

**“BIODIVERSITY Conservation IN THE BIOSPHERE
OF THE SIERRA GORDA RESERVE PROJECT”
Trimesterly BULLETIN
SPRING 2003**



The first workshop of the Water and Mountains Initiative (WAMI) took place in Geneva, Switzerland on April 23rd. It was organized by the World Economic Forum and the United Nations Environment Programme (PNUMA) and those invited included Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve (SGBR) Director and an outstanding Social Entrepreneur of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, and Laura Pérez Arce, representative of the Sierra Gorda Ecological Group (GESG). This initiative targets the renovation of prioritized watersheds, the improvement of its management and the drive to create new action plans such as the payment of environmental services and the involvement of civil society, through the creation of demonstrative projects in several regions.

Subsequently, from April 24th to 26th, both actively participated in the “Natural Protected Areas: 20-Year Scenarios” workshop, which was organized by the International Union for Nature Conservancy (IUCN) that took place in its headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. 25 experts in the field of Natural Protected Areas (NPAs) participated in this workshop and the main theme was the future of these NPAs in the next 20 years. Three main scenarios were developed and will be presented in the plenary session of the next World Congress of Parks, which will take place in Durban, South Africa in September 2003.

Thanks to the generous support of *Plaza Boulevares* management and CINEMARK in Querétaro City for facilitating their public space and one of the movie theaters. Grupo Ecológico presented the video “Fire: Danger in the forest,” produced by the GESG with resources of the Mexican Fund for Nature Conservancy (FMCN). 400 students of several secondary schools within the state attended and it was a great success among the students and teachers’ alike. Ecological songs and accordion playing completed the session with an extra environmental awareness session by the Reserve Manager.

Pottery Teachers from the Training Center for Technological Skills (CECATI - SEP), in Dolores, Hidalgo, have been advising and training the women participating in the community-based pottery project in the community Soledad de Guadalupe. The first molds for a promotional souvenir of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve were designed and the mugs are being commercialized regionally with a positive response from tourists and local hotels.

For the second time in its history, a Mexican citizen has received an award from the prestigious Society for Conservation Biology, formed by biologists, academics and conservationists from all around the world. Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo received the

Distinguished Service Award for Social, Economic and Political Work. The last Mexican laureate was Dr. José Sarukhán Kermez, the former Headmaster of the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), who served as the head of the National Biological Commission of Mexico.

The awards ceremony took place during the Society for Conservation Biology annual meeting celebrated in Duluth, Minnesota, in the first days of July.

The project “Expansion of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve in the southern edge of the Chihuahuan Desert” (financed by the World Wildlife Fund to the GESG) was undertaken to produce the studies to justify protecting areas close to the SGBR in the state of San Luis Potosí. The sites under determination are referred to as the Santa María River Canyon and the Sierra de la Silleta. In the particular case of the Sierra de la Silleta, this site represents the last well-conserved mountain cloud forests and temperate forests with high levels of biodiversity in the Huasteca Potosina Region. The new Biosphere Reserve will occupy approximately 13,000 hectares and has already been announced for its future decree in the Federation’s Official Diary the 11th of July. The site is an important addition to the core protected area “Cañada de las Avispas” on the eastern border of the Sierra Gorda Reserve. Sierra la Silleta Biosphere Reserve is one of the last sanctuaries of the Eastern Sierra Madre, and the eight ejidos (common-land societies) affected have actively and positively participated in consensus meetings regarding the protection initiative.

Three sustainable management workshops for harvesting oregano were given by Dr. Rosalía Ocampo, from the Autonomous University of Querétaro, in conjunction with the project "Formation of a Sustainable culture in eleven semi-desert communities", financed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and operated by the GESG. These workshops were given to a total of 98 semi-desert producers in 3 ejidos, completing the tasks of regularization and organization. The Federal Delegate of SEMARNAT provided leadership to conduct this group of producers to organic certification and the standards necessary for export. On June 5th the oregano producers received the National Ecology Award, which is annually granted by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT).

Joya del Hielo, A.C." is an associated non-profit civil organization dedicated to strict land management for conservation. Since 1997 the members have acquired 464 hectares for their strict conservation. Each property was purchased to preserve the high biological value that was otherwise threatened by destructive forestry and grazing activities. Consequently Joya del Hielo A.C. guards under strict conservation our last inheritance of a well conserved cloud forest in the state of Querétaro. In an effort to promote transparent management and guarantee the conservation status of the mentioned properties in perpetuity, the organization began to inscribe it all under the Ecological Easements model. This process is developed by the Nature Conservancy and has been implemented in México by PRONATURA, A.C., and will be part of this work scheme soon.

Solar Household Energy (SHE) and the Mexican Fund for Nature Conservancy selected the GESG to carry out a pilot project within the SGBR to introduce high efficiency solar ovens to the area. These were the first thirty ovens made in México and constitute a bold new product for VITRO, headquartered in Monterrey, N.L.. Louise Meyer, the consultant in alternative solar technology accompanied the training process in the communities of Purísima de Arista and Mabí. The local women were convinced by the efficiency of the ovens and demonstrated their interest in alternative energy sources. The greatest benefit: the reduced use of firewood and gas stoves. Sierra Gorda communities proved the functional and environmentally-friendly potential of this product in rural areas.

In Querétaro, QRO., the "Environmental Expo Querétaro 2003" took place in the Josefa Ortiz Auditorium in June. The theme of our stand was "Sierra Gorda: An important water source" and included a display of the overall GEF project to a considerable crowd.

In celebration of World Environment Day, the 5th of June, 20 Earth Festivals were held throughout the five counties of the Biosphere Reserve with the participation of 69 schools in 54 communities of the Reserve. We are very proud of the excellent response of the teachers, students, mothers and grandmothers who participated actively in the programming and the food fest of traditional recipes. The personnel of the Environmental Education Program presented a humorous play called: "The girl that wanted to sell a cloud".