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Robyn J. Bath-Rosenfeld

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# **The Communication of Goals in Volunteer-Based Ecotourism**

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## **A Case Study of Two Ecuadorian Ecological Reserves**

An Environmental Studies Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Bachelors of Science at the University of Vermont

Robyn Jenay Bath-Rosenfeld  
Spring, 2014

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# Abstract

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## Abstract

Volunteer-based ecotourism is a growing trend in the field of international travel. Euro-American youth pay thousands of dollars to intermediary private companies in order to volunteer with ecological reserves and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). The majority of the research on “voluntourism” discusses the personal motivations of the volunteers, and neglects to discuss volunteers’ work ethic in relation to their expectations of project goals. This study examined two different ecological reserves in Ecuador that accept paying volunteers, and monitored the communications of goals and interactions between the project managers, coordinators and the volunteers. By working with volunteers and monitoring their work ethic, I was able to discern where the problems were arising; in the lack of communication. Two weeks were spent at each site to collect data via participant observation and open-ended interviews. Volunteers were observed working more diligently if they understood the reasons for the work, and could see how it tied into larger goals of environmental protection and conservation. When work was either mundane, or not directly linked to reforestation and ecological preservation, volunteers would become frustrated that the experience did not live up to the expectations put upon them by intermediary private companies. Therefore, when goals are clearly stated, and align with the volunteers’ expectations as described by intermediary private companies, then the goals of both the host ecological reserve and the volunteer have a much greater chance of being reached.

## Abstracto

El ecoturismo basado en el voluntariado sigue aumentando en el campo de viaje internacional. La juventud Euro-americana paga miles de dólares al año a las empresas privadas intermediarias para participar en programas de voluntario con las organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONGs) y las reservas ecológicas. La mayoría de las investigaciones que existen sobre el “volunturismo” tratan sobre las motivaciones individuales de los voluntarios y desatienden analizar la relación importante entre la ética laboral del voluntario y su eficacia en alcanzar los objetivos de su trabajo de voluntariado. Esta investigación es un análisis de dos reservas ecológicas ecuatorianas donde se puede ofrecerse como voluntario a cambio del pago de una entrada. En el estudio, la comunicación de los objetivos y las interacciones entre los directores del proyecto, los coordinadores, y los voluntarios fueron observados. A través de observar y trabajar con los voluntarios, fue posible discernir problemas que estaban surgiendo; particularmente como consecuencia de la falta de comunicación. En total, pasé dos semanas en cada sitio, recopilando información a través de la observación de los participantes y de entrevistas abiertas. Fue observado que los voluntarios trabajaron más laboriosamente si entendieron las motivaciones detrás del trabajo, y si pudieron ver como el trabajo relacionó a los objetivos más amplios de la protección y conservación de los recursos naturales. Cuando el trabajo era rutinario o no estaba vinculado directamente a la reforestación y la preservación ecológica, los voluntarios se frustraron que no llegaron a colmar las expectativas de las empresas privadas intermediarias. Por eso, cuando se especifica claramente a los objetivos, y estos objetivos se alineen con las expectativas de los voluntarios y las empresas privadas intermediarias, es más probable que lograrán los objetivos de la reserva ecológica además de los del voluntario.

**Key Words:** Volunteer, Ecotourism, Communication, Gap Year, Ecuador

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# Introduction and Overview

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In the fall of 2012, I studied abroad in Ecuador with the School of International Training (SIT). For the final month of SIT, I completed an independent study project (ISP) on an ecological reserve that hosted international volunteers as their labor force. My ISP was to organize and implement a capacity-building workshop for the local staff on communication and ecotourism. During my time at the reserve, I became fascinated by the dynamics I observed among the volunteers, the volunteer coordinators, and the local staff. I had worked with volunteers and seen them leave work early to go smoke cigarettes and sunbathe. Volunteers would drink heavily most nights, and would often be late to work, and sometimes too hung-over to put in a full work day. One volunteer, a young German man on a gap year, left the reserve a whole month early because the experience did not live up to his expectations, and he preferred to spend his time travelling. In other instances, the volunteers bonded very closely amongst each other, with the staff, and with their volunteer coordinator. These observations were the basis of my research idea and led me to make several assumptions before initial research began. This interest opened the door for my research thesis on volunteer-based ecotourism. Ecuador was chosen, as it is a popular and safe site in South America for volunteering, and I had already built up connections in the country.

The phenomenon of volunteer-based ecotourism has been growing since the 1970s. “Voluntourism” leads thousands of adults (18+), to travel overseas with the expectation of saving the environment or participating in environmental research tourism (PERT) (Ellis, 2003). Volunteering internationally is now associated with paying for your experience in addition to contributing to the cause. As much as fifty percent of the money paid by volunteers goes towards the intermediary that connects them with these Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). The remaining volunteer fees go towards their room and board, conservation initiatives, and the salary of the local staff.

Based on my own previous informal observations, I was curious to look at the potential differences in how much effort is put in by each volunteer based on what they pay and how well project tasks in relation to larger goals are explained to them. I previously witnessed paying volunteers feeling that they had an inherent right to choose which projects they did or did not partake in because they were paying to be there. This “privileged” attitude led to difficult team dynamics and a delay in project completion. While I only witnessed this behavior at one site in Ecuador in 2012, by visiting a more diverse variety of sites and situations, I was able to investigate a variety of factors



that might influence this behavior. I tried not to allow these preconceived notions to influence my observations or ultimate conclusions.

I went into this research project looking for the problem that existed with the volunteers, and why they were unwilling to complete project goals. By visiting two ecologically-based volunteer sites in Ecuador, I observed first-hand the interactions between the paying volunteers, the local staff, the volunteer coordinators, and the reserve administrators. Upon the start of my research I was able to identify the communication between coordinators, administrators and intermediaries with the volunteers, and how project tasks are presented and completed in light of overall objectives, as the underlying problem at both reserves.

Multiple reports discuss the motivations of volunteer tourists and how they are impacted by their time abroad. An emerging body of literature examines the impacts of volunteer tourism on the organizations and communities that host these volunteers, and an increasing number of articles critically analyze the negative aspects of volunteer tourism, but with a focus on the organizations that send volunteers, and the project choices.

There is a gap in information regarding how well volunteers effectively complete assigned projects, and what holds them back from being more effective or motivated by the assigned tasks. As a result of this gap in the literature, NGO and reserve administrators and others in the business, lack guidance on how to motivate volunteers toward shared goals. Based on my research, I suggest that the communication of these goals is a major missing component in volunteer ecotourism. The hope is that the conclusions and suggestions of this research will help volunteer sites better achieve their long-term objectives.

# Review of the Literature

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This review of the literature presents findings about broad spectrum international volunteer tourism and volunteers' motivations, as well as case studies about specific volunteer ecotourism projects around the globe. The review is split into four sections, beginning with an introduction to the concept of volunteer ecotourism, and its complementary pairings, 'volunteer tourism' and 'ecotourism.' This is followed by an explanation of how these programs receive volunteers through intermediaries, and what are the benefits and challenges of this system. Finally, the literature review discusses the volunteers themselves and the research that has been done on volunteer tourists.

## **Development of Volunteer Ecotourism**

Volunteer ecotourism has been a growing trend within the last two decades as a combination of volunteer tourism and ecotourism. Both mediums of travel have been fundamental in shaping what volunteer ecotourism is today.

### ***Volunteer Tourism***

The current definition in circulation defines volunteer tourists as those

Who volunteer to fund and work on social or conservation projects around the world and aim to provide sustainable alternative travel that can assist in community development, scientific research or ecological restoration. (Wearing 2001, 1)

Traveling is often seen as 'window shopping', whereas volunteering is a more interactive experience (Conran, 2011). Volunteer tourism has been growing rapidly in the past few decades; in 2008 the Tourism Research and Marketing survey found that over 1.6 million tourists volunteered that year, valuing US\$1.7-2.6 billion. Though a more recent report has not been issued, we can assume the number has further increased as the world has pulled out of the 2008 economic recession. There has been a rapid expansion of growth in the market by middle and upper-class Euro-American youth; seventy percent of the volunteers are between 20 and 25 (Bryant & Goodman, 2004; Sin, 2010).

Tourism Research and Marketing (TRAM 2008, 5) estimate that the average volunteer tourism expedition costs the volunteer over \$3000, including air fare to the volunteer destination. The report also states that the majority (over 50%) of volunteers are female, and that 90% of participants volunteer in Latin America, Asia, or Africa.

## ***Ecotourism***

Ecotourism was originally defined as

Travelling to relatively undisturbed areas or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987,p.14).

Martha Honey (2008), as an expert in the field, captured the essence of ecotourism as not only protecting natural areas, but also the people living around them. This definition is also supported by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES). The goal of ecotourism is to keep the money local, meaning that profits from infrastructure and guests stay in the host country. While ecotourism can include characteristics of other forms of nature-based tourism, such as adventure tourism (rope climbing, deep sea diving, etc.), or wilderness tourism (bird watching, animal tracking), its main goal is to provide these experiences while simultaneously conserving land and people's livelihoods. Rather than expelling local people from their lands and building resentment in the name of conservation, ecotourism is inclusive and sets regulations for hiring locals over foreign employees.

In 2004 the UN's World Tourism Organization reported that nature tourism and ecotourism were growing three times faster than tourism as a whole across the industry (Solomon, 2005). As the concept of "greening" vacations becomes more popular, many tourism sites are switching their image to include eco components. Ecotourism has become an increasingly popular development tool to help poor countries while still maintaining conservation (Honey, 2008).

## **Current Trends in Volunteer Ecotourism**

According to Wearing (2001, 2004 & 2013), many volunteer tourism operations are based around ecotourism. Communities or projects that start with the concept of ecotourism, see volunteers as a sustainable and reliable source to fund and staff their conservation endeavors. The majority of these international volunteer positions do not require skilled labor from their volunteers, including language skills, as this would reduce the applicant pool. It should be noted that volunteer ecotourists are predominantly female (Wearing, 2001 & 2013; Cousin, 2007).

Often these projects have goals of not only preserving nature, but of improving the well-being of surrounding communities and integrating them into the volunteer tourism management

process. “A well-designed [volunteer ecotourism] programme could focus on community-value driven volunteering in protected areas while providing education for outsiders” (Kutay, 1990, 38).

### ***The Private Sector: Intermediaries***

#### *Commodification of the Industry*

Since 1995, the surge in ‘voluntourism’ has led to the creation of private organizations, or intermediaries, which place volunteers with these NGOs for an additional fee. Many studies are now being done on the commodification of volunteer ecotourism, and how private companies that place volunteers with NGOs and international projects, are profiting far more than the ecotourism projects they support (Ansell, 2008; Coghlan, 2006; Coren & Gray, 2011; Cousins, 2007 & 2009). Since 1995, private companies have jumped on the demand for volunteer tourism holidays and gap years. By 2005, there were three times more volunteers going through these large private companies than directly through the NGOs (Cousins, 2007). Coghlan (2006) pointed out why this can be a problem, especially when the private company is in London, and they offer hundreds of : “The disjuncture with the reality of conservation is heightened by the spatial distance and loose organizational ties between the companies that market and sell the holidays, and the actual conservation projects themselves (p. 228).”

Organizations often glamorize destinations, and overstate the effect a single volunteer could have on site. The hope of having a life-changing experience can be met, but “saving the rainforest” is a longer-term goal which volunteers can only contribute to in a well-run programs. (Coghlan, 2007; Cousins et al, 2009). Lyons (2003) has suggested that if the promotional material (often found online) does not match the actual experience, than there will be dissatisfaction and disappointment from the volunteers. Project coordinators must balance volunteers’ vacation time with hard work, in order to make significant change for the environment. Barkham (2006, pg. 1) described a quintessential volunteer-vacation experience in Nepal:

First they went climbing in Kathmandu. Then they stumbled into a local school and taught English to baffled Nepalese. Fifty spliffs and a thousand emails later, they returned home with a Hindu charm and tie-dye trousers. They had lots of great stories but the world remained thoroughly unsaved.

## *Allocation of Funds*

Some organizations (private intermediaries) offer transparency as to where the volunteer's money is allocated within the project domain and present this information at a pre-departure orientation. Room and board can make up a significant portion of the funds they pay; however in developing countries this cost is minimal compared to European and American standards. Many large-scale organizations do not share this level of transparency, creating frustration for volunteers who want to know where their money is being allocated (Coren & Gray, 2011).

Why wouldn't volunteers simply look up the name of the site, and pay directly through them? Cousins (2009) explains that companies are careful not to advertise details (such as the name, photos, and specific locations) that would make the site recognizable and possible to find through a web search. However, many volunteers feel more comfortable travelling through these outside organizations regardless of the costs, as they are reputable and licensed organizations (Grimm & Needham, 2011). Intermediaries are simultaneously targeting the parents paying the way for young volunteers, ensuring the safety of their children while abroad (Ansell, 2008). Many volunteers profit from the additional benefits of these higher-cost companies, which can include airport pickup and drop-off, language schools, and on-site check-ins.

This use of the free market to sell conservation volunteerism is an attractive solution for NGOs with a minimal-budget and need for an enthusiastic labor force (Cousins et al, 2009). However, the small reserves and NGOs are often 'at the mercy' of their partnered intermediaries. Companies can dictate the price the reserves must charge, and how many volunteers they will receive; otherwise the private company could cut its support, and the reserve will lose its main source of funding and labor (Grimm & Needham, 2013). These projects would have trouble filling their volunteer quota and receiving volunteer contributions without the help of private organizations. These organizations send volunteers to the sites for an additional fee to support safety and welfare measures, volunteer pre-trip preparation, and international medical insurance (Earthwatch, 2013).

## ***Participatory Environmental Research Tourism: PERT***

PERT "refers to a volunteer vacation, or conservation holiday, where participants pay to work as volunteers helping wildlife managers in environmental field research" (Ellis, 2003 p.75). PERT programs have volunteers collecting scientific data that helps pursue academic research,

justify conservation, and map trends across time in inhabited natural areas. (Brightsmith et al, 2008; Guttentag, 2009).

PERT travel has been most popular among Western Europeans, Australians, Poles, Japanese, Chinese, and North Americans (Brown & Morrison, 2003). One of the best-known organizations for environmental PERT volunteering is the Earthwatch Institute and Biosphere Expeditions. Earthwatch partners with ecological and environmental scientists to help them conduct their research by sending paying volunteers to their projects. Volunteers are often older (with an age average over 35) due to the higher costs of these programs<sup>1</sup> (Campbell & Smith, 2006).

