



BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE SIERRA GORDA BIOSPHERE RESERVE

Informative Bulletin JANUARY - APRIL 2006.

The Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (Ecological Group Sierra Gorda) extends its thanks to all who have joined us in our efforts to preserve the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve (SGBR), and invite those whom we have met along the road to conservation to learn more.

- The UN Foundation Commits to Carbon Neutral Operations.

An unprecedented achievement in the history of Mexican national conservation was the investment in reforestations within the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Foundation (UNF) to mitigate their impact on the environment. The UNF applied World Resources Institute and Greenhouse Gas Protocol methodologies in order to calculate its historic carbon dioxide emissions and become "carbon neutral" through the voluntary market of the payment for environmental services.

This achievement was made possible by the on-going talks between the Biosphere Reserve and the United Nations Foundation, which decided to go beyond the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol in order to allow rural communities to access the payment for environmental services as an alternative mechanism for conservation. Sierra Gorda is the first pilot project of its kind in Mexico, resulting in important environmental benefits that constitute a financial mechanism for local producers and small landholders that participate in the project.

<http://www.unfoundation.org/features/earthday2006.asp>

- The Global Development Network celebrated the Seventh Annual Global Development Conference, where prestigious members gather from around the world. This is the venue for presenting the Most Innovative Development Project Award, which was held this year in Saint Petersburg, Russia, on January the 20th. Sierra Gorda was among the three finalists and was represented by Professor Ruiz Corzo. Over 700 projects applied, 10 semi-finalists were chosen, and following two on-site visits by external consultants to the Sierra Gorda, the Biodiversity Conservation project competed against organizations operating in Pakistan

and India. Sierra Gorda received special distinction as the second place winner.

- World Travel & Tourism Council awards Sierra Gorda.

The World Travel and Tourism Council includes the CEOs, founders and directors of the 100 leading tourism companies around the world (hotels, airlines, tour operators, etc.) and administers the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards in four distinct categories.

During the most recent Tourism for Tomorrow Awards cycle presented by the World Travel and Tourism Council in Washington DC on April 11, first prize went to the Sierra Gorda Eco-lodge Network under development for various years here in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve which competed with 30 international projects in the category of Destination for Tomorrow. Grupo Ecológico, represented by Roberto Pedraza R. attended the award ceremony in the National Museum Building during a formal dinner in the heart of the North American capital. This recognition obliges us to strengthen the eco-lodge network currently in operation and foster the skills to offer high quality services. For more information, please visit the following sites: www.tourismfortomorrow.com and www.globaltraveltourism.com.

- Promoting sustainable ecotourism.

In order to promote and strengthen ecotourism in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, there is now a promotional DVD that demonstrates the natural attractions of each of the seven sites within the Sierra Gorda Eco-lodge Network, their installations, and what they offer to the visitor. San Juan of the Durán, Escanela River and Santa María de Cocos are viable projects that will have an important economic and conservation impact for regional

communities in the near future. Grupo Ecológico has dedicated years to encourage and consolidate the long-term capacity of the local communities as the owners and operators of each eco-logic in the network.

- Critical watershed assessments.

While continuing a long and enjoyable working relationship with personnel of the Pacific Northwest Research Station of the USDA Forest Service, we at the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve once again counted on the advisory and technical aid of personnel of said station from the 21 to the 25th of March. Fieldtrips to work areas and future projects as well as collaborative analysis in the offices rendered valuable assessments regarding the protection and restoration planning of the priority watersheds and sub-watersheds, located in the highlands of the Pinal de Amoles. They expressed positive impressions of the fieldwork and the short and medium term strategies.

- Neighboring states adopt Sierra Gorda strategies.

Keeping up with annual tradition, GESGIAP staff celebrated the Earth Festivals with the enthusiastic participation of regional schools, professors, students, parents and grandparents. This year for the first time, the Earth Festival was attended by schools representing the states of Hidalgo and San Luis Potosí, beyond the SGBR's borders demonstrating the growing influence of this regional civil conservation movement .

- Women and Water.

From the 16 to the 20 of March, Mexico City hosted the World Water Forum where the SGBR and the GESGIAP had the opportunity to participate in the World Conservation Congress and present the social strategies being applied in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve. We had the opportunity to share our progress in natural resource restoration and hydrologic environmental service payments before a variety of public venues. In parallel, the SGBR participated for the first time in a workshop organized by the Women's Global Green Action Network, an organization that bonds women environmental leaders of more than 15 countries together through different projects and strategies, in favor of a common cause to confront the environmental crisis facing our planet.

- Social Entrepreneurs taking the initiative.

At the Latin-American Economic Forum in San Pablo, Brazil, in early April under the auspices of the World Economic Forum, Pati Ruiz Corzo (the Director of the SGBR) participated once again by invitation of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs. During the Forum, Schwab Foundation hosted the Summit of Latin American Social Entrepreneurs to present new members of their network.

Additionally, the International Association of Social Entrepreneurs headquartered in New York City held its third session of strategic planning to solidify "Sustainable Sierra Gorda" which is a collaboration amongst eight different social entrepreneurs of Ashoka: Innovators for the Public and Schwab Foundation.

The on-going project will implement various of the member's successful projects on a regional level utilizing flexible strategies of replication. In March the SGBR received Mr. Felipe Gonzalez of abcdespañol, who offered workshops with valuable didactic tools to our environmental education promoters and presented his project and materials to educational authorities of the Basic Educational Services of the State of Querétaro (USEBEQ). This project could have extensive potential in the rural mountain areas beyond the Sierra Gorda. With the support of Ashoka: Innovators for the Public, Sierra Gorda will be the real-life training ground for exploring sustainable alternatives proven throughout Latin America.

- Sierra Gorda Earth Center: Education, Community and Conservation.

In order to catalyze a systemic change towards sustainable communities, the Earth Center inaugurates its first certified capacity-building curriculum, "Community-based Environmental Education," to local, regional and state teachers. This educational package has been reviewed and validated by the USEBEQ with the added incentive to public schools teachers by gaining points on their career scale and is soon to be recognized by the Autonomous University of Querétaro. The course will include 50 hours of classroom sessions and 200 of hands-on practice.

After months of construction, the new offices of the Grupo Ecológico and installations of the Sierra Gorda Earth Center are almost complete. The training center will include sufficient installations offering diverse levels of capacity building, as well as provide offices for GESG, Sustainable Forest (Bosque Sustentable A.C.), and the Biosphere Reserve's management team. It is important to recognize that this project is being made possible thanks to generous support from the Roberto Ruiz Obregón Foundation, the National Monte de Piedad, Hewlett Packard, and resources from the Global Environment Facility administered by the United Nations Development Programme.

- Sierra Gorda represented in California.

The Sierra Gorda is happy to say it has a new ally in the city of San Francisco, California. The non-government organization Viva Sierra Gorda will seek to promote the Reserve, its conservation efforts, cost-recovery enterprises, and community products. Viva Sierra Gorda forms part of the prestigious Earth Island Institute, which also functions as a fiscal agent, channeling contributions and financial support. Check out the web page at www.earthisland.org/sierragorda.

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