the case but I never pushed anybody out without that person agreeing on the terms of the solution.

There were many, many people who were nothing but land speculators. Once you go and study each case—and you have to do it in a person-to-person basis, you can't take a block of people and say get out. No, each family is different. Then you have to find families—"oh we have a house in the city and we have another little farm there and we have another little farm here." Okay, you're not entitled to land there because you have that. But you're entitled to be compensated for every banana plant that you have here, every attached roof that you have here, any animal that you have here. For that matter, what is it you need to be compensated. So we went through appraisals, expert appraisers with each family, and those who had nothing, really nothing, nowhere else to go, and they wanted to continue being farmers, then in each part the solution was different.

For example, in Osa, you have to go outside the park and buy a large farm and then divide it into part for them? That of course is on top of paying for the improvements—what they call improvements, the fences, this, and that. Transportation and food for a few months, also. That was pretty much the formula. If you have money; if you didn't need land, you got a check. If you need land, you get a piece of land with a check as well. Perfect? I don't think so. I don't

think we were as lucky to have it perfect, just a system for which we will go and sit down with volunteerism, no, but that was the policy. Try to never hurt anybody unjustly.

As a matter of fact it sounds probably—. Many times, I'd say there can be no conservation without justice. What I really mean by that is it is not an ethereal concept. If somebody is affected by a conservation project, or a hydroelectric project, or a highway or a hospital, they should be compensated. So parks are the same. It is a societal decision that affects somebody.

What happens if that person doesn't have the right to be there? Well, more than 50% of the people in those parks didn't have the right to be there, but they happened to have two arms and two legs and looked like humans, so we just—at least I did go by the justice side of it, not by the legal side of it. And the arm of government which is the Attorney General's office said yes, if they have been there for many years you can legally appraise and pay them for their improvements. Not for the land, that is a different story. If they are very poor and I have to put them in the street then you can give them land. That is the way it went when I was director. I don't know of any forest cases where people were evicted to the street. Indians in Brazil were evicted for a period of time or something like that.

With the Indian reservations we did our best without being very knowledgeable about that. That was also a very new concept for Costa Rica at that time. The institution that was in charge of giving the Indians—or dividing Indians' territories—there weren't Indians all over the country. There were Indians in Talamanca, some in Osa. If you think of the rest of the Park Service, where did I deal with Indians? Where else? Anywhere else? It was basically Talamanca and Osa. Talamanca, the whole mountain and try to work out—not with the Indians—I wish I had with the Indians, but with the institution that was defining the borders of the Indian territory. It was not to put a national park overlapping any Indian territories. Although one day, one Indian told me, "Alvaro you cut my territory in two." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because we used to hike across the Talamanca to the other side, and there was a route not used by others so wasn't it ours?" I said, "I guess so. I apologize and you can still hike but that's park now."

You know what I mean? Sometimes you try to do your best but sometimes there's a lack of information or the conditions to go and get an allowance to do the perfect thing. But justice was the goal.

CAMERON: Okay, let's move forward a bit now. What was your relationship with the National Park Service when the switch was made to create SINAC?

UGALDE: *I was out.*

CAMERON: You were totally out?

UGALDE: *Let me take it back. I was out but there was a government of Pacheco, the early—.*

CAMERON: 2002.

UGALDE: *Yes. Carlos Manuel became the minister, Rodriguez. Osa was in serious trouble. Corcovado was in serious, serious hunting pressure, and it had been stripped of protection staff in that period, before that. So I asked the minister if he would*

allow me to go back part time, but as director. So I became for three years the Regional Director of the Osa Conservation Area [Indecipherable], which was basically [Indecipherable] to the border of Panama and the peninsula. I lived in [Indecipherable] for three years.

CAMERON: What changes did you make in Osa as the director of Osa?

UGALDE: *You mean what the hell did I do?*

CAMERON: Yes.

UGALDE: *Again, I used the same [Indecipherable]. It was like being swept by a hurricane because Osa has always been—I can probably say the most difficult conservation region to manage.*

CAMERON: Why?