Projects last 5-16 days, and once trained in their research role (never too challenging), volunteers will collect data 6-8 hours/day. This data can be very useful for scientists, who would otherwise not have had the manpower or funding to collect this level of data. However, since these volunteers are not scientific experts, their data collection can be incorrect and often erroneous. Researchers often become disillusioned with this model, once they realize that minimal funding goes towards their project, and they are constantly required to supervise such large groups (Brightsmith et al, 2008).

### ***Gap Year Programs***

A growing majority of the volunteer demographic consists of gap-year students, those traveling or working between secondary school and university (Soderman & Snead, 2008). Grimm and Needham (2011) discovered that one of the predominant motivations for volunteers to go abroad is due to family influence and values. Many families encourage their children to take time off for self-discovery before continuing their education.

In 1972 the Gap Activity Project (GAP) was founded to create structured overseas gap years for young adults (Ansell, 2008). In the United Kingdom, approximately 14% of students (55,000) entering university in 2013 had taken a gap year (Philpott, 2013). Today, over 350,000 placements for overseas volunteering are offered annually to students aged 16-25 across 200 countries; seventeen percent of these include environmental and conservation work (Jones, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> 8 days in the Amazon with Earthwatch: \$2575-\$3675 depending on departure date (Earthwatch, 2014)  
6 days in the Amazon with Biosphere Expeditions: \$1850 (Biosphere, 2014)

## **The Benefits & Challenges of Volunteer Ecotourism**

### ***Environmental Representation***

Volunteer ecotourism has high success rates attracting Euro-American youth for projects focused on marine and terrestrial fauna, flagship species, and reforestation projects (Campbell & Smith, 2006). Projects of this nature are easy to sell to potential volunteers, as they rely on the attraction of what's "cute and cuddly" within the conservation world. Sea turtles are the most popular single-species to attract volunteer attention, just behind marine mammals and terrestrial fauna (Ellis, 2003). There has been an increased call to involve citizens in science and environmental monitoring.

However, research on topics such as dung beetles, skunks, and diptera larvae is much harder to market. While this type of research often reveals much more about the environment and its ecological health, it is not appealing to volunteers and therefore cannot be sold as a volunteer-vacation, even though these projects are desperate for volunteer researchers (Cousins et al, 2009).

According to Ellis (2003), 30% of all volunteer tourism placements are in Central and South America. The Amazon Rain Forest, where this study takes place, is viewed as Edenic nature by westerners, making it a flagship ecosystem destination for volunteer ecotourism (Slater, 1995).

### ***Economic Effects***

Volunteers provide much-needed financial support for conservation projects (Ellis, 2003; Halpenny & Caissie, 2003; Ryan et al, 2001; Wearing, 2004). Many of the small projects and NGOs that receive volunteers are often limited by the amount of money they have to spend on marketing their destination (Sanders & Halpenny, 2000). It costs a large amount of money for key-word optimization on the top two pages of the Google search engine. Generally, their only source of income is from donations and, of course, the volunteers. These small NGOs account for 77% of the volunteer tourism destinations worldwide (Ellis, 2003), and are dependent on intermediaries to help with funding through sourcing volunteers. For example, at the Tambopata Macaw Project in Peru (Brightsmith et al, 2008), 95% of their research project is funded by the Earthwatch Institute and Rainforest Expeditions, both PERT organizations.

A two week trip can cost anywhere from \$150 to \$5,195 depending on the location, accommodation, and research situation (Earthwatch, 2013; Work Abroad, 2013). This wide range

allows volunteers of different economic situations to participate, with a percentage of all funding going towards the conservation or environmentally-related causes. Organizations work to recruit volunteers who have time and capital to support these projects, with the hopes that their altruistic motivations will lead to long-term support and donations to the organization (Coghlan, 2006).

Grimm & Needham (2011 & 2012) interviewed volunteers on why they chose to travel through a specific organization; the overwhelming reason given was price. Conservation tourism can be seen as a form of marketing natural resources to an audience, making volunteers simultaneously conservationists and customers. Volunteers are willing to pay for the time they contribute to the conservation cause, and organizations (both private and NGOs), are dependent on these funds/donations for their projects.

## **The Volunteers**

### ***Motivations***

Volunteers are generally wealthy, well-educated and globally conscious of issues, such as poverty, social injustice, and environmental degradation (Conran, 2011). Many studies in circulation on voluntourism focus on the volunteers' motivations for going abroad (Brown & Lehto, 2005; Campbell & Smith, 2006; Coghlan, 2007; Coren & Gray, 2012; Cousins, Evans & Sadler, 2009). Volunteer ecotourism, in comparison to plain ecotourism, has a stronger focus on how individuals can contribute with more than just their money. This leads to the strong focus on altruistic motivations that draw volunteers to these projects. In a survey of US national environmental volunteers (non-paying), Bruyere & Rappe (2007) concluded that the seven main factors motivating such volunteers were: 1) help the environment; 2) enhance their career; 3) repair the areas they use; 4) learn about fauna and flora; 5) be social; 6) work under effective project organizers; and 7) increase esteem.

Broad and Jenkins (2008, 72), at the Gibbon Rehabilitation Center in Phuket, Thailand, describe the volunteers seeking out these longer-term ecological projects as those who:

...seek to make a contribution to conservation principles and practices and often require considerable commitment of resources on the part of organizations as they need to educate and train volunteers during their stay. Furthermore, volunteers travel long distances and invest much time and money... If their motivations are not carefully considered, programmes will struggle to recruit and retain "holiday workers."



Grimm and Needham (2011) did a study in Ecuador comparing the volunteers' motivations with the perceived notions the coordinators and administrators had of these motivations. Their findings showed that the volunteer coordinators and administrators did not have a clear understanding of why volunteers were travelling to their projects, and that being aware of these motivations can further enhance the experience for both the volunteers and the coordinators. It's been suggested that if managers do not understand volunteer motivation, then volunteers might be dissatisfied with their volunteer experience (Coghlan, 2008).

### *Altruistic Values*

One of the key motivations for environmental-based volunteering is the volunteers' feeling of doing something positive that advances their personal values (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007; Grimm & Needham, 2011). According to Campbell and Smith (2006), environmental values are the greatest draw to projects that consist of conservation, protection of flora, and especially protection of flagship fauna. Environmentally-conscious volunteers are attracted to these projects as a way to address their concerns for the environment and make a positive difference (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). The environmental movement would not exist without the help of thousands of dedicated volunteers; both public and private environmental organizations rely on unpaid volunteers to further the cause of protecting and helping the imperiled natural environment (Ryan et al., 2001).

However, if this feeling of truly making a difference, or feeling useful is not evoked, then volunteers can often feel upset or unmotivated by the tasks at hand. In a study done in South Africa volunteers' emotions were gauged throughout different activities, and it was found that many were frustrated and disappointed by the lack of hands-on time with the lions and other large fauna of the Serengeti (Cousins, Evans and Sadler, 2009). When working with volunteers on an Earthwatch Expedition, Brightsmith (2008) noted that "volunteers are relatively intolerant of doing tasks that they do not perceive as being important." Current literature debates if it is self-gratification, as opposed to true altruism, that brings volunteers to these projects (Coghlan, 2008; Cousins et al, 2009; Halpenny & Caissie, 2003).

The other prominent altruistic value that comes from volunteering is the intimacy and the creation of new relationships with people from all over the world. Tourism is the idea of consuming and spending, whereas volunteering evokes the idea of sharing an experience, growing together with strangers, and making everlasting bonds with local community members and fellow volunteers. The

idea of bringing so many different nationalities and social groups together can help reduce racial, cultural, and social boundaries, often called ‘reconciliation tourism’ (Raymond and Hall, 2008). Mary Conran’s (2011) study in Thailand uncovered that volunteers’ greatest take-away from their experiences was the connections they made with local people and the interactions they had with native cultures.

A high level of multicultural intimacy is more challenging with environmentally-based volunteering than with socially-based projects. Environmental projects often consist of much more time spent in the field studying ecological elements, doing trail construction, or working on reforestation projects. Therefore, volunteer-based ecotourism is more of an outlet for meeting like-minded western volunteers and making friends from across the globe (Brown & Lehto, 2005; Campbell & Smith, 2006). Coren & Gray (2011) noticed that volunteers in Thailand and Vietnam “interacted much more with each other than with members of the local community.” These volunteers are constantly together during free time, days off for travel, and volunteer work hours and meals.

### *Personal Goals*

Volunteering to achieve personal goals, such as career and educational development, and testing one’s limits does not take away from a volunteer’s work ethic; however it could be the main reason the volunteer initially seeks out these opportunities (Coghlan, 2006). Especially with young adults, environmentally-based volunteering is seen as a way to gain real-world experience for future careers in the field. Gap years can thus be viewed as commoditized resume building (Mowforth & Munt, 2003). A volunteer in this position can work just as constructively, achieving altruistic motivations, while still completing a personal agenda. Volunteer coordinators, who are targeting young adults, greatly consider this motivation when creating marketing campaigns for their volunteer projects (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007; Coren & Gray, 2011).

Another motivation, though not as obvious, is volunteer’s desire to explore territory uncharted by tourists. Tourism often leads along a mainstream path, whereas volunteering opens up opportunities to participate in a culturally and ecologically more authentic experience (Chen & Chen, 2011). Wearing (2001) describes these individuals as those “who move beyond the ‘gazer’ to become an ‘interactive’ contributor to the site.”

Volunteers travelling abroad for these extended volunteer periods may also be seeking personal thrills or rites of passage - a way of testing one's self and exploring the limits while still young. According to Craik (1986), many tourists make the conscious decision to throw themselves into uncomfortable situations. Volunteer tourists' commitment to their projects and work may result in greater personal development for the volunteer than for the overall environmental project: "When volunteers come back they feel empowered, knowing they have been able to make a difference...You feel a lot more confident in your ideas and beliefs...that you can contribute to society," (Hill, 2001, 28).

### ***Volunteer Work Ethic***

The concept of a "volunteer vacation," while serving as an important way to give back to the ecosystem one is visiting, also constitutes hard work and often uncomfortable situations. Zahra and Macintosh (2007) interviewed Australian volunteers in the Philippines who found "things grueling, and therefore [they] did not have that much enthusiasm." They felt that the "food was revolting," and found it difficult to work in Philippine slums. Volunteers will be more effective if their motivational needs are being met and they have tangible data that show they are making a difference (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007).

Volunteers commit 6 to 8 hours of daily work, with breaks for meals and free time (Earthwatch, 2013). Programs range in duration from ten days to as long as twelve months, depending on the nation's visa laws and the volunteer's commitment time. For the initial few weeks, there is often a "guest" and "host" concept when entering a volunteer site, wherein volunteers focus more on the tourism part of volunteer tourism, and see their project directors more as hosts than managers or bosses (Holmes et al, 2010).

If they lack experience and initial willingness, volunteers can actually hinder projects and delay completion of project objectives (Guttentag, 2009). Many volunteer projects have reported an unsatisfactory work ethic from volunteers and a failure to achieve project goals (Brightsmith et al, 2008).

### ***Expectations***

Potential volunteers, when researching programs, are concerned mainly with issues of local sanitation and safety, food, lodging, and how they will adapt to below-Western standards of living

during their time abroad. Volunteer sites are not resort vacation destinations, and many volunteers have trouble adapting to a lower standard of living, even for short periods of time (MacIntosh & Zahra, 2007). Ecotourism often requires host destinations to create an image of untouched nature and rustic living, in order to match tourist's expectations (Gray & Campbell, 2007). Many volunteers arrive with pre-conceived notions of what the work requirements are, and what amenities the facilities will have (Coren & Gray, 2012; Cousins et al, 2009; Lyons, 2003).

A mismatch between the volunteer's expectations, created in part by the organization's promotional material, and their actual experiences, may lead to decreased satisfaction levels and lowered volunteer motivation and commitment. This in turn will decrease the effectiveness of the volunteer tourism organization, which is trying to achieve its conservation or humanitarian goals through the use of volunteer tourists. (Coghlan, 2007, p.285)

Cousin et al. (2009) caught the quintessential idea behind these frustrations, in a quote from one of their research subject-volunteers: "I've paid to observe lions, not map roads!" When volunteers are paying such large sums of money for an experience that was marketed to them, anything below their expectations can lead to a drop in positive attitudes.

## **Conclusion**

The vast majority of published work favors the concept of volunteer tourism, and supports the work that volunteers contribute to environmental and community-based projects. There is a great focus on the motivation of volunteers and why they pay to work abroad, as this is an important area of study to understand recruiting methods for continued Euro-American support. However, there are few reports on the interactions and communications that take place between volunteers and host site coordinators and directors, and the impact of those interactions on the ultimate desired conservation goals of the reserves.

My research was designed to fill this gap by visiting ecological reserves in Ecuador that accept international volunteers, and comparing the work ethic and expectations of volunteers with the communication of goals from the project managers.

# Methods

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The goals of this study were to uncover the sources of discontent from the volunteers, and how this was influencing the project goals of the ecological reserves. As these reserves are dependent on volunteers to staff, as well as fund their projects, understanding these relationships is of great importance to ensuring their continued success into the future. I conducted ethnographic field work and observations in Ecuador for four weeks from June 14<sup>th</sup> to July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

## ***Study Sites***

### *Site One: The Amazon*

Site 1 is a 2,270 hectare reserve located in the Amazon Jungle along the Napo River at an altitude of 450 meters (~1,500 ft.). It was founded in 1985 with only 150 hectares and now encompasses 2,200 hectares. The site is managed by one of Ecuador's largest conservation NGOs. This NGO was the founding organization, run by Ecuadorians, which brought volunteer ecotourism into the country starting in the early 1990s. In the early 2000s, the executive director wished to partner with other reserves and help extend the volunteer ecotourism model. The NGO, based in Quito, now manages four other reserves across Ecuador, including one in the Galapagos. The NGO manages recruitment for all the reserves, including Site 1, and sends volunteers to the reserve Monday through Thursday via public transportation. As alternate forms of funding, the reserve also hosts tourists, university student groups, and researchers. This Site was chosen to be included in the study due to the length of time it has been a model for sustainable conservation and voluntourism in Ecuador.

### *Site Two: The Cloud Forest*

Site 2 is located in the Andean Cloud Forest, a bio-diverse ecosystem located on the flanks of the Andes. The site's 800 hectares of protected forest has an elevation range of 3,600 to 6,700 feet, hosting a mix of Tropical Andean and Choco-Darien ecosystems. Volunteers focus on garden and trail maintenance, environmental education, and reforestation, with a larger focus on sustainability through agriculture, than Site 1. The owners of Site 2 have had this land in their family for generations, where it was previously used through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century as a plantation and then as a ranch. In 1992, the family turned the land into a private reserve to protect it from illegal

deforestation, hunting, degradation from farming, and resource extraction. The reserve has been hosting tourists, university groups, and researchers since the 1990s, but in 2004 they began accepting volunteers as an alternative source of income and labor.

