

**“BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE
BIOSPHERE OF THE SIERRA GORDA
RESERVE” QUARTERLY BULLETIN**

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Editorial

We finished a year full of work and challenges, but in the end it concluded with many accomplishments and the best omens for 2003. This year we will carry out concrete actions in order to strengthen our infrastructure, environmental education, productive skill training, and begin to charge for environmental services among other things. Among the many tasks to be implemented over the next 6 years within the GEF-UNDP project, life will provide us the opportunity to knit a broad sustainable development network from the grassroots, to shorten institutional gaps and to build a bridge towards sustainability with all the necessary elements. This constitutes a unique opportunity for our beloved Sierra Gorda to consolidate itself as a real life example of a sustainable rural society on the *road* to holistic development. This is a replicable model and an effective strategy for the conservation of our priceless natural sanctuaries.

USDA Forest Service studies of rivers and streams in Sierra Gorda

Following up on a project that initiated in 2001 on the state and characterization of watersheds of the main fluvial systems in Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, concentrating on the rivers: Ayutla, Conca, Escanela – Jalpan, Extoraz, Tanculín and Chuveje. A group of experts from the USDA Forest Service in coordination with members of the Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (GESG) worked in the above river systems this past October. This is the first effort to integrate fauna registers of fish species and other invertebrates and to characterize the physical and conservation conditions. Unfortunately the preliminary results show that all river systems are polluted, in lesser or greater degrees. Their deterioration is a consequence of severe modifications in the natural conditions of river banks due to improper extraction of gravel and sand, intensive fishing and harmful extensive cattle. The most affected river system Escanela – Jalpan, which provides the majority of drinking water for Jalpan and the neighboring communities, is contaminated with heavy metals from mercury mines exploited in the 1950’s and 60’s

and from sewage drainage systems of adjacent communities. The effects of these pollutants were obvious in the fish sampled for study, which exhibited tumors, bone deformities and funguses attached to their scales. The project will continue next year and will prioritize work on the Escanela river system.

Environmental Relief

We recently established an alliance with ECOCE (Ecology and Enterprise Commitment), an organization created by companies that produce PET plastic bottles seeking to resolve the environmental impact of their products. This organization solved the massive accumulation of plastic bottles collected in the 57 community-based recycling centers of the Sierra Gorda Reserve, installed and operated by the GESG. ECOCE is purchasing and transporting the material to Mexico City to be recycled. In the first shipment they cleared our Regional Recycling Center in Jalpan of more than 900 sacks filled with plastic bottles and soon another shipment will be collected.

Implementation of the project “Protection of the Biodiversity in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve” has begun.

The project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and administered by the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) office in Mexico, has begun its initial implementation phase with the hiring of eleven staff members. This new personnel will enrich the project by developing areas such as: the territorial organization of the Reserve, a geographic information system, assessment and technical assistance for forest producers, surveillance and inspection, monitoring and evaluation, research, control and combat of pests and forest fires, communications, productive diversification and concrete inter-institutional coordination, among others. This project will energize our daily work and will open new perspectives for the conservation of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere. It also constitutes a great responsibility to generate and raise significant matching funds for the project.

International presence of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve

The federal director of the Biosphere Reserve, Martha Ruiz Corzo, accompanied by Laura Pérez Arce of the Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda, participated in four international forums, including: World Economic Forum in New York; Earth Summit (World Summit for Sustainable Development) in Johannesburg, South Africa; Social Entrepreneurs Summit by the Schwab Foundation in Switzerland; and the Latin American World Economic Forum in Brazil. All have been unequalled opportunities for this local initiative, needless to say the organizations and individuals invited are carefully selected for their innovation and outstanding impact.

Ongoing Projects

The project called “Formation of a sustainable culture in eleven communities of the Sierra Gorda semi-desert”, financed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has begun operating successfully with full acceptance and participation of the population and local educational authorities. The activities include: environmental education, reforestation, community clean-up, workshops on diagnosis and management of natural resources with local producers of organic oregano and damiana (a medicinal herb), pest controls and tree nurseries. The project has also printed a booklet being utilized for the sustainable management of alternative forest products. This project is complemented by another project directed to community women financed by the SEDESOL (Social Development Ministry) which consists in establishing ousehold vegetable gardens, bakery classes, classes on properties of natural herbs and a healthy diet, recycling methods and the construction of a recycling center. We recently received a supervision visit from JICA personnel sent by the Japanese embassy, they left very pleased with the development of project activities so far.

ROLEX recognizes the Sierra Gorda and Pati Ruiz Corzo

The prestigious ROLEX watch company through its organization The ROLEX Awards *for Enterprise* in its 2002 edition recognizes Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo as an associate laureate in the environmental category of this prize. She has become the second Mexican to receive this prestigious

recognition. This constitutes great pride for all the Serranos and people who have contributed over the last 15 years in the environmental rescue of the beautiful Sierra Gorda.

A Great Achievement

With support from the Gonzalo Río Arronte Foundation, we initiated operation of a three-year project titled: “Holistic restoration of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere river basins”. Over the next 3 years, the general objective is to re-evaluate the Biosphere Reserve as a region that captures water in addition to providing environmental services, as well as recuperating the health of watersheds and their capacity for hydrological capture for the Jalpan and Ayutla River. This comprehensive effort implies a detailed regional hydrological study to diagnose the watersheds and support environmental education, soil and water conservation, reforestation and sanitation of the same. This project will be complemented by the other projects and conservation activities of the Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda, the office of the Biosphere Reserve, the UNDP- GEF project and the US Forest Service. We hope all these actions will revert the present tendency towards degradation and will assure the water supply of many people inside and outside the Reserve.