

Abstract 5: Collective Forests and Expansion of Public Protected Areas in China: Loss of Land, Rights and Biodiversity? Author: Xu Jianchu, Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK).

There has been a dramatic increase in the establishment of public protected areas over the last several decades and this expansion has often come at the expense of indigenous and other community rights. There is growing awareness of this tension between public goals to preserve biodiversity and the human rights of indigenous peoples, who often live in the world's biodiversity hotspots. At the same time, there is growing recognition of the integral role indigenous people have had historically, and continue to have, in effectively managing landscapes and protecting biodiversity – often with better success than public protected area agencies. This paper examines this issue in China and focuses particularly on the Province of Yunnan – one of the most biologically and ethnographically diverse areas on earth. The paper begins with an overview of the status of the public protected system in China, its targets for expansion, and experiences to date. The paper then presents all available data on the known livelihood impacts of this expansion, the amount of land area lost by communities to the protected area system, the number of households, as well as the known due process to incorporate community land and compensation paid to communities for their loss of rights. The paper focuses particularly on the case of Yunnan and identifies particular issues that merit attention by policy planners. In addition to examining the legal and social dimensions of this problem, the paper examines the empirical evidence of whether public goals for biodiversity protection are better achieved under public, or private collective forest tenure. The paper concludes with recommendations for further research and reflection by China's policy makers, environmental groups and community advocates at the international, national and provincial levels.