

A NATURAL RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT STUDY OF INDIAN TRIBES LIVING IN THE CALIFORNIA-BAJA CALIFORNIA BORDER REGION

PROJECT NUMBER: IT98-1

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INTRODUCTION

This binational project worked with two rural Indian communities situated in the border zone of southern California and Baja California. These communities are the Kumeyaay reservation of Cuyapaipe located in southeastern San Diego County and the Pai Pai *ejido* of Santa Catarina situated in the Trinidad Valley near the Sierra Juárez mountains.

The immediate goals of our study were twofold: (1) we sought to create a natural resource baseline for each of the communities in the area of investigation by utilizing GIS technology to monitor land use activities, to inventory plant and animal habitats as well as cultural resource features, and to redefine territorial boundaries. This technical analysis was then used by the tribes to plan for future efforts toward sustainable development.

(2) We analyzed the political structure, decision-making apparatus, and the socio-economic impact of tribal cooperative efforts in each of the communities. This analysis assisted us in gaining a better understanding of the short-term and long range costs/benefits of forming various partnerships between the tribes and outside agencies such as the U.S.-Mexican governments, representatives of NGOs, and university academics.

This interdisciplinary one year field project involved a team of researchers from San Diego State University, University of Utah, New Mexico State University, the CUNA Institute in Ensenada, Mexico, and the *Facultad de Ciencias* at the *Universidad Autonoma de Baja California*.

This comparative study resulted in several practical outcomes, including:

1. An inventory the state of natural resources at Cuyapaipe and Santa Catarina which these indigenous communities can then use as a tool for future planning.
2. The creation a set of applied policy analysis models that can be used by other indigenous communities located in the border region.

3. The promotion of transborder Indian cooperation, as well as the facilitating of a dialogue between tribal governments and federal, local, and state agencies on border-related environmental issues.
4. A hard copy, bilingual document that will be made available to the local Native American communities, government officials, and other interested parties.

Background

In June 1996, the *Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* (SEMARNAT) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) released the U.S.-Mexican Border XXI Program Draft Framework Agreement. This draft document (which built on the La Paz Agreement and the Integrated Plan for the U.S.-Mexican Border Area, First Stage, 1992–1994) outlined the Border XXI Program and identified general environmental objectives for the border region through the year 2000. It also described mechanisms and strategies for fulfilling these objectives and assuring sustainable development for the border region into the future.

There are approximately 25 Indian tribes located in the United States in the border zone outlined by the 1983 La Paz agreement (e.g. 100 kilometers north and south of the international boundary). There is a similar number of indigenous groups living in the Mexican part of the border zone. Collectively, the indigenous populations of southern California, Arizona, and Baja California comprise over 40,000 people and encompass a land base of over three million acres.

While these California Indian groups may appear to be spatially separated, their history, language, and culture remain closely linked. The majority of these border tribes living in southern California and northern Baja California speak a dialect that belongs to the Hokan language family. The original territory of these tribes was the region now bisected by the international boundary and, as a result, many of the Indians living on the U.S. side still maintain strong cross-border ties with their Mexican relations.

The Problem

Many of these present day indigenous peoples living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border have occupied their traditional lands since well before the colonization of the Americas. Despite their long and intimate knowledge of their lands and environment, these Indian groups have been largely excluded from the recent international initiatives and discussion. The critical problem for the future will be to integrate these tribal societies and their present-day territories into the shared, binational vision for the border region.

One of the announced goals of the Border XXI program is “to protect human health and the environment through the promotion of sustainable development.” One of the critical strategies to achieve these goals in the border region has been to implement “community-based or ecosystem-based approaches to environmental management.”

Three recent meetings have impacted the direction of our current research on border tribes. The first was a conference held on March 14, 1998, in Ensenada, Mexico which focused on sustainable development issues with tribal officials from Arizona, California, and Baja California. The second meeting was held in Phoenix, Arizona on July 31, 1998, and involved discussions about border tribe needs with representatives of the EPA, BEEC, IHS, and members of the InterTribal Council of Arizona. The final meeting took place on September 28, 1998, with representatives of the EPA Region nine in San Francisco.

