

Ownership and Access: Tenure in the Forests of Mt. Fuji

Question: Who owns the property rights to the forests that I visited around Mt. Fuji and who has access to them? What differences exist between property rights and use rights and how do these differences influence land management?

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Background

Forest tenure around the base of Mt. Fuji is a spectrum that ranges from common land to strict private ownership. Land ownership around Mt. Fuji is qualified by use-rights that have existed for centuries. Generally, forest owners fall into one of the following categories.

1. Iriai: traditional common land rights
2. Private owners: companies/ individuals
3. Government land: Prefectural/ National

Underlying policy formation or changes in how an owner manages their land are important questions of who owns a piece of land, who claims to own this piece of land, and who has access to this piece of land (White 2002). The exercise of traditional use-rights on public and private land creates interesting tenure arrangements

Forest tenure is a broad concept that includes ownership, tenancy and other arrangements for the use of forests. It is a combination of legally or customarily defined forest ownership and of rights and arrangements to manage and use forest resources. Forest tenure determines who can use what resources, for how long and under what conditions.

Methodology

I used 12 forests surrounding Mt. Fuji as a representative sample of the forests in Japan. Within these forests I catalogued ownership, land-use, tree cover, entrance fees, and a basic description of the historical use in the area. I geotagged photos of each forest and created a map (figure 1). Using google earth I layered geo-referenced point data with the survey data described above, historical aerial photo overlays, and polygon boundaries of the legal government and common ownership. My understanding of the property rights and use-rights in the area would not be possible without the help of local ecologist, Watanabe Michihito.