UGALDE: *It has been the last frontier, so it has a frontier culture especially when we did the park.*

UGALDE: *My knowledge of Osa goes way back to the '60s when I first went there as a kid, 18 or so years old with a crazy American whom I met in an airplane coming from LA who said that he knew where the gold in Osa was coming from. He knew the source of the gold in Osa and he made his wife (recently married, an alcoholic wife with an alcoholic man) sell everything and come and get the gold.*

I was lucky or unlucky, but I was sitting next to them in the flight. Pretty much all the passengers got drunk because it was raining like hell in Central America, everywhere. So we were landing and taking off and landing and taking off for hours until we finally got to San José, and we could barely get out of the plane. I felt compelled to help them, not because of the gold, but because here you get these two idiots who are drunk when they land and just what their objective was and the nature of Costa Ricans who like to help, just made me help him with the language—he could not speak one word of Spanish, etc.

I ended up going to Osa with him to find the gold where he said he knew it was. It is a long story so I am not going to tell it all. But what I'm saying is, the failed expedition—because he had been wrong all the time, he was an old gold miner from the west side of the United States. He had caught the virus of the gold fever totally. He was sick and drunk, an alcoholic. So our expedition failed very quickly but I guess he was more of a practical man or a simple ways, I don't know. He just said, "The hell with it, let's go fishing."

After a few days of pain, pain in the butt because of the horses, pain in the body with mosquitos, pain in the feet because of walking hours in the course of the rivers, etcetera, etcetera, he decided that that was it. His wife lost all her money right there when he said "Let's go fishing." He went fishing and then I could look around. I could see the macaws, I could see the—I said wow, what a paradise. I didn't know my future. Honestly nobody did, but at that moment I wasn't thinking biology. I wasn't thinking of what a national park is, I was just thinking what a beautiful place.

Then of course I started adding things. As time went by I went to study biology. My herpetology teacher took us to Osa. Then I said, "Wow, it is not only beautiful, it is incredible." So on and so forth, over the years that I wanted to save the Osa

until the opportunity came in the early 1970s, '74 I think it was. I don't know why I got into this.

CAMERON: We were talking about why Osa is the most difficult region.

UGALDE: *At that moment the only way people could get to Osa was in a boat that would take you from Puntarenas and would stop in different places along the coast down to Panama or get on a dingy boat, a small boat in the Sierpe River and risk their life crossing the Sierpe bar in the ocean. Many people die. Or I guess hiking for days. There was no road, there was nothing. But there was gold.*

So gold miners had been there. There weren't many when we established the park because there was not a gold rush at the moment, but Costa Ricans were beginning to feel the scarcity of land pushed by population growth. So the pieces of Costa Rica that were very common and available before, they were all titled, they had owners. So they kept going farther and farther and Osa was the last frontier when we established the park. Legally Osa had two owners: the government land, which hadn't been given to anybody, it was supposed to be government land. It was supposed to be managed, but nobody managed it. The other half was a US corporation called OSA Productos Forestales. But when you added the amount of individuals that were actually not owning but being there, there were close to 200. So the owners were absentees and the squatters were the ones in possession of the land. Their aims, everybody's aims were death to the forest. The OSA Productos Forestales wanted to topple the forest of Osa and make it chips or wood and send it to Japan or whatever. The Costa Rican families just wanted to get rid of it and take the wood so they were able to put cows or pigs or corn or coffee, whatever, to make a farm.

At that moment just before the creation of the park, the issue of the American company was dealt with by Congress extricating them. They and the squatters had this game of shooting each other or burning each other's—it was war there. So the government intervened. So inaccessibility I would say was the main reason.

Most of the ecosystems in Costa Rica were saved not by us, as pioneers of the orchard system, but because nobody could get there. Of course when we started making parks we went for what was left first before we went for restoration later. I am not by any means suggesting that it was the only difficult area to get to.

If you think about the border with Nicaragua, that was even worse. No roads, incredible wetlands and rivers, etc. Or you talk about Talamancas, nobody could get there to farm. But Osa was one of them.

CAMERON: When you were Regional Director for Osa what was your role in regards to payment for environmental services and how did that work?

UGALDE: *Early in the game they created FONAFIFO and separated it from SINAC. So two entities that in my opinion maybe should have been together, more together, were independent. FONAFIFO made its own priorities, its own decisions without consulting much the rest of the authorities. What I tried to do was to use PSA as a way to compensate people whom I couldn't pay because they had no title—not inside the park, outside the park. The forest reserve, or to help the Indians, Indian territories to get some regulation of their forest.*

As a tool for connectivity, but as a very powerful political tool for making peace and having friendly terms with the rest of the—the surrounding, Corvovado, for example. That is how I saw it.

