

# TOMPKINS CONSERVATION

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Who are Kristine and Douglas Tompkins?**

Kristine McDivitt Tompkins and the late Douglas R. Tompkins (1943–2015) are American conservationists who have worked to save wildlife and wild habitat for more than a quarter century, achieving unprecedented success as national park-focused philanthropists. After prominent business careers, she as the former CEO of Patagonia, Inc. and he as the founder of the North Face and cofounder of Esprit clothing companies, in the early 1990s the Tompkinses turned their entrepreneurial talents toward saving nature's beauty and diversity. They are best known for their efforts to acquire and aggregate private land and then donate it to become new national parks.

### **What is Tompkins Conservation?**

Tompkins Conservation is a publicly supported charity incorporated in California. The organization's current and past efforts to create parklands, conserve biodiversity, restore damaged lands, reintroduce missing species, encourage environmental activism, and promote ecological agriculture have been accomplished through a suite of nonprofits founded by Kris and Doug Tompkins. As of 2019, these entities have been legally merged and consolidated into the U.S.-based Tompkins Conservation, which works primarily with two organizations in South America: Tompkins Conservation Chile and Rewilding Argentina.

### **How much land has Tompkins Conservation protected?**

In collaboration with governments, other NGOs, and philanthropic partners, Tompkins Conservation has helped conserve more than 14.2 million acres (5.7 million hectares) in protected natural areas. This legacy of conservation success is embodied in 13 new national parks, four expanded national parks, and various provincial parks and private reserves. For comparison, this is roughly the size of Connecticut, New Jersey, and Delaware combined. This overall figure includes the roughly 2 million acres donated for permanent conservation by Tompkins Conservation-affiliated nonprofits, plus additional government land that those donations leveraged into new protected areas, plus lands we have helped preserve through other conservation tools.

### **Does Tompkins Conservation focus exclusively on terrestrial protected areas?**

No. Tompkins Conservation is also dedicated to marine conservation, recognizing the paucity of marine protected areas (MPAs) globally, especially “no take” MPAs where ocean wildlife is fully protected from extractive activities including industrial fishing. Tompkins Conservation was a key partner in a coalition of advocates that helped secure new marine protected areas totaling upwards of 30 million acres in 2018–2019, including Argentina’s first two marine national parks.

### **Why donate land to the public for national parks?**

National parks are the oldest, most durable, and best loved mechanism for permanently protecting exceptional landscapes. They provide indispensable ecological, cultural, and social values, from personal recreation and spiritual renewal to helping develop widespread public support for conservation. They highlight the best attributes a country has to show the world—outstanding beauty, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and noteworthy cultural/archaeological sites. And beyond all these benefits, they are a fundamentally democratic institution—open to all, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc. National parks have an unparalleled track record for permanence and cultural support. In general, national parks have fared well even in politically unstable areas of the planet. The vibrant democracies of Chile and Argentina have a proven commitment to national parks stretching back to Francisco “Perito” Moreno’s 1903 offer to donate his land to the State for Argentina’s first national park. Chile’s first national park was established in 1926. Both countries have excellent systems of protected areas with flagship national parks such as Torres del Paine in Chile and Iguazu Falls in Argentina that are world-famous destinations.

### **Will the donated parklands be funded, maintained, and protected by the government?**

The national park systems of Chile and Argentina would certainly benefit from greater financial and public support, but this can be said of essentially every country that designates national parks. Every full-term Chilean president since 1926 has expanded the park system, and no national parks have been stripped of their protection, even during the period of military dictatorship. The Argentine national parks have similarly weathered tumultuous political events. The long-term solution to the question of adequate budgets and administrative capacity is to develop a broad societal commitment to national parks as an institution. Toward that end, Tompkins Conservation has fostered conservation activism and helped launch the “Corporacion Amigos de los parques de la Patagonia,” an independent organization devoted to Chilean national park advocacy.

### **On what issues and where does Tompkins Conservation work?**

During its first decade, the Foundation for Deep Ecology (now merged into Tompkins Conservation) made hundreds of grants to grassroots organizations, primarily in North America, working to protect wilderness and wildlife, advance ecological agriculture, and oppose destructive forms of megatechnology. Later, Doug and Kris Tompkins's priority shifted toward South America, where they were developing ambitious land conservation projects. While the core interests of expanding protected areas, restoring beauty and wildlife abundance, developing agro-ecological systems, and promoting a culture of activism remains part of the organizational ethos, current work priorities are focused on specific parklands conservation and wildlife recovery initiatives in Chile and Argentina.

