

AMERICAN BUYS SLICES OF SOUTH AMERICA

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LOS ESTEROS DEL IBERA, Argentina --

The American multimillionaire who founded the North Face and Esprit clothing lines says he is trying to save the planet by buying bits of it. First Douglas Tompkins purchased a huge swath of southern Chile, and now he's hoping to save the northeast wetlands of neighboring Argentina.

He has snapped up more than half a million acres of the Esteros del Ibera, a vast Argentine marshland teeming with wildlife.

Tompkins, 64, is a hero to some for his environmental stewardship. Others resent his land purchases as a foreign challenge to their national patrimony.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Tompkins said industrialized agriculture is chewing up big chunks of Argentina's fragile marshland and savanna, and that essential topsoil is disappearing as a result.