I. Natural Resource Baselines:

While a number of environmental issues were outlined (e.g. air and water quality, the creation of hazardous materials corridors on tribal land, and the impact of unchecked illegal immigration) what became apparent was that there exists a critical need for each of the 25 border tribes living in the Texas, Arizona, California, and Baja California region to develop a plan to maximize their own natural resource base. This strategic road map could then be used not only to inventory present environmental conditions on the various reservations, but also to forecast the impact of future changes on existing tribal infrastructure.

The situation is especially critical in Mexico where the indigenous communities of Baja California are among the poorest of the rural communities in the border region. Ironically, these Kumiai and Pai Pai people are rich in land and natural resources and possess an extraordinary knowledge of their environment. However, the lack of comprehensive land management plans for each community has resulted in subsistence strategies for survival such as overgrazing and overexploitation of juniper, yucca, manzanita, and other natural resources that often adversely affect the environment well beyond the communities themselves. In Mexico, the creation of such plans would provide a road map to the Indian communities and make possible the diversification of their economic base as well as grant them access to special government programs such as the Environmental Monitoring Units of SEMARNAT.

A number of Southern California tribes (e.g. Pechanga, Pala, Pauma, La Jolla, Manzanita, and Rincon) are currently working with the EPA to establish master plans which focus strictly on environmental assessment. In addition, in Baja California a preliminary environmental assessment plan has been created for the indigenous *ejido* of San Jose de la Zorra by faculty and students from the *Universidad Autonoma de Baja California*. However, these studies focus strictly on environmental assessments and do not address the issues of long-term natural resource development, nor do they provide any viable policy analysis of the cooperative process between tribes and various outside agencies.

II. Tribal Cooperative Efforts:

Because the success of these natural resource development plans involves the sustained collaboration between tribes and diverse group of stakeholders such as U.S. and Mexican government officials, members of NGOs, and university academics, it is important to examine how tribal groups like those at Cuyapaipe or at Santa Catarina can integrate their development goals with the political and economic interests at the local, state, federal, and international level. Thus, the socio-economic impact of forming alliances needs to be analyzed (e.g. the short-term and long-range costs/benefits to each group in the partnership).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Over a 12 month period, the research team assembled a team of SCERP specialists to conduct an intensive natural resource survey of Cuyapaipe, a rural Kumeyaay Indian community located in southeastern San Diego County, California. Created in 1891, Cuyapaipe occupies some 4,100 acres and is situated about 40 miles east of San Diego. In Mexico, Kilpatrick and another SCERP team member conducted similar research among the Pai Pai Indians located in the community of Santa Catarina which is situated in the Trinidad Valley near the Sierra Juárez mountains.

These U.S.-Mexican Indian communities were selected for a number of reasons. First, the team of investigators has already conducted extensive fieldwork among these tribal groups and, thus, has a good database upon which to conduct further research. Second, because of prior efforts, there is a good working relationship with tribal members and currently enjoy a high level of trust and acceptance from the various communities involved. Finally, because this study was designed to complement existing efforts and not to duplicate activities initiated by the tribal governments or by outside agencies such as the EPA or IHS, the research team believes that this project will have a high probability of success.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY/APPROACHES

It is important to create a natural resource development plan that is geared to the fragile, arid environment of the mountains and deserts that characterize this border region. Technologies need to be installed to fit in with the way these Kumeyaay and Pai Pai Indian groups want to live.

A key component of the research plan was the development of a “respectful methodology” where the team members do not approach the tribes as “outside experts” but as collaborators seeking mutually beneficial solutions. As a result, this research approached the process with the greatest sensitivity toward the Indian concerns and made every effort to involve the tribes at every stage of the research. The goal was to foster intertribal cooperation on a binational level in order to build capacity by utilizing existing Indian resources.

Over 12 months, researchers from San Diego State University, the University of Utah, New Mexico State University, CUNA Institute, and the Autonomous University of Baja California worked closely with the interested native communities to accomplish the following goals:

1. Preliminary Assessment:

The project team reviewed and synthesized existing bibliographic data on the specific area of investigation. They then met with the community to explain the scope and goals of the project.

