

# **The Communication of Goals in Volunteer-Based Ecotourism**

- A Case Study of Two Ecuadorian Ecological Reserves -

Robyn Bath-Rosenfeld  
URECA Grant Recipient

## **Thesis Abstract**

Volunteer-based ecotourism has been a growing commodity in the field of international travel. Euro-American youth pay thousands of dollars to intermediary private companies in order to volunteer with ecological reserves and NGOs. The majority of the research on “voluntourism” discusses the personal motivations of the volunteers, and neglects to discuss volunteer’s work ethic in relation to the explanation of project goals. This study examined two different ecological reserves in Ecuador that accept paying volunteers, and monitored the communications of goals and interactions between the project managers, coordinators and the volunteers. By monitoring the communication of goals in comparison to volunteers’ work ethic, I was able to discover where communication is lacking, and how it can be improved. Two weeks were spent at each site to collect data via participant observation and open-ended interviews. Data was analyzed in aggregate using hand coding. Volunteers were observed working more diligently if they understood the reasons for the work, and could see how it tied into larger goals of environmental protection and conservation. When work was either mundane, or contrary to reforestation and ecological preservation, volunteers would become frustrated that the experience did not live up to their expectations. Therefore, when goals are clearly stated, and align with the volunteers expectations laid on them by intermediary private companies, then environmental conservation goals are reached.