As a small-scale reserve, Site 2 originally turned to Site 1's NGO to help source their volunteer populations. Volunteers would sign up through the NGO (the only volunteer ecotourism intermediary in Ecuador at the time), and be sent to Site 2. The NGO used to support many more sites across Ecuador like Site 2, but since the economic depression, has cut this support to focus on its five reserves. There was also growing competition of outside intermediaries coming into Ecuador, and dispersing fewer volunteers across more sites. In 2008 through 2009, the NGO stopped sending as many volunteers to Site 2. In 2009, Site 2 created its own NGO to source volunteers, and began partnering with international intermediaries. In 2010, it officially split from Site 1's NGO.

Site 2 was chosen for the different methods it uses to manage volunteers in comparison with Site 1. Spending time at both reserves gave me an understanding of the diverse communication methodologies used with the volunteers, and multiple case perspectives to deepen my inquiry.

### ***Participant Observation***

Using ethnographic and participatory research methods, I worked alongside the volunteers, recording their daily work habits and reactions to the work demanded of them in my field notes. My observations were collected on a quantitative scale, reporting what each volunteer was doing every 30 minutes (working, taking a break, socializing, complaining, etc.). I was concerned that volunteers would conduct themselves differently, knowing that they were under surveillance (see Limitations). To remain completely transparent, all volunteers received information on the project ahead of time, and chose whether or not they would participate. My notes were always open to volunteers who were interested in my observations or who after the first few days, wished not to be included in the study. All volunteers, administrators, and coordinators agreed to participate in the research (Appendix K).

I was on site at each location for two weeks; this time period allowed a minimum of eight days observing the volunteers. Only 40% (n=17) of the volunteers were at the reserves for the full two weeks, as many ended their volunteer period during my first week on site, and new volunteers came on site early in the second week. However, two weeks ensured enough time to interview all present volunteers, coordinators and administrators before personal connections biased results. Both

sites, along with the names of all employees and volunteers, shall remain anonymous for the protection of the sites and their participants. Both sites are examples of volunteer *ecotourism*, as they differ from the usual meaning of volunteer tourism, as proposed by Lyons and Wearing (2008); neither directly involve the volunteers with community members beyond the full-time employees on the reserve. While the reserves have programs for local environmental education and outreach, this aspect is separate from the volunteers' work.

These reserves focus specifically on volunteer ecotourism, and how volunteers can aid in sustainable agriculture, reforestation, and environmental regeneration. The predominant volunteer language at both sites was English, even when the staff only spoke Spanish or Quichua (one of the indigenous languages of Andean and sub-tropical Ecuador). Both sites have a minimum volunteer time of two weeks, ensuring that volunteers get a more in-depth experience than a normal vacation, and have time to grow accustomed to the work rhythm of the reserve.

### ***Interviews***

After I started monitoring their behavior every 30 minutes and taking field notes, I began conducting formal open-ended interviews with each volunteer to supplement my field data. I ensured that each volunteer had been on site for at least 5 days before interviewing them, to confirm that they understood their role on the reserve, and what to expect from the rest of their volunteer experience. All interviews and observations were recorded anonymously under codes (Volunteer Male 1 Site 1 (VM1S1), Volunteer-Coordinator Female 1 Site 2(CF1S2)). Results of these observations were only analyzed in aggregate, and the final thesis does not include recognizable indicators of individual human subjects, nor of the identity and location of the reserve sites.

Participants were asked a structured set of interview questions (Appendix A) ensuring that every individual was asked the same questions. There was additional space within the interview for open-ended questions, leaving room to explore additional information and deepen the discussion on certain topics. The recording device was always clearly visible to the volunteers during the interviews. All interviews were transcribed afterwards to ensure word-for-word quotes and accuracy of information. Interviews with volunteers were on average 14 minutes, with the shortest being seven minutes and the longest being forty-five. Interviews conducted in Spanish were transcribed cautiously to ensure that translations were accurate. In this study, when translated quotes from Spanish interviews are used, the original quotes can be found in Appendix F.

As clarification, there is a distinct difference in the role between coordinators and directors. Directors live on the reserves, and are in direct contact with the NGO's office in Quito. The Director is fluent in English, and manages the office work for the reserve. At both Sites, the director used to work with the volunteers, but now manages from a distance through the coordinator. The coordinators work, and often live, with the volunteers. They are on site everyday helping the volunteers with their activities, assigning roles, and distributing gear. The volunteers are usually much closer with their coordinator than the director.

Interviewing the coordinators and administrators after the first week gave me key information to look out for when observing the volunteers and their relationship with the coordinator for the second week. Interviews with the administrators and coordinators were on average 45 minutes. The administrator's interviews were structured specifically to each site (Appendix C & D). This was due to the length of time each site had been hosting volunteers (Site 1: 21 years, versus Site 2: 9 years), and the ways their volunteer programs differed. It was important to get a full-picture view of the volunteer program, and mark what trends the administrators had noticed across the years. Both reserves have had a multitude of different coordinators, but the administrators have remained the same since the opening of both reserves. Since the coordinators are shorter-term employees, their open-ended interview questions were the same, with only slight modifications for the coordinator at Site 2 (CF1S2), since she had only been in the position for 3 weeks when I interviewed her.

## ***Survey***

Two months after being on site with the volunteers, I emailed all volunteers a post-volunteer online survey (Appendix E) through Survey Monkey<sup>®</sup>. The survey was used to compare volunteers' mind set about volunteering after they had left the site and had returned home, allowing time for reflection. All responses to the surveys were returned to the researcher anonymously. Since only 56% of participants chose to fill out the survey, I do not know which did, and which did not.

## ***Data Analysis***

I transcribed interviews on site, in order to begin looking for trends, especially between the two sites while still in Ecuador. Transcribing all of the interviews from Site 1 before entering Site 2, gave me a clearer idea of what trends had appeared at the first site, and how I might uncover them at the second, or compare differences. I transcribed all of the interviews from the field (21 interviews)



within two weeks of returning from Ecuador and began analyzing the information, searching for trends that are more clearly seen once removed from the situation.

Data analysis began with preliminary hand coding (Cope, 2005); a mix of highlighting key words and concepts, along with looking at prominent themes. Volunteer interviews were coded individually, and then further coded and grouped by question across all volunteers for each site in a matrix. Volunteers were divided by each column, with their answers to the questions side by side in the rows (see Figure 1 for an example). After coding by site, I expanded the coding to look across both sites, and pick out key comparisons and differences between their responses.

**Figure 1:** Example of a Coding Table for Volunteer Interviews

	Volunteer Female 1 Site 1	Volunteer Female 2 Site 1	Volunteer Male 1 Site 1
Interview Question 1	<i>Response</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Response</i>
Interview Question 2	<i>Response</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Response</i>

Coordinators' interviews were coded individually as each was in a very different scenario, and could not be compared. The coordinators' descriptions of their work and communication style were then cross referenced with my field notes, referring to what actions they took on specific days. Once this individual analysis of each interview was complete, I would then compare coordinators in the fields where possible. This method was used to analyze which methods from each volunteer coordinator were most successful.

The administrators' interviews were also coded separately, but could not be grouped together by question, as each administrator had very different interviews due to the characteristic of each site. Both interviews with the administrators were conducted in Spanish, and were translated before coding began.

### ***Research Ethics***

As a URECA! Grant (Undergraduate Research Endeavors Competitive Award) recipient and student researcher of the University of Vermont, it was assured that this research was exempt from the Institutional Review Board. First and foremost, the privacy of the research participants and research sites is preserved throughout this process. All private records linking the sites to their identities were kept for one year after the study was complete and then permanently deleted.

## ***Limitations***

1. Fitting in with the average volunteer demographic (Caucasian, female, unmarried, and in my early 20s), made it easy for me to meld with the group, and allow the volunteers to be themselves when I was present. That being said, it was often difficult for the volunteers to distinguish the difference between my various roles as a fellow volunteer, a researcher and friend. Joining volunteers in down-time festivities and weekend travel gave me a strong bond with them, however it may have also biased my research; my connection with them making it harder to be objective. For this reason, I chose to only stay 2 weeks at each site, to ensure that I didn't get too attached or comfortable with the volunteers, the employees or the site itself.
2. When planning my research, I hoped to study each volunteer for a minimum of 10 days while I was on site. Upon arrival, I quickly realized that this would not be the case, as many volunteers come and go every week. For example, at Site 1, I arrived and studied 4 volunteers for only 5 days before their volunteer period ended. Likewise, 3 volunteers arrived in the last 5 days of my study. A few volunteers arrived within the last 48 hours of my time at Site 1, and I found it impossible to include them in the study, as an interview would be impossible until they had worked there for at least 3 days, and understood their role and how that aligned with their expectations.
3. It was difficult to monitor all volunteers every 30 minutes due to the nature of the work we were doing. Volunteers would often be split up into multiple teams and sent on different tasks. As I could not be everywhere at once, I would stay and work with the largest group, or if needed, with individual volunteers that I had not had the chance to monitor as frequently.

# Results

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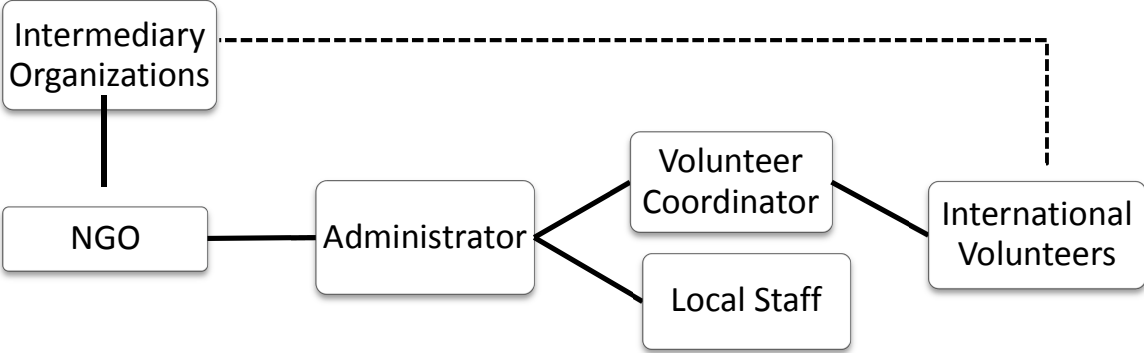
## *Introduction*

The results are reported for each site, with a preliminary section on the daily routine and group demographic. Results from the interviews are presented, followed by summary data of field observations. This information is presented separately for each site, followed by a comparison of the two sites in the final section.

## *Hierarchy of Actors*

Figure 2 displays the hierarchy of authority and responsibility at play in both reserves. Intermediary organizations also have a direct connection with the majority of the volunteers, unless the volunteer came through the NGO directly. When volunteers have a problem, they go first to the volunteer coordinator, then the administrator, and finally the NGO and/or intermediary organization.

**Figure 2:** Relationship Hierarchy at Volunteer Ecotourism Sites



## **Site One: The Amazon**

### ***Participant Demographics***

The following list of participants accounts for all the individuals who participated in my research study. The participants have been broken up into three categories: reserve administrators, volunteer coordinators and volunteers.

#### *Reserve Administrator*

Site one has its NGO office based in Quito where all of the administrative work and international outreach is conducted. The Administrator on Site 1 has been working here since the reserve's opening in 1985, and has been part of the process of integrating volunteer tourism into the reserve's management plan. The Administrator (AM1S1), has, worked and lived on the reserve for the past 28 years, and is an integral part of the running of Site 1. AM1 meets daily with the volunteer coordinator to plan the groups' activities, and gets to know the volunteers during meal times, which he joins daily. The Administrator speaks fluent English, and is whom the volunteers turn to if they are having any difficulty.

#### *Volunteer Coordinator*

The volunteer coordinator at Site 1 (CM1S1) has worked there for two years, and is native to the area. CM1 does not speak English, only Spanish and Quichua. Site 1 cannot afford to hire a volunteer coordinator that speaks English, as they demand a much higher salary. CM1 worked for 15 years in ecotourism before coming to Site 1, and has an educational background in agroforestry and botanical studies. CM1 not only serves as the coordinator for the volunteers, but also manages the gardens, trails, and maintenance of the Amazon Plant Conservation Center, a center for experimental silviculture and agroforestry.

#### *Volunteers*

At Site 1 there were 9 volunteers; 4 males and 5 females (See Figure 3). The average age of the volunteers was 22, with the oldest volunteer being 26 years old. The mean amount of time spent at Site 1 was 8 weeks, with a mode of 4 weeks. The longest-standing volunteer (VM2S1) had been

on site for 9 months. The shortest volunteer commitment Site 1 will accept is 2 weeks (i.e. 10 days of work). 90% of the volunteers had never had a volunteer travel experience before coming to the Amazon.

**Figure 3:** Site 1 Volunteer Demographic

Key: *V = Volunteer*    *F = Female*    *M = Male*    *SI = Site 1*    *BD: Bachelor Degree*

<b>Volunteer Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Time at Site 1</b>	<b>Education Level</b>
VF1S1	26	United States	3 weeks	Bachelor Degree
VF2S1	23	China	3 weeks	Bachelor Degree
VF3S1	19	Switzerland	4 weeks	About to start BD
VF4S1	26	United States	4 weeks	Bachelor Degree
VF5S1	20	United States	5 weeks	Currently attaining BD
VM1S1	21	Germany	12 weeks	About to start BD
VM2S1	22	England	36 weeks	Currently attaining BD
VM3S1	19	England	4 weeks	About to start BD
VM4S1	19	United States	4 weeks	Currently attaining BD

***Daily Routine:***

In order to fully understand the daily routine of the volunteers, I have included a schedule of the day-to-day work that was carried out in Appendix G, and additional activities that were available for the volunteers. This daily routine only includes work hours. Volunteers worked every day from 7:30 to 11:30 and from 13:30 to 15:30. The work supplies and designated work areas were 1.5 kilometers down the road from the volunteer huts and cafeteria. Volunteers would leave for work at 7:30, walk for 30 minutes, and then start work. They would then walk 30 minutes back at 11:30 for lunch, and walk back again at 13:30, ultimately returning to their huts at 16:00 each afternoon. Having worked alongside the volunteers during these projects, I can vouch for the difficulty of the labor.

During their free time on the reserve (not listed below), volunteers would go on walks through the jungle, meditate, climb the observation tower, or go swimming in the Napo River. Most commonly, volunteers could be found relaxing in the hammock area after lunch and dinner.