2. Natural Resource Inventory:

Utilizing GIS technology, the SCERP team created a database that provides the demographics and distribution of the population, current and past territories, spatial relationships to other Indian groups, as well as information about cultural resources. This information also includes an intensive description of the area based on the such variables as: (1) geomorphology of the area, (2) climatic patterns, (3) water resources, (4) biological characteristics (flora and fauna) and (5) current land use patterns. Appropriate information (excluding sensitive information related to sacred sites) will be made available on the SCERP web site and linked to the Border Ecoweb.

In Mexico, the SCERP team and CUNA worked closely with *Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* (SEMARNAT), the Mexican environmental agency, and the National Indian Institute (INI), an institution of the Mexican federal government. CUNA also coordinated with the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) in the identification of archaeological resources. The field data subsequently was analyzed and documented at the university. Gaps in information were sought through further fieldwork and coordination with government agencies. Spatial information was incorporated into the GIS database. Data accuracy was verified by interviews with community representatives.

Utilizing the data, the SCERP team explored the carrying capacity of each unique habitat and will focus on identifying such issues as: what are the most severe environment problems in the area and what are the main causes for environmental damage in this area? Probable sources of pollution were investigated within each community (e.g. agricultural run-off, contaminated containers, nitrates in acquifer from livestock). The areas most vulnerable to degradation were established, as well as those that need to be restored. Traditional forms of knowledge were identified which can be utilized to aid the situation.

III. Analysis of Tribal Cooperative Efforts:

During the same period, our SCERP team analyzed the political structure of each tribal community, its decision-making apparatus, and the overall effectiveness of tribal alliances and partnerships with outside agencies. Some of the critical questions to be answered are: (1) What are the political and economic barriers that these Indian groups face in attempting to maximize their resource base? (2) What are the short-term and long-range costs/benefits to

forming partnerships with government representatives, NGOs, and university researchers. (3) Will these economic partnerships leave the Indians in a perpetual state of “dependency?” (4) If these native communities are successful in becoming more economically self-sufficient, can these natural development models then be applied to other tribes living in the border region?

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The project developed information and analysis about border environmental issues that will have practical application to the various stakeholders involved. The mechanisms applied in carrying out this project will be fully described and evaluated in a final bilingual document so that other communities interested in utilizing the same model will be able to maximize and build on its usefulness. As a result, it is projected that the outcomes of this binational environmental assessment study will be of utility to all actors on border environmental issues, including the border Indian tribes; federal, state, and local authorities on both sides of the international boundaries; local communities; private sector organizations; and university researchers.

The Investigatory Team

The investigatory team was interdisciplinary. The principal investigator was Alan Kilpatrick, an American Indian anthropologist, who is Professor of American Indian Studies at San Diego State University. Kilpatrick has had extensive field experience working among indigenous communities in the United States and Mexico. Assisting Kilpatrick in California was Mike Connolly, a Kumeyaay Indian, who is Director of the Campo Environmental Protection Agency. Connolly, who has a background in engineering and environmental remediation projects, has worked on environmental issues affecting border tribes for over a decade.

The principal collaborating researcher in Baja California was Mike Wilken, Director of CUNA, a NGO in Ensenada that works with the local Indian communities in Mexico. Wilken has many years of research experience with the Indians in Baja California and the border region. Assisting Wilken was Claudia Leyva, an ecosystems management specialist, who is on the *Facultad de Ciencias at Universidad Autonoma de Baja California*, Gregorio Montes Castaneda, past president of the Union of Indigenous Communities of Baja California, and a GIS specialist from UABC.

The project also employed several student assistants. One of the qualifications for employment was that the student had some background in environmental studies. This opportunity provided the selected student with significant applied research experience about the environmental issues affecting the indigenous people living in the border region. In addition, we also encouraged Mexican students at UABC who are writing their thesis in environmental studies to work closely with the team.

Quality Assurance Narrative Statement

Throughout the research project, close contact will be maintained with EPA Region nine and the San Diego Border Liaison Office to insure that the project supports ongoing EPA efforts with Indian border tribes. As was previously mentioned, the Indian groups themselves will be regularly consulted with to provide direction and feedback.