CAMERON: Were there any challenges for you from different groups in regard to implementation of PSA?

UGALDE: *What is the question?*

CAMERON: What were the challenges in regards to implementing?

UGALDE: *FONAFIFO*

CAMERON: Talk to me about that.

UGALDE: *If you have a group of farmers receiving PSA and next year FONAFIFO says "That's not priority anymore." Then you get a bunch of angry people.*

CAMERON: But doesn't SINAC decide the priorities.

UGALDE: *I guess if you go by detail to scrutinize the changes since the law was passed until today, maybe I'm speaking in a vacuum. At SINAC I had to supervise deforestation, regulate deforestation, give permission to people who had all the legal rights, to get permission to cut a tree that is outside protected areas. Remember SINAC is everything now, protected areas, outside protected areas, etcetera. But as far as making checks to pay them for PSA, that was FONAFIFO, I had nothing to do with that.*

As far as making national priorities, they would move from an entire region to another region and your local priorities didn't matter much. So it has been a double-edge sword. So yes, you can be good friends for five years and then an enemy if they don't continue.

The other challenge was, at that time—remember, this is a long time ago, things may have changed and I retired a long time ago—if a farmer had 50 hectares of forest or 100 hectares of forest and then you multiply the hectares by \$60, \$70, whatever, the PSA per hectare back then. And the man had ten children or six children and could only get the amount of money for the land he had they came to me and said, "We can't make it; it is just not enough to educate our kids, it is not enough to eat, it is not enough to move forward. If we had 200 hectares we could. If you only have 50, no matter how beautiful they are or how valuable to mankind it is, it is no good to me because PSA is paying me and it is not enough." That was a constant struggle for those people.

CAMERON: Who were the people that it was enough for?

UGALDE: *The larger pieces.*

CAMERON: The larger landowners.

UGALDE: *The larger landowners who could get more land in the PSA. To me it got corrupted—corrupted is not the right word. Almost by definition, if you are the biggest landowner, you're not the poorest person in the land, but you are the most able to get titles and get PSA. So in a way the PSA was—a lot of the PSA was allocated to people who didn't need it to survive.*

CAMERON: If the goal of PSA is to stop deforestation then wouldn't it be better targeting the larger landholders?

UGALDE: *Yes, but those, the greatest holders of land are not the hunters, and not squatting. It is the masses of much poorer people, not because they're mean or anything like that, it is simply the numbers of them.*

CAMERON: And they are creating the greatest pressure on the forest?

UGALDE: *Of course. So that is why I say I used it very politically in the sense of making peace with people who said, "I want PSA." I said, "Where are you located? Here it is, it's beautiful." Either continuing forests from the park outside or in very specific, delicate, fragile area. I love the PSA for that although I would prefer it buy land of course. To me buying the land and proper management are the only tools that might survive.*

CAMERON: Can you just give me your overall analysis of PSA, the good things first and then we'll get into the bad things.

UGALDE: *It is a good concept, and I love the idea that we get a lot of the money from the polluters. To me, that was the concept that was very nice to watch being implemented. When they started paying taxes in the gas. When you fill the gas tank and you know part of it goes to the forest. Clever, I love that one. I think it is good. But it has never been enough for the demand. It has been a successful project. It has demand. It has enjoyed demand, meaning people like it. But there are limitations of the amount they pay, the period of the contract. It has been five years; I don't know now how many years it is but it was five years and five years go like that. So you cross your fingers, "Oh my God, I hope they renew PSA for this family, otherwise I have problems." You as a regional director for SINAC, FONAFIFO in my opinion, it sounds like they have a soul but I don't think they have a soul, I think they're a political tool.*

I remember one time when the office of FONAFIFO in Osa was located in ranger station and it burned. So all the files burned. That was a mess for society, for years. They stopped paying, there were no files. The people were affected by this stupid institutional decision not to have a better filing system and stuff like that.

CAMERON: When was that?

UGALDE: *I don't know, fifteen years ago or more. So the flaws are the amount of money, the time of the contract. Supervision is not that good in my opinion. They say, "SINAC can hardly take care of the protected areas and taking care of a little farm here, a little farm here." It is very difficult, the enforcement of the compromisos earlier. That the owners of the forest sign.*

CAMERON: Because SINAC is in charge of enforcement right?