### **Why South America?**

The regions where Tompkins Conservation has focused its park-making efforts—Chile's Lakes District, the Aysén Region of Chilean Patagonia, and in various parts of Argentina—are places with exceptional conservation potential. All presented an opportunity for public-private collaboration that would enhance biodiversity protection and stimulate local economic development as a consequence of conservation. Land values were reasonable and legal structures—in particular the national park systems of Chile and Argentina—were strong. Moreover, large-scale conservation in these areas can naturally sequester vast amounts of carbon, helping to mitigate climate change.

Tompkins Conservation's founders also had a longstanding personal attachment to the region. As an alpine ski racer and mountaineer, Doug Tompkins began spending time in remote areas of Argentina and Chile as a young man in the 1960s. He fell in love with Patagonia; during numerous expeditions to the region he notched many first ascents of mountains and first descents of wild rivers by kayak. Kris Tompkins became similarly devoted to Patagonia the place after a career at Patagonia the company.

### **Why focus on land and wildlife conservation?**

We recognize that the sixth great extinction event in Earth history is here, precipitated by human numbers (overpopulation) and human behavior (overdevelopment) leading to a global loss of wildness, integrity, and beauty. Technoindustrial civilization based on endless growth is ultimately doomed to fail on a finite planet, but its side effects are presently accelerating, causing a wildlife holocaust. We believe that this preventable tragedy is wrong.

## **What are Tompkins Conservation's guiding values?**

We believe that:

*Nature's health is fundamental.*

*All life has intrinsic value.*

*Beauty matters.*

Because the natural processes that create and shape life's beauty and diversity are being subverted by human activity, systemic change at a deep, foundational level is needed. The present global extinction crisis—the greatest contraction of biodiversity since the age of dinosaurs ended 65 million years ago—is the clearest marker that our current trajectory is not merely unsustainable, but unethical.

Everyone who is blessed to spend time on this majestic blue orb in space has an obligation to help pay his or her "rent" for living on Earth.

## **What is the overarching goal of Tompkins Conservation?**

To advance the global movement which seeks to rewild at least half of the Earth—and thereby reverse the current extinction and climate crises while helping create a harmonious relationship between humanity and the rest of life. We anticipate the day when humans again remember that we are not the owner or conqueror of the Earth, but rather are, as conservationist Aldo Leopold wrote, a "plain member and citizen" of the land community.

Because conservation is ultimately about preventing human-caused extinction of other species, all of which have inherent value, we endorse the idea of "Half-Earth"—a global conservation agenda that works to secure enough habitat—in interconnected systems of terrestrial and marine protected areas—to support vibrant populations of all species. Based on decades of published research in conservation biology, it appears likely that this goal of adequate habitat for all Earthlings—from beetles and bears to warblers and whales—could be met if at least 50 percent of the planet were set aside in strategically selected, strictly protected, and interconnected natural areas. A key benefit of such an outcome would be thriving ecosystems and a stable climate in which human society might flourish.

## **Where is Tompkins Conservation located?**

The San Francisco Bay Area has been and remains the financial and administrative headquarters of Tompkins family-led nonprofit work since Doug Tompkins launched the Foundation for Deep Ecology in 1990. The main administrative office for Tompkins Conservation in Chile is in Puerto Varas. The primary office for Rewilding Argentina is in Buenos Aires, with a key regional outpost at the Estancia Rincon del Socorro in Corrientes

Province, which is the administrative headquarters for our rewilding efforts in the Iberá marshlands region.

### **What are other major accomplishments of Tompkins Conservation?**

Tompkins Conservation's success working with several different presidents of various political parties in Chile and Argentina shows the power of public-private collaboration to expand protected areas and help create vibrant local economies linked to conservation. Complementing these successes in parklands expansion, the Tompkins Conservation team has become widely known for its work to protect imperiled species such as huemul deer and pumas, and to reintroduce native species now missing from the project areas where we work. We have successfully reintroduced pampas deer, giant anteaters, collared peccaries, tapirs, and other species to the Iberá marshland region, and are expanding the scope of this initiative to restore and "rewild" formerly degraded landscapes. A highlight of this program is to breed jaguars in captivity and release their offspring into the Iberá Park.

### **Why is rewilding important?**

The idea of large-scale wilderness recovery (ecological restoration writ large) has come to be known as rewilding. At its simplest, rewilding means *helping nature heal*, that is, helping degraded areas regain wildness. In a world as damaged as the one modern humans are making, ecological restoration is a necessity—both to help prevent human-caused extinction of other species and also to support human well-being. Everywhere there are opportunities to help wounded landscapes return to health by protecting habitat, controlling or removing invasive species, reintroducing missing wildlife (including keystone species such as large carnivores), repairing exploited and overused landscapes, and helping natural processes again operate freely.