Every day volunteers would be guided through their tasks by the volunteer coordinator (CM1S1). CM1 would work with the Administrator to set weekly goals for the volunteers to complete. Each day would consist of multiple activities, often being split between the morning and afternoon shifts. To be more efficient, CM1 would often split the volunteers into several tasks, and work with the group that had the most physical or technically-challenging job. Since CM1 was constantly moving around, he was only ever able to explain the goals and objective of approximately

seventy percent of the tasks. Tasks might include weeding, making compost, planting seed starts for reforestation, or clear cutting areas for maintenance or to remove invasive plants.

## ***Interviews<sup>2</sup>***

Interview data was compiled from the full list of interview responses. See Appendix A, B, and C for full list of interview questions.

### *Paying to Volunteer*

Each volunteer was asked which intermediary they came through, and how much they paid through their outside organization; each volunteer paid a different monthly rate. Site 1 would not disclose the full list of partnering companies that attract volunteers to its organization; however, the list from the current volunteers shows clearly the diversity of recruiting organizations. The varying trends in commodification of this volunteer experience, led to a wide range of costs across the volunteer demographic- see Figure 4. It is important to note that many volunteers were not 100% sure how much they had paid for the volunteer experience, as many spent time in Quito beforehand for a language school, and the price was all combined in a bundle.

**Figure 4:** Volunteers' Program and Costs for One Month at Site 1  
Listed from Most to Least Expensive

<b>Volunteer</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Price/Month(US \$)</b>
<b>VF1S1</b>	Global Volunteer Network	<b>\$1,874</b>
<b>VF2S1</b>	Global Volunteer Network	\$1,800
<b>VM3S1</b>	i-to-i volunteering	\$1,156
<b>VF5S1</b>	Lead Adventures	\$1,000
<b>VM4S1</b>	Love Volunteers	\$875
<b>VF4S1</b>	Ubelong	\$850
<b>VM1S1</b>	Academica Travels	\$750
<b>VF3S1</b>	Academia Columbus	\$610
<b>VM2S1</b>	Directly through Site 1 in 2012	<b>\$477<sup>3</sup></b>

Regardless of how much the volunteer paid, the contribution to Site 1 remains the same: \$577 per month. The site does not gain further benefits if a volunteer is paying more to an outside organization. When the reserve first began accepting volunteers in the 90s, the price was \$200/month. When asked about the paying volunteer system, the Administrator (AM1) said “It’s a

<sup>2</sup> All quotes from AM1S1 have been translated from Spanish to English.

<sup>3</sup> When VM2S1 first came to the reserve the price was \$477/month. He kept this rate for the whole 9 months of his stay, even though the reserve recently increased their price to \$577/month.

great system...we don't have funding coming from anywhere....If we didn't have volunteers, we would have closed a long time ago."

Twenty five percent of the volunteers did not understand where their money was being allocated. When asked if they felt their money was being put to good use, VF3 said "Yes...it would be nice if they could put a higher percentage into the projects." VM3, who paid for services such as airport pickup said, "The money that I paid for... I think it could be put to good use. I don't know how much they use on certain things, maybe if I knew that I would know." VF1, who upon arrival learned how much money actually came to the reserve (\$577/\$1,874), said "I feel jipped off!...I feel like a lot of the money was taken by GVN" (Global Volunteer Network). It is important to note that VF1 was paying the highest rate, even after GVN had offered her a \$300 discount for early registration.

Some volunteers, depending on the intermediary they travel with, receive an orientation at the NGO's office in Quito. This orientation includes a PowerPoint on the reserve's goals and the allocation of the volunteers' donation (the \$577 that came to the reserve). However, as many volunteers do not receive this information before coming to the reserve, they are running off inaccurate information; such as VM1 who believed "a lot of this money we pay for goes into buying new forests." This is a mistaken conclusion, as money to purchase new land under conservation is paid for by large private donations, not volunteers.

AM1 explained the reality of the volunteer's donation: "We don't have money to hire enough people. The volunteers: it's not the money they're paying, it's their help. The help comes from the work they're doing." The Administrator is explaining that the \$577 only covers the volunteers' room and board, and housing/supplies maintenance, and does not leave any extra funding to hire on employees or conserve land.

### *Volunteer Commitment and Motivation*

Volunteers were asked what had sparked their interest to become a volunteer, in other words what made them begin researching volunteer experiences in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Volunteers named a number of similar reasons (listed here in order of most common response), including: 1) wanting to visit the rainforest, 2) give back through volunteering, 3) self-discovery, 4) travel, and 5) help with reforestation. VM3 stated "It was my childhood dream to visit the rainforest... and I thought I would want to do something which I could give back in any way I can."

Fifty percent of the volunteers had just finished high school and were taking a gap year before jumping into University-level academia. VM1 was here for nine months to receive credit for his University and said “I didn’t have to do this year out, but it looks better...with ‘industrial experience’ instead of just biology. And also it’s been a great thing, living here for so long.”

Volunteers were then asked what personal goals they hoped to achieve through volunteering, whether they were pre-existing goals, or formed once they arrived on site. One of the clear themes in the volunteer’s personal goals was the desire to challenge themselves. VF4, who had never been camping before coming here, said “I’ve never done anything nature!...I wanted to challenge myself in some crazy way...three weeks ago I was sitting in an air-conditioned office...and now I’m sleeping in a mosquito net and working on an organic garden in the Amazon!”

Six volunteers mentioned the personal goal of wanting to help the environment. For VM4 it was “more about actually making an impact on helping the environment than anything else.” All the volunteers were cognizant of the alarming rates of deforestation happening in the Amazon, and many mentioned how important it was for them to personally be supporting conservation. VF5 told herself “as long as I get to plant one tree, or I do one kind of restoration something, that’s all I want to do.”

For the administrator, this mentality can often lead to problems within the volunteer system: “There are many who think that reforestation means going to plant trees. But you need to explain to them that that also means filling the bags with dirt, [seed nursery]... because someone needs to do the first step.” AM1 also mentioned issues that can occur with volunteers because of their attitude: “they come with the idea that they know more than us....so they think they can come here with the mentality of a missionary.”

### *Volunteer’s Understanding of their Role within the Reserve’s Goals*

To further comprehend how volunteers viewed the work they were doing at Site 1, they were asked if they felt like their work had made a contribution to the reserve. VF4 felt that she had “perhaps in a small way. I definitely feel like I’m learning more than I’m giving.” VM3 was equally aware of the scale of his role, saying “Every little thing like gathering compost, or clearing land for planting fruit for the community... I think any small help is good.”

Volunteers were then asked if they believed the coordinator (CM1) or the administrator (AM1) had made it clear how their work was benefitting the overall goals of the reserve. VF1



became frustrated: “Not completely no...I never know what I’m doing every day. I don’t know what we’re planting. I don’t know if these trees are feeding us. I don’t know how long this is helping the jungle. I’m not completely sure what I’m doing exactly.” There were similar complaints from three others, including VF3, who when talking about the communication of the goals, said “that is a thing I wish [CM1] would do more of; especially for us in the beginning. We were put on this field and we don’t know why.”

This idea that greater understanding comes with time, ties in with AM1’s thoughts on how effective volunteers are: “It’s always better when they stay at least a month...learning, getting the rhythm, learning how to use a machete, and how to work here. It’s best with a three-month minimum.” VM1, who had been on site for three months when interviewed said, “I think right now I really know why I’m doing things, and what it’s for.”

Several volunteers mentioned their inability to communicate with CM1 due to the language barrier, as the main reason for their not understanding the goals. VM4 believed he could not entirely understand how his work was benefitting the overall goals, “due to my lack of Spanish skills, but I can tell [CM1 is] trying.” VM1 felt that, “I think when you really want to know, you have to ask CM1. ‘Why are we doing this?’ And ‘why are the trees there?’ And ‘why do we have to clear this area?’ I think you just have to ask more. But I think he has so many people, and he has to say the same thing hundreds of times every week, so it’s kind of repetitive.”

### *How to Improve Communication*

Volunteers were asked how they believed communication could be improved between themselves and the coordinators (which includes AM1). Fifty percent of replies jumped right to the language barrier that exists between the volunteers and the coordinator. VM4 bluntly said that communication could be improved by “me being fluent in Spanish, and [CM1] being fluent in English.” VF2, who is from Beijing, also agreed that “English would be very helpful, because English is one of the international languages...for Asian people, Spanish is not a common language...I am kind of sorry that I didn’t have any Spanish before I came here.” VF3 said she would recommend this program, “but tell all my friends that you get more out of it if you speak Spanish.” VF5 felt “I could, you know, get my way around, but I really do wish I was more fluent so I could understand what the volunteer directors were saying.”

Other volunteers who could not speak Spanish, didn't feel they were losing out by not speaking the language since, as VF4 says, "there's always someone around who can translate, or if not just gesturing. A lot of it is manual work, so [CM1] can just show you. I don't feel like I'm missing things." VM4 felt that "It's not just language, I guess you can also show what need to be done. But then the purpose of what need to be done I don't understand. Sometimes I need perhaps you (the researcher), or VF3 to define what we need to do." VF4's point of not understanding the work's purpose ties into VF3's thoughts on the subject:

I would appreciate if there was more of a weekly plan, or if they told us what we are going to do this week and what the aims are. More information in the morning about what we are doing, and what it is for. Sometimes it's clear. For us, it was definitely the work on the field that is frustrating because we didn't know what it was for. I didn't know if it was for Site 1 or for a community outside.

An example of good communication came on Day 5; CM1 very clearly explained the process of natural fertilizers and herbicides, and how these methods would be helping us, the forest, and local communities. Volunteers finished the task of digging holes for these natural fertilizer pits before the day was done, and even received help from community members.

There was not only a desire to communicate goals on a weekly basis, but also for a comprehensive orientation upon arrival. AM1 said that he often explains the reality of the work when volunteers arrive, but believes it would be better to have more information on the website. VF1, who attended the NGO orientation in Quito, explained how she feels communication of the goals could be improved on site:

When I got here, they're like ok here's your key here's your roommate. I had an orientation in Quito but they just kind of told me the basics, it would be nice to have an orientation from them about this is what you are doing to help the preserve. It would be nice if they explained it more in depth. I feel like I am kind of aimlessly wandering through the work.

Another problem with communication arose from the 'rain rule:' if it was raining hard when the volunteers alarms go off at 6:00 AM, they could stay in bed until the rain stopped. CM1 didn't like volunteers working in the rain, as it could get them sick, and worn out. On Day 10 it was very clearly pouring, but AM1 got angry at the volunteers for not working, and made them walk through the rain to the garden. VF4 voiced her complaint of not understanding the "rain rule" and when you should or shouldn't wake up for work.

### ***Volunteer Work Periods<sup>4</sup>***

There were times when volunteers did not do the work asked of them within the given time frame. I monitored their work behavior every thirty minutes as raw data. This data will now be shared alongside volunteers' perceptions of their own work ethic. Volunteers were asked during the interviews if they believed they had a strong work ethic. During the week, work is most difficult and labor-intensive on Mondays and Tuesdays, while easier tasks, such as raking, are saved for Fridays.

On Day 1, half of the volunteers were not present in the afternoon for work as they often skip work on Fridays. Many volunteers will leave the Site early to gain an extra day for travel over the weekend. On June 14<sup>th</sup> VF1 and VF2 skipped the afternoon work shift to go to Baños (tourist destination), while VM1 spent the afternoon cutting firewood for a bonfire planned for that evening. This meant that only VF3, VF4 and I were raking leaves to make compost. Since there were only 3 of us, the work was not completed, and volunteers had to return on Monday to finish the job. This is an example of work not being finished, and thus project goals not being met. The coordinator most likely expects volunteers to cut out of work on Fridays to travel, and thus assigns easier work since there are often fewer volunteers.

Day Two's raw data was collected on a Monday. In the morning, volunteers carried heavy planks of wood from the jungle to the main road. This was very hard physical labor, and even the staff and interns joined in to help. VF4, when asked about her work ethic, said "for someone who hasn't done a lot of manual work, I think I do pretty well. At the beginning I was definitely tired a lot." Since the morning was so exhausting, by the afternoon, volunteers only had the energy to rake leaves, and that was after they arrived on site one hour late.

Day 3 offers a large expanse of data since all of the volunteers were working on the same project: building a bridge. VM1 felt that projects should not be put off to other days if they don't finish during volunteer work hours, and thus kept working long after the 3:30 requirement. "For example, on the corn field, I wanted to finish that, and have something that was ready, not to leave it for a few days... I want to finish something, and then it's done. I don't have a problem to work 1 or 2 hours more"- VM1. Volunteers spent the morning carrying the remaining wood planks, and then the rest of the morning and afternoon building the bridge. In the morning, the women were tired, and after the coordinator left, all but VF3 quit early to go home for lunch. With the raw data it is easy to see which volunteers work consistently throughout the day; however, there are many volunteers who

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<sup>4</sup> View Appendix I to see the full results of the raw data explained in this section.

are not used to such intense levels of physical labor, and thus stop earlier in the day, or rest while others keep working.

Day 9 broke the work routine, as there was an influx of new volunteers and returning volunteers who had been ill. Since there were seven of us together for the first time, CM1 brought the whole group into the research station and gave a brief orientation and explanation of the reserve's overarching goals, and the importance of Amazonian plant conservation. At 10:00 am the volunteers were given machetes and asked to clear a field without any specific explanation about the task. By 10:30 all of the volunteers, except VM5 who had arrived that day, had stopped working since they were tired. Veteran volunteers (those who had been there longest and were more intolerant of these types of tasks) quickly became unmotivated and stopped working. The work was hard, and CM1 was not present to watch over the group.

At 11:00, CM1 returned to tell the volunteers to carry wood planks to build the conservation center. I witnessed the sudden shift in work level across the volunteers as they are happier to receive a task that seemed more purposeful, even though it was harder.

Volunteer motivation and work would often decline if CM1 was not there to facilitate the work, and observe. On Day 6 CM1 was busy leading a tour group of students; therefore work was slower, and we left early. On Day 8 VM3 and VM4 would take breaks in the middle of the trail where they knew no one could see them resting. This shows the extent to which there is greater pressure to work hard when CM1 is present. CM1 was observed to have a motivating presence, and is admired by the volunteers. It is also important to note that CM1 was the oldest adult present by 15 years, and thus could be viewed as a paternalistic or authoritative figure in the eyes of the volunteers.

### ***Post-Volunteer Survey***

Five out of the nine volunteers completed the online survey. It is possible that the following results are skewed based on the volunteers that chose to respond; those who did not enjoy their volunteer period may not have taken the time to fill out the survey.

