VERMONT CENTER FOR ECOSTUDIES
Uniting People and Science for Conservation

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Dear Editors,

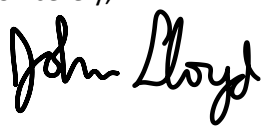
On behalf of myself and my co-author Yolanda León, I would like to submit our manuscript "Forest change within and outside protected areas in the Dominican Republic, 2000-2016" for consideration for publication as a Research Article in PLOS ONE.

Efforts to conserve Earth's remaining forests, and to understand the consequences of their disappearance, demand estimates of where, and at what rate, forest loss is occurring. Especially critical is reliable national-level data on forest change, as this information can help inform policies on forest conservation, sustainable development, and climate-change mitigation. Country-specific analyses of deforestation also allow for the evaluation of the efficacy of conservation interventions and, ideally, implementation of adaptive changes as needed.

In this manuscript, we examine spatial and temporal patterns of change in forest cover in the Dominican Republic (DR) between 2000 and 2016 using Landsat-based estimates of forest-cover change. In particular, we document changes in the extent of forest cover, by forest type, and examine the efficacy of the nation's system of protected areas - the country's primary conservation tool - in stemming forest loss. We focused on the DR for several reasons. First, as a middle-income country, it is broadly reflective of the changing dynamics and challenges faced globally in conserving forests in developing countries experiencing rapid economic growth. Second, it supports an outstanding number of forest-dependent endemic plants and animals, many of which are threatened with extinction. Third, very little published, quantitative information exists on the status of forests in the DR. Only two studies have produced quantitative estimates of change in forest cover in the country, and none that we are aware of have produced estimates specific to the different forest types in the country. In quantifying recent changes in the extent of different forest ecosystems in the DR, we provide an initial evaluation of forest-specific conservation policies, identify spatial hotspots of deforestation and forest types at greatest risk, and suggest fruitful areas for investment of conservation resources.

The following Academic Editors have handled similar manuscripts, and we suggest that they may be suitable to handle ours: Shijo Joseph, RunGuo Zang, Edward Webb, Bruno Hérault, and Madhur Anand.

Sincerely,



John D. Lloyd, Ph.D.