UGALDE: *Oh yes, SINAC is in charge of enforcement, regardless of FONAFIFO.*

CAMERON: What did that mean for your staff when you were the regional head of SINAC?

UGALDE: *Well, it shouldn't have meant anything different because we were in charge of everything. But then you get the government signing a contract with a person and*

then you have checks going by. Then you have to comply with people who have to stop burning, stop hunting, stop logging, and do what the contract says. If you have to supervise that as well, that is really an additional work because it is not the same thing to say, oh, I saw somebody logging a tree there, go and stop it. Where are the borders of this PSA thing? The borders are usually very fussy.

CAMERON: So it was very hard.

UGALDE: *It was very hard.*

CAMERON: What was the role—you also have the forest regions that do some monitoring as well?

UGALDE: *The forest regions?*

CAMERON: The regentes forestales.

UGALDE: *Oh regions.*

CAMERON: They also do some sort of monitoring

UGALDE: *In theory they should. Probably a lot of them do good work, some of them they screw up.*

CAMERON: What is the relationship? SINAC is overseeing it and they are also doing some supervision?

UGALDE: *What is this?*

CAMERON: Regentes Forestales. They're supervising some of the enforcement of the PSA to check that people were complying with what they said. SINAC also does this too? Is that right?

UGALDE: *I think SINAC has decided that that is the region's problem and don't mess too much with it. This has nothing to do with the regions, it is a good way to get the responsibility passed on to a third party which has very little motivation. There is money to be made, they're money-makers in the regions. They love to have these just because they make a lot of money. It is not the same as a ranger. It has a salary and has always protected the land. The regions have to file reports, make quick visits, say "Okay, Everything [Indecipherable]." I don't believe much. At least in the days I was there, the '90s, enforcement wasn't that good.*

CAMERON: Can you talk about, just quickly, any other comments that you have on the Payment for Environmental Services and also the land conversion ban that came along with the 1996 law.

UGALDE: *The land conversion ban? I would say the Payment for Environmental Services in Costa Rica has been welcome, or at least it is welcome for me and for the direct beneficiaries. It has been innovating. It is trying to get the other parts of the—not just wood or water but biodiversity, the other services. At the beginning it was just like a basket—that's all the services. It was true but we don't know exactly which is which or how much is each. I like that—. The deals with the World Bank for example, including biodiversity as part of the services, etcetera. I like it, I still like it. I think if we could improve it and make it more sustainable... from time to time, you hear rumors that it is going broke. I don't know if the rumor was true or not.*

It has been a very nice tool to make conservation, the conservation program grow without having to buy the land. But it has the flaw that, "what after?" Are my children going to change their mind? That's the difference from a piece of land owned by somebody and incentives or services that when they, end they end and they end eventually.

CAMERON: It is going to be a lot more expensive to buy the land though right?

UGALDE: *Yes, it is always more expensive, sure.*

CAMERON: Is there a bit of a tradeoff then that maybe this is the next best thing?

UGALDE: *Oh yes, I'm not saying—.*

CAMERON: Without having many of the resources—.

UGALDE: *I would make a very strong move to change FONAFIFO if I didn't take benefits. Sure. I have enough land to buy already in the parks. It is very difficult to get money for land acquisition. Why should I still keep fighting? No. I think it is the second best thing but assuming that you manage the parks well—what I'm noticing now is you can mismanage parks as well. So the entire thing is missed, the goal. But if land is yours, meaning Park Services, or meaning NGO (nongovernment organization) or meaning community, then the management is easier, it is doable. But if it is not yours there is always a question mark, when is it going to change.*

CAMERON: Can you comment briefly about the mismanagement of the parks that you just spoke of?

UGALDE: *There is hunting going on in all the parks. There is a lot of hunting going on in some parks. There is an increasing amount of gold mining/hunting in Corcovado National Park. There is very few staff in all the park system. The society, human society, I guess here and most countries is getting distant from nature and still getting closer. It is getting more avid for energy. Parks are becoming the beautiful apple. Oh my goodness, they have beautiful wood, they have beautiful geothermal energy, they have other—.*

I don't know. I'm afraid that humanity is going to mess it up by introducing these sustainable-use concepts, which are neither whiskey nor moonshine, and so when you have wishy-washy objectives, you end up with wishy-washy products at the end. So my—when I see bills—when I see Costa Rica saying we've got to get the geothermal energy from whatever—if we have to de-authorize a national park to get it, we'll do it. I've seen the attempts. Now my fights now are against that. Why don't we use the geothermal energy without having to de-authorize a park or a chunk of a park? There are things that can be done properly without being too—more catholic than the pope. You know what I mean?