Four out of five who responded firmly believed they had a positive impact on preserving the local ecology and environment of Site 1. All the surveyed volunteers said that the experience was rewarding, and that they want to have a similar volunteer experience again. One volunteer said:

For myself it was really rewarding. I learnt that I can live with fewer things; that it's great to live close to and with nature and that the western culture has forgotten a lot of its nature based knowledge which those people still have. I would definitely do it again!

One volunteer said that they thought the price of their volunteer package was suitable; the rest said they would never pay that much again. Four volunteers believed that one month was too short, and would rather stay for three. Only VM2, who stayed for 9 months, believed he would stay for less time in the future. Volunteers listed some of their most memorable volunteer experiences as being so close to nature and living in the jungle, climbing the bird observation tower, floating down the Napo, and learning from CM1.

In regards to what experiences they took away from this adventure, one volunteer said: “how to wield and be deadly with a machete, how reforestation is a difficult process in the Amazon, how to enjoy working relentlessly even when nobody else seems motivated to do anything.”

## **Site Two: The Cloud Forest**

### ***Participant Demographic***

The following list of participants accounts for all the individuals who chose to participate in my research study. The participants have been broken up into four categories: reserve administrators, volunteer coordinators, employees, and volunteers.

#### ***Administrator***

The administrator at Site 2 (AF1S2) has been part of the owner’s family since before the reserve began accepting volunteers in 2004. AF1 was originally the volunteer coordinator, working closely with the volunteers and sharing meals with them. As she’s gotten older, and started a family on the reserve, she has become the site’s administrator, and is now in charge of hiring the volunteer coordinator. AF1 offers Spanish classes to the volunteers for a price of \$5 per lesson. She also gives a weekly lecture to the volunteers about a subject of their choosing, ranging from cloud forest ecology to Ecuador’s current political situation. AF1 meets every Friday with the volunteer coordinator (CF1S2) and the staff administrator (EM1S2) to discuss the next week’s plans for the reserve, what needs to get done, and if new volunteers are coming.

#### ***Volunteer Coordinator***

The volunteer coordinator at Site 2 changes approximately every six months. This position is short term in part due to the difficulty of obtaining work visas for time over 12 months, and to the small stipend that comes with the position. Coordinators must speak English, and serve as the main

source of communication between the administrator and the volunteers. It is encouraged that the coordinator can speak Spanish so he or she can communicate with the staff, but is not a prerequisite; Site 2 does not want to put limits on who can fill the position. AF1 said that it is often difficult to fill the position far down the line beyond who will replace the current coordinator. A large portion of the volunteer coordinators are former volunteers who return years later to serve the reserve in a leadership role. The coordinator works, lives, and eats with the volunteers, assigns daily work, and monitors their health and wellbeing. AF1 sees value in having international volunteer coordinators who have the “same cultural background as the volunteers, understand[ing] them better.”

The current volunteer coordinator (CF1) at Site 2 was an American woman (36 years old). CF1 found the position online and saw it as a great opportunity to explore South America and learn Spanish without losing money. CF1 had been the coordinator for 3 weeks when I arrived. CF1 had no previous experience with agriculture, ecology, or volunteer management, but she hopes this opportunity would help her gain a future job as an environmental educator in other parts of South America.

### *Volunteers*

While at Site 2, I worked with 7 volunteers; 2 male and 5 female (see Figure 5). The average age of the volunteers was 26, with 3 from the United States, 3 from the United Kingdom, and 1 from Ecuador. The mean amount of time spent at Site 2 was 4.3 weeks with a mode of 4 weeks. Seventy-one percent of the volunteers had never had a volunteer travel experience before coming to Site 2.

**Figure 5:** Site 2 Volunteer Demographic

Key: *V = Volunteer*    *F= Female*    *M= Male*    *S2= Site 2*    *BD: Bachelor Degree*

<b>Volunteer Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Time at Site 2</b>	<b>Education</b>
<b>VF1S2</b>	20	England	4 weeks	Currently attaining BD
<b>VF2S2</b>	18	England	4 weeks	About to start BD
<b>VF3S2</b>	34	England	4 weeks	Postgraduate Degree
<b>VF4S2</b>	19	Unites States	4 weeks	Currently attaining BD
<b>VF5S2</b>	21	Unites States	6 weeks	Currently attaining BD
<b>VM1S2</b>	17	Ecuador	4 weeks	About to start BD
<b>VM2S2</b>	51	Unites States	4 weeks	Postgraduate Degree

### *Employees*

Site 2 had seven full-time employees, 3 of whom lived on the reserve with their families during the work week, and went back to their homes on the weekends. EM1, the staff administrator,

worked closely with the volunteers on their projects, while also managing the logistics of the reserve. Two young men (EM2, EM3) worked on the farm doing maintenance, farming, and managing the cattle. These men also worked with the volunteers, helping them manage heavy equipment and get through physically arduous tasks such as using a machete, chain saw or weed-whacker. While some employees know Basic English, most of their communication with the volunteers was done in Spanish.

### ***Daily Routine***

The daily routine consisted of activities completed during work hours: Monday through every other Friday from 8:30-12:30 and then from 14:00-16:00. Volunteers only had to walk 5 minutes to get to the work areas, and thus did not lose time commuting as they did at Site 1. The summer is the dry season in Ecuador and is a bad time to plant trees; therefore there was no reforestation work during this period. As a consequence, volunteers focused heavily on agriculture practices and how to increase the farm's sustainability.

In their free time volunteers would lie in hammocks, read in their rooms, do laundry, or go bird watching. There was a cecropia tree right next to the volunteer house that was frequented by toucans, cock-of-the-rocks, and monkeys, making it a popular spot for volunteers to sit under and observe with binoculars. Volunteers wishing to buy additional food or beverages could walk down to the local village (45 minutes) or take a bus to the nearest town (1 hour).

### ***Interviews<sup>5</sup>***

#### ***Paying to Volunteer***

Price was slightly less varied among participants because Site 2 partners with far fewer organizations than Site 1. Three volunteers, who came through Working Abroad believed that they had come directly through Site 2's website; however, they had simply misinterpreted that Working Abroad was an outside organization, collecting an additional fee. See Figure 6 below. Many volunteers could only give estimates of the amount they paid, leading to differences in price across the same organization; however, it's possible that they were charged different rates depending on the "volunteer package" they purchased. Going directly through Site 2 costs \$495 per month, or there is a minimum 2-week volunteer commitment which costs \$395.

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<sup>5</sup> All quotes from AF1S2 have been translated from Spanish to English.

**Figure 6:** Volunteers' Program and Costs for One Month at Site 2  
Listed Most to Least Expensive

Volunteer	Program	Price/Month (US \$)
VF2S2	Outreach International	\$1,266
VF4S2	Academia Latino Americano	\$1,055
VF5S2	Working Abroad	\$800
VM2S2	Working Abroad	\$650
VF1S2	Working Abroad	\$595
VF3S2	Working Abroad	\$595
VM1S2	Through Site 2	\$120 <sup>6</sup>

When asked if the volunteers thought their money was being put to good use, 5 out of the 7 volunteers responded that they didn't know where their money was going. Six of the seven volunteers acknowledged that their money was paying for room and board, but none could expand beyond that. VF2 said "I just know that it's used for obviously my food and accommodation, and I'm not sure what else. But it would be nice to know." In response to the volunteer's monetary complaints, AF1 justifies the value of the experience: "if I put everything on a receipt: "Three meals, housing, lectures every Tuesday, hikes, coordination, recreational activities, etc. "They would say "Agh how great, they're giving me all of this!" But, if you already have something you don't value it in general."

### *Volunteer Commitment and Motivation*

When asked what motivated them to volunteer at Site 2, the volunteers answered (from most to least frequent): 1) the location in the cloud forest; 2) the location in a Spanish-speaking country; 3) to gain experience in their careers; 4) to be helpful; and 5) to travel/get away from work. Volunteers mentioned a hope to achieve personal goals, including (in order from most frequently, to least frequently mentioned): 1) independence; 2) personal growth; 3) aid in conservation; and 4) travelling cheaply.

All of the volunteers said they believed they had a strong work ethic. VF3 specifically mentioned "I kind of have to understand what the point is of what I'm doing. So I'd say that possibly, on the clearing the field for the sugar cane task, I felt less than enthusiastic about that because I don't fully understand, and slightly disapprove.... Although I did do that task, I would say I didn't put as much effort into that one as I might have done if I had understood more."

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<sup>6</sup> Because VM1 is Ecuadorian, he only had to pay for food; room and board were covered through a scholarship that allows 1 Ecuadorian free room and board for every 5 international volunteers



Speaking Spanish was not such a necessity at Site 2 as it was at Site 1. This was because the volunteer coordinator was a native English speaker, and the staff had been trained earlier in the year in Basic English and communication. VM2 pointed out: “if they said in the packet, ‘look, the staff does not speak English; you should show up with some rudimentary Spanish, or some degree of Spanish,’ I think it’d be helpful.” Those who had a ‘rudimentary’ Spanish level, or above, had better relationships with the staff, and spent more time with them during breaks and meal times.

### *Communication of the Reserve’s Goals to Volunteers*

AF1 stated that volunteers help more with the day to day maintenance of the reserve and farm as opposed to the longer term goals of reforestation. A major issue at Site 2 is that there are no longer many places left to do reforestation; therefore, volunteers are more engaged with maintenance, which doesn’t feel as representative of conservation. VM2 explained “I think that the biggest breakdown in communication has been communication to me as a volunteer where I fit in with what’s going on; sort of what the organization is.” Volunteers often come to the reserve only for conservation, but are not considering the realities of the situation. AF1 explained the volunteers’ mentality and pre-conceived notions can negatively impact their view of Site 2:

On Animal Planet, or National Geographic, a jaguar is running and catching the Capybara and eating it, while the Toucans fly around. And you live with that idea of the cloud forest, of the rainforest... you get here and you’re not going to see a Jaguar eating the Capybara. With luck, the man hidden for 20 years in a refuge would see it. “Where are the animals?” The other factor ... when someone has studied... and have in their mind “how lovely, I’m going to go to the tropics, I’m going to eat a coconut ice cream and a piña colada while planting trees that are going to grow immediately after I plant them.” They never thought about the mosquitoes, they never thought about “oh! The weeds grow faster!” It’s a lot easier to talk about conservation, to talk about sustainable development, than to do it in reality.

When asked if the volunteers thought AF1 and CF1 had made it clear how their work was benefitting the overall goals of the reserve, 100% (n=7) of the volunteers said they didn’t know what the goals of the reserve were, especially the long-term goals (mentioned by 5/7). VF3 expanded on that point, saying “the reasons I wanted to come here, what I thought we were doing, were specifically projects to do with conserving cloud forest. Obviously there’s some tree planting going on, but it’s vague, and I’m not entirely sure what the strategy is.” VF2 mentioned “no offense to Site 2 or anything but...I don’t know any of their overall goals and I feel like it would be nice to be explained why we’re necessarily doing something.”

“Sometimes the common factor is them saying they haven’t learned enough. Or that they don’t understand why we’re doing things. But on the other hand, it’s like they want a course, which isn’t what this is. For \$8 a day we’re not going to give them a course (AF1).”

### *How Communication could be Improved*

The volunteers were asked how communication could be improved between themselves and the volunteer coordinator and administrator. Six of the seven volunteers mentioned that it would be helpful to have a clearer communication of the reserve’s goals. VM2 mapped out what he would like to hear at the orientation, or upon arrival on site:

“Welcome to Site 2. This is our long-range plan, this is our mid-range plan, this is our short-term goals, this is where you fit into it, this is the way we operate, we’re currently involved in reforesting this area for this reason with these kind of trees, we’re currently involved in...” I’ve been here almost 3 weeks, I have no idea what’s going on here. Cause I came here with the conservation interest, and from the website I was under the impression I was going to be involved in reforesting areas and helping to restore. And, first of all I haven’t done any of it, and second of all, if it’s going on, I have no idea. I guess that’s been a little frustrating.

VF3 said she would like to hear “what overall plan for Site 2, in terms of a six weeks, one year, and ten years.” VF4, in regards to the volunteer coordinator’s communication role, said “I’m sure if I asked she could tell me, or find out for me, but I would just like it to be more of her objective to explain how what we’re doing fits into the wider goals of what apparently S2 is all about.” AF1 directly addressed the repetitiveness of a coordinator’s job, and how it might be necessary to explain every detail.

One of the more frequent complaints from the volunteers is that they don’t understand why they’re doing something. That in a lot of cases, to us, is obvious, but to them it’s not. “Why do we plant a carrot?” For me the answer is “to eat it.” But sometimes you have to say “today we’re going to plant carrots here, we’re going to do this, and the reason we’re planting the carrot is to eat it.” The idea of the volunteer coordinator is to do exactly that... for 5 years I managed the activities...but I reached a point where repeating the same thing over and over...There are volunteers who come for 15 days and want to know everything. There are volunteers who come for 1 month and want to know everything.

### ***Volunteer Work Periods<sup>7</sup>***

Day 3 at Site 2 is an example of too many volunteers working on one project. In this case, VF3, VF5, VM1 and EM2 were all working on the same task: repairing stairs, a job which only has room for 2 individuals due to space constraints. Therefore, the volunteers simply waited around, or

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<sup>7</sup> To find the raw data from participant observations of the volunteer work periods, see Appendix J.

observed while EM2 and one other volunteer would work. The volunteers became frustrated by just sitting around, and 3 left to go and weed with CM1.

On Day 7 the volunteers were weeding the medicinal garden. The volunteers had a clear explanation of the work by CF1, and told why it was important for the maintenance of the garden. They had also received a lesson from AF1 on the importance of the medicinal plants, and how they have been used in the cloud forest for generations. Volunteers were given adequate tools, and completed the project by lunch. This is an example of a successful work today with clear positive results.

### ***Post-Volunteer Survey***

Four of the seven volunteers completed the online survey. Half of these participants, firmly believed they had a positive impact on preserving the local ecology and environment, the other 50% thought they only had a small impact. All volunteers said that the experience was rewarding, and that they want to have a similar volunteer experience again. Three volunteers said that they thought the price of their volunteer package was suitable; one said they would pay less next time. Two volunteers believed that one month was the perfect amount of time; the other two believed their stay could have been longer. Volunteers listed some of their most memorable volunteer experiences as: milking cows, reforestation, camp fires, making chocolate and coffee, and playing drinking games and Pictionary with the other volunteers.

### **Compare and Contrast Site One and Site Two**

Figure seven (below) illustrates the differences and similarities between Site 1 and Site 2. Important differences to note are the size of the two reserves (in hectares) and their proximity to the main road. There is also a significant different in the hours of work per week across the two sites, and the schedule of work times. Both sites offer similar extra learning activities and amenities, along with fairly similar work areas. Volunteering at Site 1 costs 17% more than Site 2, and has also been receiving volunteers for almost a decade longer.

