



Improved Beef and Nature Tourism in the Flooded Savannah

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Introduction – The preliminary feasibility study of improved beef production and nature tourism showed the promise of this combination, but time and resources were not adequate to fully specify a follow up. Consequently, this pilot project proposal outlines some next steps in the process. The general objective of the pilot project would be to generate equitable and environmental sustainable economic growth in the Casanare and Arauca flooded savannahs.

Objectives - The specific objectives would be:

- 1) Determine the best options for improving grazing management in the flooded savannahs,
- 2) Identify the nature tourism best practices that would generate long term profits and protect the environment in the flooded savannahs,
- 3) Test the most promising beef and nature tourism management approaches with farmers that are currently raising cattle and managing a nature tourism business, and
- 4) Promote the most promising beef and nature tourism management approaches throughout the flooded savannahs.

If sufficient funding is made available, Purdue University would consider providing overall project leadership. A project management unit would be created in Yopal to coordinate activities, monitor progress and lead the way in solving the problems that will inevitably arise. The project management unit would be staffed by Colombians with strategic and technical assistance from Purdue faculty and staff. At Purdue a senior faculty member, assisted by a steering committee, will oversee the project. In university terms, this senior faculty member will be the “Principal Investigator” and project lead. Purdue University, through the project management unit, will contract with Colombian organizations

for specific components of the project. For example, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sena, Unitropico, UniSanGil, Unillanos and other organizations have expressed interest in providing technical training and the higher education needed by those employed in both the beef and the tourism sector. The office of the Casanare Secretary of Agriculture is ready to support the initiative. Unitropico, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Unillanos, Corpoica, now Agrosavia, and other research organizations have expressed interest in providing technical support and applied research to solve production and management problems identified in the course of the project. The management unit will work with national and international financial institutions to find credit for farmers and tourism related businesses. The management unit will seek out educational institutions and non-governmental organizations that provide support for new and expanding businesses, it may be better for the project to develop its own capacity for business support. The contractors and services providers will be part of a working group that meets monthly to insure good communication within the project and address problems early. A stakeholder advisory group would be developed to provide input on strategic decisions. The advisory group would include crucial stakeholders that are not contractors or service providers for the project, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Unidad de Planificación Rural Agropecuaria (UPRA), National Planning Department (DNP), Corporinoquia, World Wildlife Fund, Palmarito Foundation, World Conservation Society, Nature Conservancy, Government of Arauca, and Government of Casanare.

The timeline for the project would be:

Year 1 – The project would work with university and research institution partners to do a thorough literature review of grazing management in the flooded savannahs and similar ecologies (i.e., the Pantanal in Brazil) worldwide. This would be combined with rigorous economic analysis of the grazing options to identify those that are most profitable, while at the same time being environmentally sustainable. Potential for environmental service payments and carbon sequestration subsidies would be built into the analysis. Similarly, an analysis would be done of the management option on the nature tourism side. The project will work with the Casanare and Arauca Secretaries of Agriculture and with NGOs like the Green Horizon Foundation to develop a network of farmer nature tourism entrepreneurs.

Year 2 – Based on the literature review, the economic analysis and discussions with stakeholders the project would propose a limited number of alternatives for farms which already combine agriculture and nature tourism enterprises to try. The farmer nature tourism entrepreneur network would serve as the main mechanism for contacting and working with farmers. It would also be a key source of feedback for the project.

Year 3 – Using the experience in year 2, the project would develop a strategy for helping farmers in the flooded savannahs improve cattle production and launch nature tourism ventures. The project would help them identify niche strategies and effective marketing plans. The project would also work with them to jointly optimize the two enterprises. The network would continue to serve as the many

mechanism for working with flooded savannah farmers and for obtaining feedback on project activities.

Year 4 – The improved cattle production and nature tourism strategies would be tested with 5 to 10 farmers. The project would help them identify niche strategies and effective marketing plans. The project would also work with them to jointly optimize the two enterprises. The network would continue to serve as the many mechanism for working with flooded savannah farmers and for obtaining feedback on project activities.

Year 5 – Using what was learn in previous years, the project would scale up the improved cattle production and nature tourism program to a larger number of farmers. The network would be a key tool in helping farmers learn from each other and solve problems. In the 5th year an internal evaluation and an external impact assessment would identify replicable strategies and lessons learned.

The exit strategy is that by the fifth year the project management unit will close. By that time coordination of farmer nature tourism network can be handed over to a local organization (e.g., Chamber of Commerce, Unitropico), self-sustaining relationships will have been established between financial institutions and the farm tourism sector. The final internal evaluation and the external impact assessment will summarize the project experience and provide the basis for future public and private investment in the beef and nature tourism sector.

Conclusions – The long term management of the flooded savannahs depends on more systematic and scientific knowledge of the ecology and hydrology, but in the meantime life in the flooded savannahs goes on. Rural people in the flooded savannahs, like people everywhere, want to improve their lives. This pilot project offers a mechanism for them to improve their lives while at the same time preserving the local flora and fauna. The project will identify promising approaches to improving cattle production and growing nature tourism. It will test the best alternatives with farmers and make that information available to the region.