

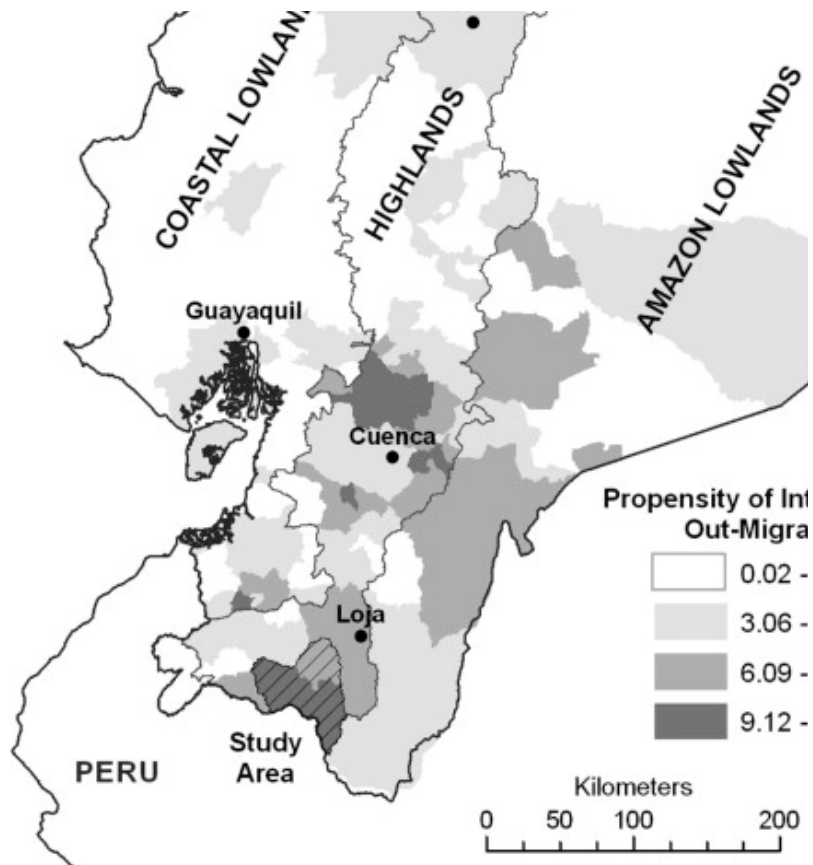
# Human Migration and the Rural Environment in the Ecuadorian Andes

Clark Gray

Carolina Population Center

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Wilson 128 at 4:00 PM



SIGNIFICANT ATTENTION FROM human-environment researchers has focused on potential connections between human migration and environmental change in the developing world. Unresolved questions include:

1. Has environmental degradation such as soil erosion displaced millions of “environmental refugees”?
2. Will rural out-migration lead to environmental recovery and a “forest transition” in biodiverse tropical countries?

Previous studies of these phenomena have drawn primarily on national-scale datasets or small-scale qualitative approaches. However, methods from population-environment research offer a powerful alternative by linking structured survey data to environmental variables derived from Geographic Information Systems and other sources. This approach provides insight into household and individual

decision-making, as well as results that are generalizable to the regional scale and the opportunity to control for confounding effects using multivariate statistics.

My dissertation drew on this approach to investigate relationships between migration and the environment in the southern Ecuadorian Andes, a region that is environmentally marginal for agriculture and an important center of out-migration. I will present analyses of the effects of environmental factors on out-migration to alternative destinations, and of the subsequent effects of out-migration and migrant remittances on household land use. The results undermine common assumptions by indicating that poor environmental quality does not consistently increase out-migration, and that out-migration does not lead to agricultural abandonment. I will close by presenting an ongoing project that expands this approach to include a larger sample, three new study areas and analysis of satellite imagery.