**Figure 7:** Compare and Contrast Site 1 and Site 2

*The information for this table was tallied from observations at each site, interviews, and online/pamphlet material.*

	<b>Site 1</b>	<b>Site 2</b>
<b>Ecosystem</b>	Amazon	Cloud Forest
<b>Hectares</b>	2,270	800
<b>Proximity to Main Road</b>	200 meters	2.0 kilometers
<b>Reserve Created</b>	1985	1992
<b>Volunteers arrived in:</b>	The early 90s	2004
<b>Amenities</b>	Volunteer cabins Cafeteria Laundry Service (costs extra) Free Cleaning Service Observation tower Beach on the Napo River Self-guided trails	Volunteer House Cafeteria Area for washing clothes/dishes Hot Showers Camping Sites Laguna and Waterfall Self-guided trails
<b>Work areas:</b>	Reforestation and Planting Seeds Botanical garden Vegetable/fruit garden Clearing fields Maintenance Work Center for Conservation of Amazonian Plants	Reforestation and Planting Seeds Medicinal garden Vegetable/fruit garden Clearing fields Maintenance Work Dairy Facilities Baking Bread for Breakfast
<b>Extra learning opportunities:</b>	Occasional lectures from CM2 Making indigenous bracelets Tour through the botanical garden Tour through jungle with park guards Self-guided trail guides Teaching English at the school	Weekly lectures from CF1 Learning to make coffee and chocolate Spanish lesson service Bi-weekly hikes through the reserve Self-guided trail guides Teaching English at the school
<b>Work hours</b>	Monday-Friday 7:30-11:30 1:30-3:30 Soccer on Wednesday afternoon instead of work	Monday-Thursday 8:30-12:00 2:00-4:00 Friday is a hike or travel day Soccer on Wednesday after work
<b>Hours of work/day</b>	6 (+ additional hour walking back) 5 (without walk)	5.5
<b>Hours of work/week</b>	28 Time spent walking: 7.5 hours/week	22
<b>Meal Times</b>	Breakfast: 6:30-7:00 Lunch: 12:00-12:30 Dinner: 6:00-6:30	Breakfast: 7:30-8:00 Lunch: 12:30-1:00 Dinner: 6:00-7:00
<b>Price/ Month</b>	\$577	\$495

<b>Ideal number of volunteers</b>	10	15
<b>Trail Width</b>	Single Track	Vehicle/cow herd width

### ***Communication***

Communication of goals, both long-term and short-term, was fairly similar across both sites. Often the overall goals were not explained, and volunteers would have to ask the administrator for additional information. At Site 1, there was a language barrier with the volunteer coordinator that often blocked the communication of goals; whereas at Site 2, the lack of long-term experience from the coordinator (having only been on site for 3 weeks) left many questions unanswered. Both sites had white boards in the dining area for writing down a weekly schedule, but often this tool went unused.

Both sites offered orientations in Quito, however neither fully explain the need for day-to-day maintenance, and that this will be the main task of the volunteers. Likewise, volunteers do not receive a comprehensive orientation upon arrival on site, and thus start off their eco-voluntourism without a clear understanding of the reserve's goals and how they fit into them.

### ***The Volunteers***

At Site 1, 78% (n=9) of volunteers were frustrated with the lack of communication, or did not understand the reserve's goals; whereas at Site 2, 100% of the volunteers felt they didn't understand the goals and that communication could be improved. Even in their free time at Site 2, the volunteers discussed this frustration, whereas at Site 1, where it was only brought up during work hours when volunteers were frustrated with the task at hand. Therefore, the volunteers at Site 2 were overall more frustrated with their situation and lack of communication.

### ***Environment***

At both sites, volunteers expressed a wish to help the environment and save the rainforest as part of a larger conservation goal. Volunteers were motivated by the perception that they were saving the forests around them. At Site 1, volunteers are taken on a tour through the reserve's jungle with a park guard, and receive an in-depth explanation of what is being protected. At Site 1 volunteers live in the jungle; the only time volunteers leave the reserve is for the 30 minute commute

to the work area along a main road. This is in contrast to Site 2 where the volunteer house is surrounded by pasture fields and farmland. It is hard for volunteers to visualize the 800 hectares they are helping to protect, when they are surrounded by concentrations of cleared fields and felled forests. Only during the hikes offered every other Friday, or by their own initiative, do volunteers get into the cloud forest, away from the cattle, and feel the presence of the endemic wildlife.

### ***Projects***

Both sites advertise reforestation projects, and the sense that volunteers are making a great difference in the health of the local ecosystem. However, at both sites volunteers were doing very little work planting trees, and many volunteers voiced their frustration with this. Both administrators had similar thoughts on the realities of conservation work. AM1S1: “There are many who think that reforestation means going to plant trees. But you need to explain to them that that also means filling the bags with dirt, because someone needs to do the first step.” AF1S2: Planting the tree is the easiest step, but maintaining it, [the volunteers] don’t want to... planting the tree is easy, but afterwards the weeds come.”

# Discussion

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## ***Pre-conceived hypotheses:***

The assumptions for my hypothesis came from my own previous informal observations at in 2012. I came into this research project expecting managers and coordinators to be somewhat frustrated with the volunteers' lack of effort and participation. I expected that these frustrations would be mirrored in the volunteers' behavior and work ethic and their inability to complete project goals. I believed that volunteers shied away from projects they didn't like due to the amount they were paying. I thought the price-tag attached to the labor gave them the feeling that they had an inherent right to choose when and what projects they worked on. I expected that an in-depth study would reveal volunteers' true motivations had nothing to do with working hard if the project didn't align perfectly with reforestation (as discussed by Cousins et al in 2009). Upon commencement of my research I quickly discovered that these assumptions were mistaken.

## ***Introduction***

During the course of my research in Ecuador at Site's 1 and 2, I observed certain communication norms, both positive and negative, in volunteer-based ecotourism. Firstly, communication of project goals between the volunteers and their coordinators played a fundamental role in the level of the volunteers' frustrations. Second, the disparity between the pictures painted by the intermediaries and the reality of the sites, led volunteers to feel that their expectations were not met. Lastly, the relationships that volunteers had with each other greatly influenced the progress of the work and deliverables.

I will also discuss the following questions in this section:

- Where does the lack of communication start?
- Is it intentional?
- Is it avoidable?

## ***Communication of Goals***

As Brightsmith (2008) discussed, volunteers are "relatively intolerant of doing tasks they [do] not perceive as being important." Through my observation of the volunteers, I thoroughly

endorse this statement. Unless a task was clearly explained, and the value of the work shown, volunteers' motivations (personal and altruistic) were not met (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). Due to the short time period that most volunteers were on site (the mode for both sites being 4 weeks) they could not see the long-term results of their labor. Therefore, the volunteers needed these long-term goals explained to satisfy their altruistic motivations of wanting to do something positive for the environment (Campbell & Smith, 2006; Grimm & Needham, 2011). At Site 1, volunteers would be drained of energy and give up quickly if they did not enjoy the task, or if the coordinator was not present to provide leadership. Not only is the presence of a coordinator or leader-figure required to help motivate volunteers, but they also need to present the volunteers with a clear explanation of the task's purpose. At Site 2, volunteers would still do all of the work asked of them, even when a coordinator wasn't present, but there would be greater complaining, and frustration amongst them than at Site 1.

Grimm and Needham (2011) and Coghlan (2008) suggest that coordinators and administrators do not have a clear understanding of their volunteers' motivations, and that this lack of understanding may lead volunteers to have an unsatisfactory experience. Almost all of the volunteers at both sites mentioned a desire and a motivation to save the rainforest, or help with reforestation. While overlapping, their motivations do not automatically align with the coordinator/administrators' goals of wanting to run a sustainable biological reserve, and the need for maintenance and upkeep. Aligning these two sets of goals requires educating volunteers to see the connection between their tasks and larger aspirations and for administrator's to frame maintenance projects within this set of conservation values. This gap of understanding, and difference of vision and reality, could be the leading cause of communication barriers between the volunteers and their coordinators.

At both sites, volunteers were most intolerant of tasks that were monotonous (weeding, raking) or those that seemed contradictory to the ideals of conservation (clear cutting, farming). When the feeling of being useful is not evoked, volunteers will feel discouraged or unmotivated (Cousins, Evans, and Sadler, 2009). As both administrators pointed out, the volunteers are there as a form of labor they cannot afford otherwise. Thus, it is understandable that volunteers are asked to complete tasks dealing with the day-to-day maintenance of the reserve, and not always focusing on cutting-edge conservation projects.



While many volunteers expressed in their interviews the desire to understand the long-term plans and weekly goals, at no point did they express this to the coordinators or administrators during work times. Therefore, the deliverance of these desired explanations is dependent entirely on the volunteer coordinator knowing what volunteers want to hear. Should the volunteer coordinator be expected to know this? This could tie back to the language barrier at Site 1, and at Site 2 the intimidation of an older adult-figure as the coordinator.

At Site 2, more than at Site 1, volunteers mentioned only to me a desire for a formal introduction upon arrival to the reserve; to have their first-impression be set alongside the goals of the reserve, and how they fit into them. As shown in the results, volunteers who took the time to speak with the coordinator and learn more about the reserve's processes, believed that had a clear understanding of the goals, and took away a great deal from this experience. Understanding of the goals was also determined by the length of the volunteer periods; those who stayed upwards of three months saw longer-term changes and therefore could better comprehend the overall goals and how they were achieved over time.

Volunteer ecotourism draws a fine line between volunteer labor and a volunteer vacation. A volunteer site needs volunteers to put in a certain amount of time working or collecting data in order to make the venture worthwhile (Brightsmith, 2008). However, if you ask too much of the volunteers, specifically those paying for the experience, they will feel that they should not be paying to work so many hours. This point again, exemplifies the necessity of communication, especially in stating the importance of a volunteer's role in achieving long-term goals.

Both Site 1 and 2 take volunteers on hikes around the reserve, in order to highlight the ecological beauty and diversity their time and money are contributing to protect. If these points are not constantly highlighted, volunteers can forget their role within the wider scale of conservation and forest management.

### ***Pre-Conceived Expectations from Intermediaries***

For both the biological reserves and the private intermediary companies, volunteer ecotourism is a business, and as is with any business, they must sell their product: voluntourism. In order to sell a volunteer vacation, their websites include fantastic pictures of the Amazon, with idyllic photographs of morpho butterflies and tropical birds. This is the fundamental idea of creating this vision of 'Edenic' nature to satisfy volunteers' dreams (Gray & Campbell, 2007). The website

speaks of multitudes of projects, and offers the impression that volunteers will be doing a great deal of reforestation and conservation work. While it is true that all of these things are possible at the reserves, usually the more mundane tasks win out. This leads to dissatisfaction on the part of the volunteers, especially when the promotional material does not match the true nature of the project (Coren & Gray, 2012; Lyons, 2003). If you're doing reforestation work, then it's the rainy season and every day you are walking through mud and getting soaked. During the dry season, the days are fairer, but the work includes more maintenance and crop planting. The realities of mosquitoes, humidity, spiders, and ants, are often difficult to accept when juxtaposed with pre-conceived expectations induced from catalogues and websites.

The websites also give the perception of being deep in the jungle, and being part of the rainforest ecosystem. Volunteers mentioned in their interviews the desire to feel like they were living in the rain/cloud forest, far from civilization. This was a problem at Site 2 due to the location of the volunteers' living quarters. At Site 1, the volunteer huts are no more than 500 meters from the main road along a single-track trail (less than one meter in diameter) into the Rain Forest. Despite the proximity to the road, volunteers feel the constant presence of the rain forest, and at times are bush-whacking their way to breakfast. Thus, Site 1 placed volunteers in the jungle, with access to many trails, and animal activity, only a few meters from their huts. This is in contrast to Site 2, where the volunteer house is off a dirt road (car width) and volunteers have a view of cow pastures, and distant mountains with forest terrain. Bird watching was still accessible along the main road, but to really access the pristine cloud forest, volunteers must hike a fair distance along dirt roads and pastures. This perception, of living on a farm, as opposed to in the jungle, is one of the main reasons volunteers were less content on Site 2 than on Site 1.

Site 1 is almost three times larger than Site 2, allowing it to give the perception of unending wilderness in all directions. Volunteers at Site 1 did not need to be reminded of what they were conserving since it always surrounded them. At Site 2, if the administrator doesn't highlight the 800 hectares of cloud forest being preserved behind the cow fields, volunteers would feel their motivations weren't being met. This point ties back to coordinators and administrators not clearly understanding the volunteers' motivations for being there, and thus not focusing on what volunteers need to hear (Grimm & Needham, 2012).

### ***Commodification & Price Disparity amongst Private Companies***

A major disparity within volunteer ecotourism is the price of the experience. As shown in the results, volunteers paid a wide range of monthly rates, all for the same experience, and all with the same amount going towards the reserve. This price disparity is attributed to the private intermediaries selling volunteer packages with an exorbitant additional fee. At Site 1, the highest-paying volunteer (VF1) paid 225% more than she would have going directly through the NGO (\$577). At Site 2, VF2 paid 156% above the reserve's price (\$495). These private organizations do not provide transparency of fund allocation to the volunteers, creating frustrations once volunteers realize how little is being given to the reserve from the total (Coren & Gray, 2011).

At both sites, volunteers expressed frustrations that this experience did not live up to their expectations. These expectations are imposed by the intermediary's promotional material, which is often exaggerated to heighten a prospective volunteer's interest (Lyons, 2003). As seen at Site 2, when the realities of the experience did not match volunteers' expectations, they become frustrated by the work, and unmotivated to do certain tasks.

Using intermediaries is essential to both Sites, as otherwise they would not be capable of recruiting the needed workforce on a minimal advertising budget. Both Sites have contracts with these intermediaries that dictate the relationship and how much the reserve/NGO can charge.

Two volunteers at Site 2 did not even know that they had come through an intermediary, believing they had found the reserve directly. Neither of the reserves addresses the issue of price disparities amongst the volunteers, and for good reason. Realizing that your roommate is paying \$1,000 less than you for the same experience would be frustrating and could create tension amongst the volunteers. This then brings up an ethical issue about the intermediaries: should the intermediary have to be honest about the allocation of funds, and what percentage is actually going to the reserve?

### ***Relationships amongst Volunteers and their Shared Experiences***

At both sites, the volunteers mentioned the desire to try something new, and engage in self-discovery during this transition period in life. These volunteer ecotourism destinations are a hub for like-minded young people at similar emotional stages in their lives. It is therefore not uncommon that volunteers should kindle this intimacy with one another and bond very closely over a short period of time. Volunteers become fast friends, travelling together on weekends, experiencing a new country together, and often reconnecting with one another upon returning to their home countries.