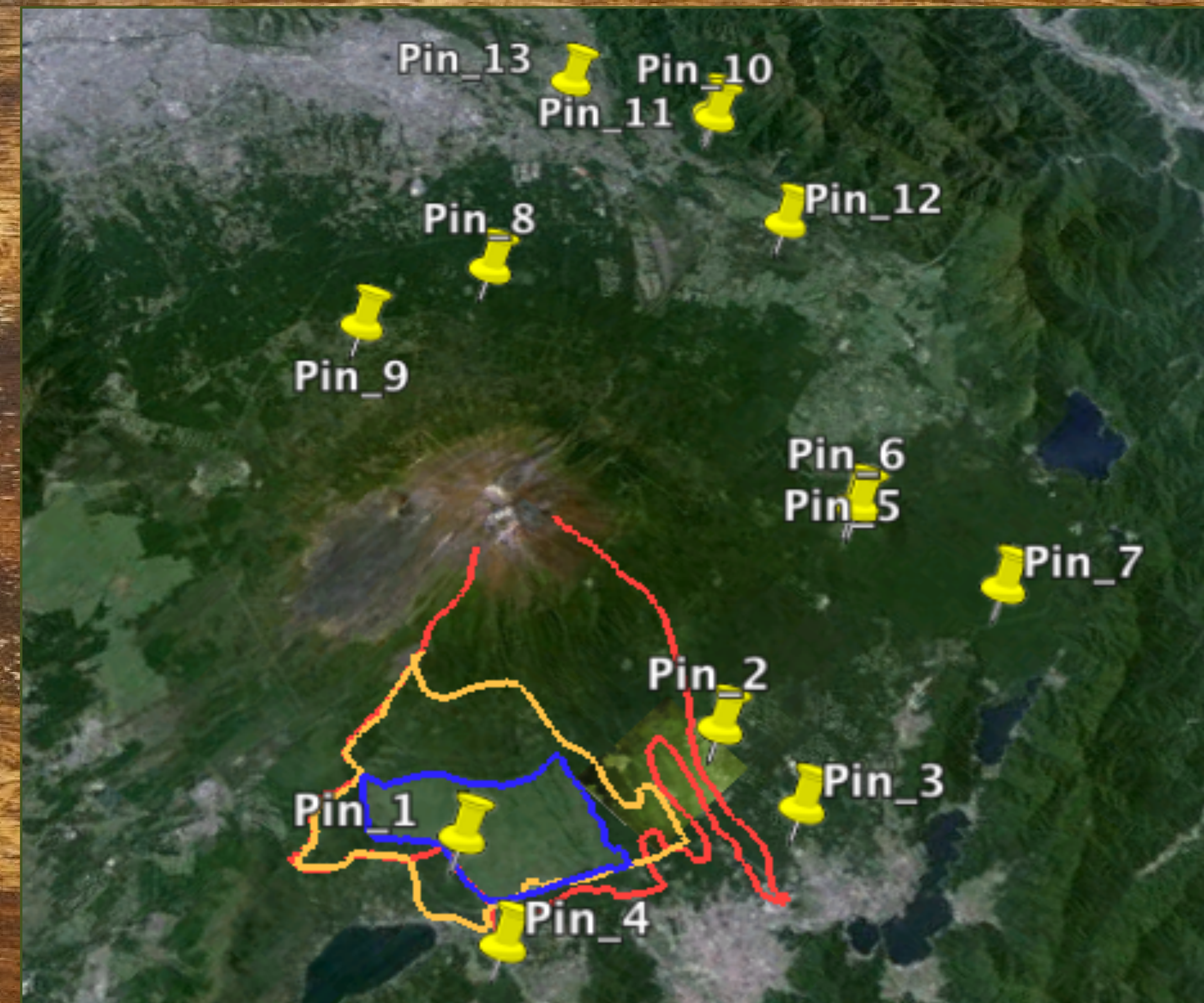


Figure 1(above): My sample sites



Figure 2 (above): This is a sample of how an aerial overlays from 1946 shows infrastructure development and harvesting near one of my research sites.

Figure 3 (below): This is an example of the survey data displayed after a pin is clicked on in my google map document.

Pin_4	
latitude	35.4484841261836
longitude	138.85219232389
site	Takamarubi_site2
basic_description	This forest used to be predominantly harimomi, a type of fir tree, that is on the northern edge of the kenmarubi lava flow. The harimomi trees do not have many uses. This area is a national monument, but when it was declared a national monument it was a pure harimomi forest, about 60 years ago. This forest is owned by the saengen shrine, but is common land. The forest is near the villages of Yamanaka and Oshino, northwest of lake Yamanaka. Just outside of the Iriachi land, we are on a trail that is public access. The trail runs between Kyoto and Tokyo, and is called Tokai Shizen Hodo. Tokai is the road, Shizen means natural, and hodo means road. Near the entrance to the forest there are obvious signs of coppicing on konara trees. The harimomi was thought to have been in the area before the takamarubi lava flow, and seeded this forest after the lava cooled and became solid. At takamarubi, the Northern area has oak, and this area has harimomi.
fees	no
forest_type	Mixed (broadleaf/coniferous)
photos	
photos_caption	...
photos_url	View Photos
ownership_other	Private owners of Oshino Village, National Monument
Directions	To here - From here

Results

Various methods of forest management and timber production have come in and out of use in the course of Japan's rich forest history. Some traditional methods are still used simultaneously with larger industrial scale timber production, while others are no longer employed.

- Patterns of historical use, like coppicing for firewood and harvesting grasses for animal feed, still occur on much of the land outside the recorded legal boundary.
- Traditional, village-based use-rights have a political voice and representation: The Onshirin Kumiai.

Large-scale, plantation-style production occurs on both public and private land in the Mt. Fuji area. Some of the sample sites were used for timber production after WWII or earlier in the century.

- Private forest land on the southern side of Mt. Fuji has been fragmented into very small parcels. This is due to land sale, and land being divided up in estates of deceased owners.
- Small parcel size decreases profit margins. The high management costs associated with thinning and managing plantation forests leads to neglect, and many forests lay economically dormant until the market price of timber increases or management costs on their land decrease

Discussion

Being considerate of the national and local interests surrounding forest land continues to be a challenge on forestlands worldwide. In trying to create a more collaborative approach to policy formation, an intuitive, inclusive method of information transfer is essential.

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 - Historical, village-based, use-rights have a political voice and representation: The Onshirin Kumiai.
- Large-scale, plantation-style production occurs on both public and private land in the Mt. Fuji area. Some of the sample sites were used for timber production after WWII or earlier in the century.
 - Private forest land on the southern side of Mt. Fuji has been fragmented into very small parcels. This is due to land sale, and land being divided up in estates of deceased owners. Small parcel size decreases profit margins.
 - The high management costs associated with thinning and managing plantation forests leads to neglect, and many forests lay economically dormant until the market price of timber increases or management costs on their land decrease.