

Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0095-0696(17)30362-5

DOI: [10.1016/j.jeem.2018.02.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2018.02.004)

Reference: YJEEM 2107

To appear in: *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*

Received Date: 1 June 2017

Revised Date: 20 February 2018

Accepted Date: 21 February 2018

Please cite this article as: Canavire-Bacarreza, G., Diaz-Gutierrez, J.E., Hanauer, M.M., Unintended consequences of conservation: Estimating the impact of protected areas on violence in Colombia, *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* (2018), doi: 10.1016/j.jeem.2018.02.004.

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Unintended consequences of conservation: estimating the impact of protected areas on violence in Colombia

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February 20, 2018

Running title: The effect of protected areas on violence in Colombia

Abstract

1 Protected areas are designed to conserve ecosystems and their services, but the re-
2 strictions they impose create the potential for unintended consequences. For instance,
3 poverty advocates have long voiced concerns that protected areas might exacerbate
4 poverty in surrounding communities. Here we examine another potential unintended
5 consequence of protected areas: illegal activities. We use data from Colombia to esti-
6 mate the impact that protected areas had on violence perpetrated by guerrilla groups.
7 We find protected areas that were established prior to 2002 significantly increased the
8 number of guerrilla attacks in affected municipalities during the surge of violence in the
9 mid-2000s. Our results are robust to the choice of estimator and numerous additional
10 tests. We find evidence that guerrillas were using protected areas as havens to conduct
11 their operations and that our impact estimates are largely driven by protection in the
12 most rural areas.

13 Keywords: causal inference, matching, guerrilla, heterogeneity, conflict, difference-in-
14 difference, FARC, Latin America, terrorism

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