Romances were a common occurrence at both sites, especially when volunteers would go out partying and drinking after work. All of these interactions and connections lead to a feeling of family within the volunteer group, as volunteers are far away from the familiarities and comforts of home. Volunteers bond over this adventure, and the excitement of leaving home for such long periods of time. Each time a volunteer leaves, there is a farewell party, and many sad faces reflecting the strong connections made within a transient community.

It was observed that volunteers bonded far more in their free time at Site 1 than at Site 2. This could be for several reasons. Firstly, the average age of the volunteers was greater at Site 2 (26) versus Site 1 (22). The presence of older volunteers (ages 34 and 51) at Site 2 led the volunteer group, as a core, to be more mature and responsible, and participate less in drinking and late night activities. Next, at Site 2, the volunteer coordinator (34) lived with the volunteers and therefore set more regulations about quiet time and drinking habits. During my previous visit to Site 2 in 2012, volunteers appeared to bond more since the coordinator was the same age (21); however, they did not communicate with volunteers as regularly, and thus far less was accomplished than with the 2013 volunteer group. Lastly, Site 2 does not have a large comfortable communal area for volunteers to interact. Site 1 had their hammock area as a positive source of volunteer bonding and relaxation. At Site 2, volunteers would spend afternoons and mornings in their own rooms or observing birds in a more isolated area. If there were not drinking festivities taking place at Site 2, volunteers would often go to their own rooms at night to read, as opposed to a communal area, ultimately spending less time together.

It is clear that volunteer relationships and bonding are an important dynamic in volunteers' work ethic. When the volunteers bond together and socialize more, they complain less about the work since they are relaxed in each other's company. However, it means that there are usually more drinking and weekend festivities which lead to more hangovers and absent volunteers, ultimately slowing down work and progress. When volunteers do not bond as closely, they are focused more on the work at hand, but spend more time discussing their frustrations with the work, and how the experience is not meeting their expectations. If there is a happy medium, it would appear that neither Site has it.

When asked in the post-volunteer survey if they would volunteer again, all of the volunteers said yes, and reaffirmed that this was one of the greatest experiences of their lives. When volunteers

look back and reflect on their experience, they don't remember the lack of communication, or the frustration over misunderstood goals and intentions.

The common language at these sites is English, and therefore it is natural that volunteers will talk and bond more with each other than with the employees, especially those with a language barrier. At both Sites, those volunteers who spoke Spanish believed that they had a deeper connection with the staff.

### ***Where does the lack of communication start?***

There is no one culprit leading to the lack of communication with the volunteers. Nor is there a clear start or end of miscommunication, as there is a constant stream of new information to be communicated. For many of the research participants, this miscommunication began with the intermediaries painting an unrealistic view of the reserves and the scale of the volunteer's role within them (Coghlan, 2007). Volunteers enter a voluntourism adventure with heads full of miscommunicated expectations.

Further communication gaps occur once volunteers arrive on site, without a clear explanation of the reserve's long-term and short-term goals, and how they are a part of the overall process. This is where volunteers at both sites began to feel frustrated about the work they were doing, and how they were actually helping to save the environment.

The lack of communication can continue if volunteers do not reach out to their coordinators and administrators for further guidance and explanation.

### ***Is it intentional?***

The lack of communication with volunteers appears to be intentional only by the intermediaries in their quest to make a profit. Private companies provide 'glamorized' information to sell their trips, yet not enough to find the reserve directly and pay through them. This false advertising is not something new volunteers are aware of, and thus cannot be controlled. It could also be argued that the lack of communication starts with volunteers not realizing that intermediaries are advertising for other sites, not their own.

### ***Is it avoidable?***

Unless volunteers can successfully find the ecological reserve directly, it is unlikely that they will be able to avoid the miscommunications imposed by the private intermediaries. However, just

finding the Site's website does not mean there will be no exaggerated information. The administrator at Site 1 believed that their website offered too much information about tasks that volunteers will most likely never get the chance to do; but they also need to entice volunteers to sign up. Therefore, miscommunication from websites cannot be avoided by the volunteers.

As seen at Site 1, new volunteers were put to work on a field without understanding why they were there, whereas long-term volunteers like VM1S1 had been on site long enough to understand his role, and how each project was helping to achieve conservation of the rainforest. New volunteers need the most guidance and explanation, something that is difficult for a coordinator to repeat for every new volunteer.

Volunteers who were proactive about asking questions felt more secure in their role on the reserve, feeling less discontent with daily maintenance tasks. Volunteers such as VM3S1 knew they could ask the coordinator for more information, but often chose not to. It is importance to discuss the hands-on mentality of the volunteers; volunteer sites provide basic information and engagement tools, but it is up to the volunteer to get the most they can out of the experience.

# Conclusion

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This thesis explores the concept of communication within volunteer ecotourism, with a focus on two case studies in the Ecuadorian Rain Forest and Cloud Forest. This study highlighted the importance of the communication of goals in order to fulfill volunteers' motivations, inspiring them to work harder towards conservation objectives.

## ***Main Points:***

Throughout this study, there were several recurring themes that were prominent in both the interviews and participant observations. It is important to understand these conclusions, as they are the basis from which suggestions and future studies may be gleaned.

The following lists the main conclusions from the researcher's findings:

- Volunteers are responsive to the explanation of project goals when they are tied back into the larger vision of conservation and reforestation;
- When project goals are explained clearly, specifically how they relate to long-term conservation objectives, volunteers will work harder to help achieve them;
- Most volunteers are unaware of the allocation of their funds. Those who learn that only a small portion goes towards the reserve can become frustrated and feel ripped off.
- The volunteer coordinators' communications role gets very repetitive and therefore they do not always explain goals adequately to every new volunteer;
- Intermediaries and volunteer sites, in order to sell a volunteer package, often oversell the project, or make claims that are unrealistic in terms of the volunteers overall impact on the reserve; and
- Volunteers who spend free time together will bond more closely, and have more positive attitudes when working together, often accomplishing more.

## ***Suggestions:***

Based on the results of this study, and the points addressed in the discussion, several suggestions can be made to improve the communication of goals to the volunteers, and thus spark their motivation to work harder and complete more projects. These suggestions are based on participant observations, and conclusions on what could improve volunteers' attitudes and work

ethic. These suggestions have not been tested, and it is at the discretion of the reserve managers to implement them, or for volunteers to actively seek the information.

- An introduction at the reserve is needed for new volunteers: to explain long and short-term goals, the allocation of funds, and the way things run on the reserve. Most importantly, orientations need to focus on how the volunteer is an integral part of achieving these goals;
- Displaying the beauty of the reserve, via a guided hike etc., is helpful to inspire the volunteers, and to make it clear what they are helping to save;
- Clearly explaining the activities and outputs of each daily task and how they relate to the bigger outcomes will inspire volunteers to complete these everyday maintenance jobs. Keeping an updated weekly calendar will also help volunteers visualize their work, and the goals achieved over time;
- Having the coordinator sit down with volunteers during free time, or meal times to discuss the work, and how they feel about their role would help. This is not intended as an opportunity for volunteers to complain about every aspect they don't enjoy, but to spark a dialogue about the reserve, and how to maintain positivity and motivation.

### ***Gaps in Findings***

While this study addresses a problem in volunteer ecotourism, and suggests how this problem could be improved, it doesn't offer a tested long-term solution to improving the achievement of both volunteers' and reserve goals. All suggestions are based on an hypothesis for improvement, and have not been tested at an ecotourism project for an extended period of time.

This research only focused on two ecological reserves in Ecuador, rather than looking at a wider-range of ecologically-based projects in other countries. The literature suggests that similar problems arise on other sites, including in South Africa (Cousins, Evans, & Sadler, 2009) and Thailand (Broad & Jenkins, 2008), but neither study focuses specifically on the communication of goals and the interactions between volunteers and their coordinators. It is not clear if this trend is common across the world, and further research with multiple global case studies. .



### ***Future Research***

This gap in the research opens up the potential for future research in this field. It would be stimulating research to study volunteers working under a coordinator doing business as usual for an extended period of time (2-4 months), and then switch to a volunteer coordinator who clearly explains all of the goals based on volunteers' motivations for 2-4 months. Would volunteers' work significantly improve when goals are explained? Would volunteers be significantly more satisfied with their role on the reserve? Would projects be concluded more quickly with greater conservation gains? Is the communication of goals not as significant as suggested, and are there other factors observed over a longer period of observation?

### ***Personal Reflections***

After over a year of research, writing, and analysis, I feel as if I am finally starting to understand the complex arena of volunteer ecotourism. I have no doubt that every site is different, and that no volunteer shares the same experience, considering the broad range of activities, coordinators, intermediaries, and other factors. Despite all of these variables, I believe that volunteer ecotourism, when conducted correctly, is an amazing experience for volunteers, communities, and the natural environment the site is protecting. These projects bring individuals together from all around the world, uniting them under the banner of conservation and environmentalism, expanding everyone's world view.

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# Appendices

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## Appendix A: Open-Ended Interview Questions for Volunteers

1. What sparked your interest to become a volunteer in Ecuador?
2. Who is funding this expedition for you? How much are you paying per week/month?
3. What personal goals do you hope to achieve through volunteering here?  
*(to help the environment, enhance their career, repair the areas they use, learn about fauna and flora, be social, work under effective project organizers and/or increase esteem)*
4. Has this experience, thus far, met your expectations, or exceeded them?
5. Do you feel that you came in with a pre-conceived notion of the type of work you would be completing?
6. Do you feel that the reserve adequately prepared you for this experience?
7. Do you feel you have made a contribution to this reserve?
8. Have the administrators made it clear how your work is benefitting the overall goals of the foundation/reserve/organization?
9. Do you feel your money is being put to good use?
10. Describe your interaction within the group dynamic.
11. Do you wish you spoke Spanish?
12. Do you feel you have a strong work ethic?
13. Would you do this again? / Recommend it to friends?

## **Appendix B: Interview Questions for Volunteer Coordinators**

1. How long have you been a volunteer coordinator?
2. *(If they are not the reserve owner/manager)* Whom do you report to, and how often do you interact with said authority?
3. What is the most rewarding part of working with the volunteers?
4. Is there a specific project you are particularly proud of?
5. Do you personally connect to the short-term volunteers?
6. What issues, if any, come from working with the volunteers?
7. How would you describe the overall pace and efficiency of volunteer work?
8. Do you meet your project goals in a timely manner?
9. How much time do you spend discussing project goals and outcomes with the volunteers?
10. Overall, how would you describe the volunteers' attitude?
11. Is there a specific instance that comes to mind regarding a volunteer who behaved disrespectfully, or in a rude manner?

## Appendix C: Interview Questions for Site 1 Administrator, AM1S1

1. How long have you worked at/with S1?
2. How much land founded Site 1?
3. And how many of those hectares did the volunteers' money buy?
4. When did you decide to accept volunteers?
5. Where do the majority of volunteers come from?
6. Is it usually people taking a gap year?
7. What is the average age of the volunteers?
8. When you first started to receive volunteers, how much did it cost per month?
9. Do you think it's a good system to have paying volunteers?
10. How many full-time employees do you have?
11. Do you have a lot of communication with Quito?
12. Did you used to work with the volunteers, or have you always been in the office?
13. How often do you replace the volunteer coordinator?
14. CM2 has worked here for 2 years, is that a long time?.
15. What's a good number of volunteers to have?
16. Are there other problems that come from working with the volunteers?
17. Can you describe how effective the volunteers work is?
18. At this point, do you wish it was mandatory that the volunteers speak Spanish?
19. Have you thought about offering Spanish classes?
20. How do you decide on what activities the volunteers will be doing?
21. Do you normally complete your project activities in the desired timeline?
22. Why don't you work in the rain?
23. Do you give the lectures, or does CM2?
24. Do you receive enough funding to maintain S1?
25. What do you need the most maintenance/funding for?
26. Does the money that is left over from the volunteer's money goes towards this?
27. What is the most common complaint from the volunteers?
28. Have you had to tell volunteers to leave?
29. How would you normally describe the volunteers attitude?
30. In the 20 years that you've had volunteers, how has the voluntourism system changed?
31. Do you think the volunteers have changed, in terms of the type of people who come?
32. In all of your time here, what are you most proud of?
33. Do you have a favorite part of the reserve?
34. How much of your time do you spend in the office?
35. If you could change one thing in the system of volunteers, what would it be?
36. How do you feel about volunteers like RM2 who come for really long periods of time?
37. Do you think you have a good relationship with the volunteers?
38. What's the biggest problem you've had with the volunteers?
39. Do you think that when they come for the orientation you could explain the Reserve's goals to them?
40. Do you see a problem with the information on the website?



## Appendix D: Interview Questions for Site 2 Administrator, AF1S2

1. Can you tell me the history of Site 2, and how it became a biological research station?
2. Is the goal to be sustainable?
3. Site 1 helped you found the volunteer program?
4. Beforehand all the volunteers came through S1?
5. When you split from S1 did you begin receiving more volunteers again, or are there too many places for them to go?
6. Do you have to pay intermediary programs like GVN and Working Abroad?
7. Did you ask for less money because you knew the intermediaries were asking twice as much?
8. When you started in 2004, how much did it cost for 1 month?
9. How much does it cost now?
10. Do you think this system of volunteers paying is good system for you?
11. Why did you decide to not have volunteers work on Fridays?
12. Do you think you need to give the volunteers a talk about the importance of their work when they enter the reserve?
13. Do you think they already know the goals, from the orientation in Quito?
14. Do you think there's a way you could better communicate the value of this experience to the volunteers?
15. Is it difficult that your coordinator changes every 6 months?
16. Did you initially work with the volunteers?
17. How long does training for each volunteer coordinator take?
18. Does it work better now that EM1 is full time?
19. Is EM1 like another coordinator?
20. Do you plan everything on a weekly basis, or do you have longer-term goals like 1 month down the line, 1 year down the line?
21. Do you think that the volunteers help more with day-to-day maintenance, or more with the larger goals like reforestation?
22. Do they usually come with this idea that they're going to replant trees and do reforestation?
23. Are you trying to buy more land?
24. Do you have help from the government?
25. Do you receive help from donations through your foundation?
26. Do you receive sufficient funds to maintain S2, or are you coming up short?
27. The donations you receive come from past volunteers?
28. Do you complete your projects in the time you planned, or does it take longer?
29. What do you think of the efficiency of the volunteer's work?
30. How many weeks does a volunteer take to get used to the rhythm? Is 2 weeks too short?
31. What's the ideal number of volunteers per month?
32. Do you like to break the volunteers up into groups? It doesn't seem like 15 can work on one project.
33. Where do the majority of volunteer comes from?
34. From working with the volunteers, did you notice a nationality that works harder than others, or a nationality that doesn't work well?
35. Is there a distinct percentage of females versus male volunteers?
36. What is the most common complaint from the volunteers?
37. You would say the best way to communicate is one on one, but, that takes more people?