While the goal of rewilding is to have missing species and processes reassembled into functional ecosystems and then get out of nature's way, the means to this end will generally include active restoration techniques, passive recovery, and ongoing monitoring. Site-specific activities such as countering hillside erosion or rehabilitating a former gravel pit are small steps toward this larger vision of restored beauty and health. Once habitat productivity and security are assured, returning missing species to the system and helping them achieve sufficient population size to perform their normal ecological roles is the capstone to a rewilding project.

Tompkins Conservation has undertaken the most ambitious rewilding efforts in the Americas, employing all of the aforementioned tools—helping create new protected areas (terrestrial and marine national parks), replanting Alerce tree seedlings in Chilean rainforest watersheds where their seeds were gathered, ripping out hundreds of miles of former ranch fencing after the livestock was sold, and reintroducing missing species to their former homes. Pampas deer, giant anteaters, collared peccaries, tapirs, and other species have

been returned to the Iberá marshlands; these projects have helped the Tompkins Conservation team gain expertise for current challenges including restoring the Iberá region's apex predators—jaguars on land and giant otters in the water—and recovering populations of iconic species such as huemul deer and Darwin's rheas in Chile..

### **Does Tompkins Conservation accept grant proposals from other nonprofits?**

No. In the past, Tompkins family foundations have made grants totaling more than \$100 million to nonprofit organizations working for a permanent peace between humanity and wild nature, including funding that helped launch several groups and campaigns. These include the International Forum on Globalization and the *iPatagonia Sin Represas!* campaign, which waged an ultimately successful seven-year-long effort to stop a massive hydroelectricity development scheme that would have dammed two of Chilean Patagonia's wild rivers. At this time, we are focused exclusively on the large-scale conservation projects that we're implementing in Chile and Argentina.

### **Does Tompkins Conservation seek external funding to support its programs?**

Yes. The organization's roots as a family foundation allowed it to operate for many years both as a grantmaker to other nonprofit groups/campaigns and to self-fund its own conservation initiatives. Ultimately Tompkins Conservation projects became so ambitious that partnerships became essential. As of 2019, more than \$67 million of external funding from individual and institutional donors has bolstered the more than \$345 million that Tompkins family philanthropy has invested in land and wildlife conservation, environmental activism, etc.

### **Shouldn't conservation philanthropists focus on climate change?**

The accelerating threat of climate chaos resulting from human activity—deforestation and other land-use changes, as well as a century-long frenzy of fossil fuel use—should be the focus of every citizen. Fortunately, philanthropic engagement on the issue of climate change has grown significantly, with most attention being paid to renewable energy. Such work is crucial, but insufficient, to stop climate change if deforestation and other wilderness-destroying land-use changes proceed apace.

"Natural carbon solutions" including habitat protection—saving large expanses of wild forests and grassland that naturally sequester carbon—are crucial for mitigating climate change. The parklands conservation projects developed by Tompkins Conservation assure that many millions of acres of wild habitat will never be developed and continue to provide climate-supporting carbon uptake and sequestration in the soils and biomass of these protected areas. Just one of our flagship parks, Pumalín Douglas Tompkins National Park in Chile's lakes district, has been estimated to sequester 229 million metric tons of carbon in its soil and vegetation. When Tompkins Conservation and the administration of former Chilean

President Michelle Bachelet signed the joint agreement to add more than ten million acres of new national parklands to Chile's system of protected areas, the parklands package was not only intended to benefit local economies through ecotourism but contribute to the nation's commitment to address climate change.

We recognize how runaway climate change threatens humanity, natural habitat, and our wild relatives in the land community. We believe that the failure of political and corporate elites to exercise bold leadership to reorient the global energy economy away from its present, dire course, is exceedingly dangerous to the diversity of life on Earth, and that this tragic failure is often motivated by "elective ignorance" fueled by short-term goals. A mass movement of engaged citizens is needed to counter political inertia.

### **How does parklands creation and wildlife recovery affect economic development and local communities?**

Tompkins Conservation projects have employed many hundreds of people through the decades, from carpenters, architects, and equipment operators to veterinarians, biologists, and park rangers. The large majority, roughly 80 percent, of the staff working on TC projects come from nearby communities. In general, management of lands for conservation and wildlife recovery has provided more local jobs than the previous uses.

Moreover, the new parklands that Tompkins Conservation has helped create are a building block for regional economic transformation as Chile's Carretera Austral (southern highway) becomes known as the gateway to the "Route of Parks," a 1700-kilometer scenic route featuring dozens of communities and a world-class array of national parks. Similarly, in the Iberá marshlands, our initiative to establish and brand the Iberá region as the premier wildlife-watching destination in Argentina has created a scenic route around the watershed, linked the local communities with consistent signage and marketing, and helped build widespread political support for conservation efforts because of their economic benefit to local communities. Locally trained guides for wildlife tours, hosteria operators, and many other employment opportunities are being created from this effort.