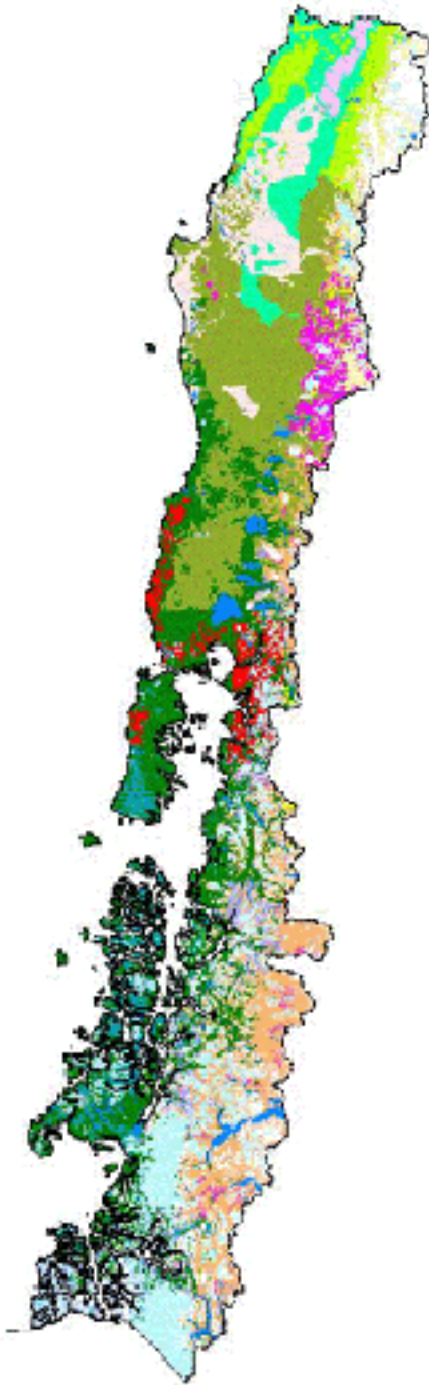


Chile's Frontier Forests: Estimates of Vegetative Cover In Year 1550 In Regions VII Through XI

Map Projection: Transverse Mercator

Citation: Neira, E., H. Verscheure and C. Revenga. 2002. Chile's Frontier Forest: Conserving a Global Treasure. WRI, CODEFF and UACH, Washington DC.



Description:

Chile's forests began to form following the retreat of continental glaciers more than 10,000 years ago. Evidence suggests that these temperate forests covered this region of the planet for the last 3,000 years, remaining almost intact until the arrival of the Europeans 450 years ago. Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, the indigenous people of the region had not significantly altered the landscape, although some forests were cleared for agriculture. With the arrival of colonial settlers from Europe (around 1860) during the Spanish conquest and later after the independence from Spain, the ancient forests were converted through intentional forest fires. Vast expanses of the central plains' alerce forest were destroyed.

This map shows the original native forest extent in 1550 prior to European colonization (Lara et al. 1999). In 1550, native forests covered an estimated 18.4 million hectares-- an area extending from administrative Regions VII through XI. Today, only 56 percent of this original forest cover remains. Most affected are the Sclerophyllous and the Nothofagus forest types, with 3 and 30 percent, respectively, of original forest cover remaining. The expanse of grasslands and scrublands, on the other hand, have doubled in area, from 2.5 million to 5.5 million hectares (Lara et al., 1999). It is important to note that, within these regions, new types of land use such as urban areas, agricultural lands, and forestry plantations occupy a significant expanse.

For more information on the species composition of the different forest categories in Chile please refer to Box 3 in the report Neira, E., H. Verscheure and C. Revenga. 2002. Chile's Frontier Forest: Conserving a Global Treasure. WRI, CODEFF and UACH, Washington DC.