38. Do you think it's a good thing that the staff lives with the volunteers?
39. Do you think the staff like it too?
40. When did you start offering Spanish class?
41. Do you still do the evaluation forms?
42. Since 2004, how has the volunteer system changed?
43. Do you try to divide them up? Because it appears to me that all of the volunteers work together.
44. In all of your time here, what are you most proud of?
45. Did the volunteers help with that?
46. Do you think that the problem volunteers have understanding is that, when they only stay for 3 weeks and they plant a carrot, they are never able to eat that carrot? Do you think it's an issue of them not being able to see the results of their work, only of past volunteers?
47. Is it about the expectations they have?
48. Do you think your website gives a clear description that they understand?
49. Do you think 18 is too young to volunteer?
50. Have you had to ask a volunteer to leave?

## **Appendix E: Post-Volunteer Experience Survey**

1. Looking back at your time spent in Ecuador at (insert name of specific reserve), do you feel that you had a positive impact on the local ecology and environment?
2. Was this experience rewarding, and would you do something similar again?
3. Would you recommend this program to your peers and/or family?
4. Would you be willing to pay as much a second time, if the capital was available?
5. Please list the top three most memorable moments of your volunteer experience?
6. Did you come away from this experience with any life-long friends?
7. Did you like the length of time you volunteered? Would you have preferred it to be longer, or shorter?
8. Do you feel there was a good balance between work and rest time? Would you have rather worked more, or had more down time?
9. What would you do differently if given the chance to start your volunteer experience over? Even as far back as choosing your volunteer program.

## Appendix F: Site 1 Daily Routine

This daily routine is only from the perspective of the volunteers, and the volunteer coordinator when he was working with us.

**Figure 8:** Daily Routine - Two Weeks of Labor at Site 1 following a Thursday Arrival

Work Day	Work Description for Morning and Afternoon Shifts
<b>Day 1:</b> Friday	<b>Morning:</b> No work due to rain.
	<b>Afternoon</b> (1:30-4:00) : Raking leaves to make compost
Sunday ( <i>extra activity</i> )	Administrator brought in a Quichua woman to teach volunteers to make artisanal bracelets from natural plant fibers and tree seeds
<b>Day 2:</b> Monday	<b>Morning:</b> Volunteers carried wood planks from the jungle to the main road.
	<b>Afternoon:</b> 2:00-4:00: Raking leaves to make compost
Monday ( <i>extra activity</i> )	Each new volunteer is taken on a tour through the reserve's trail system with one of the park guards. I profited more than others since I could communicate with the guards in Spanish.
<b>Day 3:</b> Tuesday	<b>Morning</b> (7:45-11:30): Finishing carrying the rest of the wood planks. 30 minute break then walked to the conservation center to build a bridge and carry bamboo logs
	<b>Afternoon</b> (1:30-4:00): Bridge Building Continued
<b>Day 4:</b> Wednesday	<b>Morning:</b> Bridge Building Continued
	<b>Afternoon:</b> No work, just mandatory game of soccer with the staff, interns and locals
<b>Day 5:</b> Thursday	<b>Morning</b> (9:30-11:30): All volunteers slept in due to the rain. Digging holes and clearing land for a project to make natural insecticide and compost piles.
	<b>Afternoon:</b> digging holes and clearing land continued
<b>Day 6:</b> Friday	<b>Morning:</b> (7:30-11:00): Raking leaves to make compost
	<b>Afternoon:</b> Only VM3 went to work, as everyone else was sick. He helped with weeding in the garden.
<b>Day 7:</b> Monday	<b>Morning:</b> Only VM3 was healthy enough to come to work. We de-weeded a pineapple field, and then waited under shelter while it was raining
	<b>Afternoon:</b> Weeding Yuka and Banana fields, and cutting away the fungus leaves on banana plants. Learn Machete technique
<b>Day 8:</b> Tuesday	<b>Morning</b> (8:30-11:30): Volunteers were split into 3 groups: painting signs, making compost, or harvesting Yuka seeds
	<b>Afternoon</b> (1:30-3:30): Women went and cut Yuka sticks for planting Men cleaned up the garden paths, filling the inundated areas with sand
<b>Day 9:</b> Wednesday	<b>Morning:</b> Women planted the Yuka sticks they had prepared the previous day. Men went with CM1 to collect plants for insecticide and build a water tank hole. After a morning break CM1 had all the volunteers clearing a field. For the final 30 minutes we carried planks of wood from the truck to the conservation center
	<b>Afternoon:</b> No work, just mandatory game of soccer with the staff, interns and locals
<b>Day 10:</b> Thursday	<b>Morning:</b> Everyone slept in due to the rain

## Appendix G: Site 2 Daily Routine

**Figure 9:** Daily Routine - Two Weeks of Labor at Site 2 following a Monday Arrival

<b>Day 1: Tuesday</b>	<b>Morning</b> (8:30-12:00): Volunteers were divided into 4 groups. Weeding, shell coffee beans for roasting, clear a field for sugar cane and clear a trail with machetes
	<b>Afternoon:</b> Talk from AF1 about how to roast coffee beans and make chocolate
<b>Day 2: Wednesday</b>	<b>Morning</b> (9:10-12): 2 volunteers weeded in the garden. 4 cleared grass weeds from a man-made pond that will soon house tilapia. 1 volunteer made bread and dulce.
	<b>Afternoon:</b> Cleaning the volunteer house and community soccer match
<b>Day 3: Thursday</b>	<b>Morning:</b> 3 volunteers worked in the garden with CF1. 4 volunteers worked with EM2 to build a staircase.
	<b>Afternoon:</b> 4 volunteers made fertilizer with EM3 while the rest worked in the garden
<b>Day 4: Friday</b>	Every other Friday volunteers are given the day off to travel if they choose. However, those who don't travel must work -
<b>Day 5: Monday</b>	<b>Morning:</b> 3 volunteers and CF1 were weeding the garden.
	<b>Afternoon:</b> 2 volunteers made bread, 1 roasted coffee and 2 cleared a hiking trail
<b>Day 6: Tuesday</b>	<b>Morning:</b> 5 volunteers finished clearing the sugar cane field. 1 volunteer planted heliconia plants. 1 volunteer chased chickens that had escaped
	<b>Afternoon:</b> AF1 gave us a lecture on medicinal plants as she guided us through the botanical garden
<b>Day 7: Wednesday</b>	<b>Morning:</b> All volunteers worked together weeding the medicinal garden
	<b>Afternoon:</b> 3 volunteers cleaned the house and 3 made bread. Soccer match
<b>Day 8: Thursday</b>	<b>Morning:</b> 3 volunteers redid the compost system with CF1 while 2 volunteers built a diving board for the lagoon.
	<b>Afternoon:</b> Finishing the morning tasks
<b>Day 9: Friday</b>	<b>Special Activity:</b> Hike to the waterfalls and natural water slides on the reserve

## Appendix H: Raw Data From Site 1

These tables show a sample of the data that was taken during volunteer hours for a variety of activities. Each day is listed by task, volunteers who were working, and what each volunteer was doing at different 30 minute intervals. As volunteers were often assigned different tasks, I could not monitor the behavior of every volunteer every 30 minutes. Use the key below to interpret the charts. Each capital letter (A-G) corresponds with a different job. Each color corresponds with the activity the volunteer was doing when they were observed. The colors are on a stop-light scale: with green being working time and red representing a volunteer who was absent from work.

### Key:

<b>A:</b> Raking the leaves off the path to be used for compost	<b>Work</b>	:Working
<b>B:</b> Building the bridge	<b>Obs.</b>	:Observing others or CM1S1
<b>C:</b> Carrying wood	<b>Rest/Chat</b>	:Taking a break or sharing tools
<b>D:</b> Clearing land for the reforestation project	<b>Late</b>	:Late to Work
<b>E:</b> Cleaning the botanical garden	<b>Skip</b>	:Skipping work due to sickness, hangover, or early vacation
<b>F:</b> Weeding banana fields/ Planting Yuka	<b>X</b>	:Not able to see the volunteer
<b>G:</b> Filtering Compost		

### Day 1

**Figure 10:** Day 1 Afternoon Shift at Site 1

Date	14-June	14-June	14-June	14-June
Time	14:05	14:35	15:05	15:30
Job	A	A	A	A
VM1S1	X	X	X	X
VF1S1	skip	Skip	skip	skip
VF2S1	skip	Skip	skip	skip
VF3S1	work	Work	rest	work
VF4S1	work	Rest	work	X

**Figure 11:** Day 2 Afternoon Shift at Site 1

Date	17-June	17-June	17-June
Time	14:38	15:08	15:30
Job	A	A	A
VM1S1	work(B)	work(B)	X
VF1S1	late	work	X
VF2S1	work	rest	work
VF3S1	late	work	Rest
VF4S1	work	rest	Rest
CM1S1	obs.	obs.	obs.

**Figure 12: Day 3 at Site 1**

Date	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun	18Jun
<b>Time</b>	7:45	8:15	8:45	9:00	10:10	10:40	11:10	11:30	14:10	15:10	15:30	15:45
<b>Job</b>	C	C	C	C	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
<b>VM1S1</b>	work	work	rest	work	work	work	work	work	work	work	work	work
<b>VF1S1</b>	late	work	work	X	work	work	obs.	quit	obs.	obs.	work	work
<b>VF2S1</b>	late	work	work	quit	Quit	Quit	quit	quit	late	obs.	quit	quit
<b>VF3S1</b>	work	rest	work	rest	talk	work	work	work	obs	work	work	work
<b>VF4S1</b>	work	rest	work	rest	talk	obs.	rest	quit	obs	obs.	work	work
<b>CM1S1</b>	work	work	rest	work	work	X	X	X	explai	obs.	obs.	X

**Figure 13: Day 9 at Site 1**

Day	26-Jun	26-Jun	26-Jun	26-Jun	26-Jun	26-Jun	26-Jun	26-Jun	26Jun	26-Jun
<b>Time</b>	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:15	10:30	11:00	11:30	
<b>Job</b>			F/G	Break	E	E	E	C	C	
<b>VF3S1</b>			rest		Work	Stop	Stop	work	obs	
<b>VF4S1</b>			work		Work	Stop	Stop	work	obs	
<b>VF5S1</b>			obs		Work	Work	Stop	work	work	
<b>VM3S1</b>			talk		Work	Stop	Stop	work	work	
<b>VM4S1</b>			talk		Work	Work	Work	work	work	
<b>VM5S1</b>			work		Work	Work	Stop	work	work	
<b>CM1S1</b>	Explain	Explain	explain		X	X	X	X	work	

## Appendix I: Raw Data from Site 2

These tables show a sample of the data that was taken during volunteer hours for a variety of activities. Each day is listed by task, volunteers who were working, and what each volunteer was doing at different 30 minute intervals. As volunteers were often assigned different tasks, I could not monitor the behavior of every volunteer every 30 minutes. Use the key below to interpret the charts. Each capital letter (A-G) corresponds with a different job. Each color corresponds with the activity the volunteer was doing when they were observed. The colors are on a stop-light scale: with green being working time and red representing a volunteer who was absent from work.

<b>A:</b> Shucking beans	Work	:Working
<b>B:</b> Clearing Field	Obs.	:Observing others or CM1S1
<b>C:</b> Clearing Trail	Rest/Chat	:Taking a break or sharing tools
<b>D:</b> Clearing the Laguna	Late	:Late to Work
<b>E:</b> Harvesting	Skip	:Skipping work due to sickness, hangover, or early vacation
<b>F:</b> Weeding	X	:Not able to see the volunteer
<b>G:</b> Building		
<b>H:</b> Making Coffee/Bread/Chocolate		

**Figure 14:** Day 3 Morning Shift at Site 2

	4-Jul	4-Jul	4-Jul	4-Jul	4-Jul	4-Jul	4-Jul
	8:55	9:25	9:55	10:25	10:55	11:25	11:55
	G/F	G/F	G/F	G/F	G/F	G/F	G/F
<b>VF1S2</b>	work	work	work	work	work	work	done
<b>VF2S2</b>	work	work	work	x	work	work	x
<b>VF3S2</b>	wait	wait	obs	obs	work	work	done
<b>VF4S2</b>	work	work	work	work	work	work	done
<b>VF5S2</b>	wait	wait	obs	obs	work	obs	obs
<b>VM1S2</b>	Wait	wait	obs	obs	obs	work	obs
<b>EM2S2</b>	work	work	work	work	work	work	work
<b>CF1S2</b>	explain	work	explain	rest	work	rest	work

**Figure 15:** Day 7 Morning Shift at Site 2

	10-Jul	10-Jul	10-Jul	10-Jul	10-Jul	10-Jul	10-Jul
	8:42	9:12	9:42	10:12	10:42	11:12	11:42
	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
<b>VM2</b>	late	work	work	talk/obs.	work	talk	work
<b>VF1</b>	late	work	work	work	talk	work	work
<b>VF2</b>	late	work	work	work	talk	work	work
<b>VF3</b>	wait	work	work	talk/obs.	talk	work	work
<b>VF4</b>	wait	work	work	work	work	work	work
<b>CF1</b>	explain	work	work	work	work	work	work



## Appendix J: Privacy Agreement and Research Participation Contract

### Consent Form The Effects of Volunteer-Based Ecotourism

You are being asked to take part in a research study as an associate of Site 1/Site 2. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The purpose of this study is to learn how paying volunteers are affecting the project goals of Site 1/Site 2, and how this relationship can be made more beneficial through communication.

**What is being asked of you:** If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an open-ended interview with you. The interview will include questions about your time volunteering, how much you are paying, and your overall experience. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, I would also like to tape-record the interview. I will also be conducting participant observation, and taking notes every 30 minutes during work periods.

**Risks and benefits:** I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life at Site 1/Site 2. There are no benefits to you or compensation.

**Your answers will be confidential:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You may inform the researcher any day you do not wish to be part of the field observation. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

**If you have questions:** The research is being conducted by Robyn Bath-Rosenfeld in association with the University of Vermont and the URECA Grant. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Robyn Bath-Rosenfeld at [rbathros@uvm.edu](mailto:rbathros@uvm.edu) or at 530-412-0464. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at [nancy.stalnaker@uvm.edu](mailto:nancy.stalnaker@uvm.edu) or access their website at <http://www.uvm.edu/~irb/>.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to have the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of the Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for one year beyond the end of the study.*