You can use the parks in some way, but institutions again, "If you want to do a geothermal project there," says the geothermal entity here, "We want it all. We don't want any rangers messing with me. We want to have total freedom to do what we'd like." That has been a very difficult one to work it out. Let's do it together instead of having a "give it to me" type of mentality.

CAMERON: Over the last—since the mid 1980s, Costa Rica has achieved a huge improvement in forest cover and deforestation rates have decrease dramatically. What are the biggest contributing factors to that in your mind?

UGALDE: *I think the first thing that happened that I saw, some impact, benefiting conservation was the fall of the beef economy. That was devouring the ecosystem. It doesn't matter, if it's steep like that, cows can make it. So we just stopped whatever forest we could log and brought pasture and cows there. But when you went down, for whatever global economic reasons—people don't need more meat or whatever reasons you started to notice tender green areas. Not the large green, not the grass. Tender green. What's that? That's a [Indecipherable]. That is a very young [Indecipherable], [Indecipherable] is being left by the owners because having cows there is not worth it any more. So it is a lot of forest growth simply from beef not being the best economic product.*

Then, of course, came a lot of the government programs like PSA that gave incentives to people to do that, not simply because cows aren't good but because I get some payment for my services. Then came the people who are nature lovers. So there is a good opportunity in telling foreigners to come and see the papers and in [Indecipherable] their windows, in their lodges so a lot of ecologers, a lot of them with a chunk of forest next to them, not just the building. So you saw a growth of—maintenance and growth of secondary forest growth [that is] bigger because of the ecotourism trend. I saw entire cattle ranches turn into entire ecotourism ranches, huge ranches. The owners were very smart. They transformed their tractors into people transportation structures with seats like that. Then you get on the horses, then you get on the boat and then you see this and see that. It became like the birth of the agro-ecotourism combination of everything. It made sense.

For a while I did guiding of tourism. {By the way, your colegio is only a few blocks away.) The basket of benefits began to be more appreciated by everybody, the neighbors of the parks. [They thought], "I can have the forest, I can have the PSA, I can have a new lodge. All of a sudden they were making a living out of tourism and PSA." I think those are the elements that have contributed to that.

The ban, the total ban on forestry, change of use, it sounded good, but after a while I said, "I'm not sure I like it too much." If people know that when their forests grow up to a point, and they don't know exactly which one it is, then they won't let me use it. That is a disincentive for letting people let their forest grows.

If this passes a certain point, call it wisdom, whatever, the foresters use those thing to say that's a forest, you need permission to cut that tree. People don't like that because they grew the forest. There is a term in Spanish, which we call [Indechipherable]. It means this. If you have a forest on this side and you have a pasture on this side, this year you can easily move 10 meters and nobody notices, just to go a little bit of cutting around the trees. The cows will probably do the rest. In two or three years you don't have a forest, you have a pasture with trees. Then you can cut them all because you don't have a forest you have pasture.

So you know there are intricacies, little details, that might make something a bad thing instead of with good intentions. I think that law is still in effect. I don't know if those things that I just said are still working forces. I think they are. I think we're getting more forests covered, but of less value, because we don't have the good old trees with hundreds of years, the primary forest.

It is also being taken out in different ways other than full attack of the forest. You can work like an aunt. You can go at night and you cut a tree one night and nobody noticed, nobody heard it. You keep going there, keep making it worse and then you bring it to a place where a truck can put it in. That's a tree going there, Cut more for boats.

So it hasn't stopped. The creaming or de-creaming of the primary forest in Costa Rica, the private law. Or the inefficiency of SINAC in really controlling everything, I don't know. I love to be keeping optimistic about the future of humanity but it is very hard. I'm always optimistic about the future of the planet. The planet will just laugh and enjoy once we're gone; it is the future of ourselves that is at stake.

CAMERON: Thank you for your time.