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# Protecting Ecosystems, Culture, and Human Rights in Chile Through Indigenous and Community- Conserved Territories and Areas

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**Chile: Protecting Ecosystems, Culture, and Human Rights through Indigenous and Community-Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs)**

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In environmental conservation circles around the world, the contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities to the sustainable maintenance of ecosystems and natural resources are being given increased attention. Whether for cultural, spiritual, economic, or other purposes, the use of traditional and local knowledge of habitat and resource management is slowly making its way into the modern environmental movement, and is being incorporated into the dominant conservation paradigms. These managed areas, known as *Indigenous and Community-Conserved Territories and Areas*, or ICCAs, are defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as “natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities, through customary laws or other effective means”.

The ICCA concept constitutes a new way of thinking about environmental protection which incorporates preserving the human rights of indigenous peoples, which are explicitly enshrined in international law. After spending eight months working with a human rights NGO in Temuco, Chile, the author has focused on the ICCA concept for his capstone project, as it provides a solid combination of his practicum work and personal interests. Through participatory research and collaborative efforts of his Chilean and indigenous Mapuche colleagues, the author answers the research question, “What are the major benefits of ICCAs, and what are the principal barriers to their broader support and effective legal recognition in Chile?” Based on his findings, the author outlines a comprehensive project proposal that seeks to address the underlying issues that have served to marginalize indigenous peoples in Chile. Furthermore, the proposal also supports the appropriate legal mechanisms required to give ICCAs – and their indigenous and local stewards – formal recognition under Chilean law.

**Keywords:** *Chile, Mapuche, Conservation, Indigenous Peoples, Human Rights, Governance, Cultural Preservation, Biodiversity, Protected Areas.*