



BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE SIERRA GORDA BIOSPHERE RESERVE

Hands United for Life

Informative Bulletin APRIL - JUNE 2006.

• **ECOSYSTEM SERVICE PAYMENTS AND PARKS**

The First International Workshop for Ecosystem Services, Development of Products and Markets took place May 25 and 26 as an initiative of the Ministry of Environment through the decentralized branches of the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas and the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, the Training Center for Sustainable Development (CECADESU in Spanish), the National Institute of Ecology (INE in Spanish), the Federal Senate, the Ecologico Group of Sierra Gorda (GESG in Spanish), and the international support of the U.S. Forest Service International Program, USAID and Forest Trends. The workshop was held in Amealco, Querétaro with outstanding attendance from across Mexico and especially the managers of natural protected areas. National and international experts introduced existing mechanisms of the environmental services marketplace, both voluntary and through the Clean Development Mechanism, in order to involve natural protected areas, producers, technicians, and civil society organizations in potential payments for ecosystem services across the country.

Additionally, Reforestamos México, A.C., the non-profit organization of the BIMBO corporation held a private event with Forest Trends and GESG to present an initiative to translate the www.ecosystemmarketplace.com to Spanish and a regional context. The Spanish language site intends to bring the latest trends, opportunities and basic tools to the Latin American public regarding environmental services and related markets.

We wish to recognize the valuable contribution of participants from the following institutions: Forest Trends, INE, CONANP, the Southern Border College (el Colegio de la Frontera Sur), the Atmospheric Sciences Institute of the Autonomous University of Mexico, CECADESU and the National Forestry Commission.

• **SIERRA GORDA EARTH CENTER OPEN FOR TRAINING**

The Sierra Gorda Earth Center "Education, Community and Conservation" is constructed and operating thanks to the Roberto Ruiz Obregón Foundation which donated the land for offices and a training center facility to the GESG. Subsequently resources were acquired from the Nacional Monte de Piedad and the Global Environment Facility administered by the United Nations Development Programme to construct and equip the installations, and computers were donated by Hewlett Packard Mexico for the training center's campus. The local institutions that comprise the overall Sierra Gorda project are now working side by side at the new offices: the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve management, Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda, Bosque Sustentable A.C., and Sierra Gorda Ecotours. The training center activities have ample space and services which increase the potential of these partner organizations and catalyze sustainability training to various audiences in the region and around the country.

- **CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PROFESSIONALS AT THE SIERRA GORDA EARTH CENTER**

Announcing the launch of the first certified course at the Sierra Gorda Earth Center "Education, Community and Conservation" focusing on the practical training for Community-based Environmental Education titled " Strategies for Teaching and Learning for a sustainable Future" which consists of the translated UNESCO program and the local Sierra Gorda experience in the theme. The basic characteristics of the certified course are that hands-on practice plays a central role in the 250 hour curriculum (50 hours with personal training and 200 hours of field work). It is precisely the teachers' and educational authorities' contribution to the environmental education program of the Grupo Ecológico over the years that motivated the creation of this course for primary and secondary school teachers, educational institutions, community leaders, teachers-in-training (normal schools), and organizations and individuals interested in the topic of raising awareness and fomenting stewardship of the environment.

The certified course is being held at two sites simultaneously, beginning locally on June 10th at the installations of the Sierra Gorda Earth Center in Jalpan de Serra and then in the state capital on June 17th at the Teachers College of Queretaro State. The attendees will benefit significantly from this professional capacity building by receiving points on their career scale as administered by the State's public education secretariat.

- **DOCUMENTARY FILM OF THE SIERRA GORDA EXPERIENCE**

A new documentary was recently produced by Felipe Haro that reviews the experience and activities carried out in favor of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve. The material includes interviews with personalities such as the author and reporter Elena Poniatowska, Dr. Tiahoga Ruge the director of CECADESU, and the accomplished businessman Steve Knaebel, member of the board of the Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature. The interviews reflect their personal experience and opinions regarding the on-going social strategy for conservation as do the testimonies from local beneficiaries and staff members.

- **TOURISM IN SIERRA GORDA TO BENEFIT CONSERVATION**

Recently the Director of the Biosphere Reserve began to hold consensus meetings with the tourism sector operating within the natural protected area in accordance with the Reserve's Advisory Council sub-committee on Ecotourism. The current topic is the implementation of charging for use and recreation in the protected area and complying with the existing environmental norms. The proposed strategy to the tourism sector has three important axis points: registration of the different service providers in the area with the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas; charging a usage fee to tourists and the articulation of a plan to apply the resources obtained from the fees. The objectives include standardizing and regulating the tourism operators, implementing a usage fee system and channeling the financial resources obtained towards activities in sanitation, reforestation and signage for the sites with the highest impact by tourism in the region.

- **MAMMAL RESEARCH**

Research carried out last year to monitor large mammals provided us with the first images of jaguars, ocelots, tayras and other charismatic species in the Reserve and was initiated by staff of the Natural Sciences faculty of the Autonomous University of Queretaro. To follow-up, a second team of biologists will resume the study by extending the perimeter of activities and will employ diverse techniques such as Camtrak cameras which take images of the animals through remote sensors. This project intends to determine the roaming environment of the Sierra Gorda jaguars, their geographical distribution, habitat use, prey and state of the overall population in order to design a management strategy for long-term conservation.

- **REGIONAL PLAN FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICE PAYMENTS UNDERWAY**

Based on the existing information about natural resources and the distribution of species and ecosystems in the Reserve in addition to the knowledge and experience of field staff, the preliminary perimeters for developing ecosystem products have been delineated for the following services: capture and storage of carbon, water production and biodiversity. These plots will allow for designing ecosystem products for a variety of potential clients (international organizations, government agencies, NGOs, corporations, etc.) and will produce economic benefits for local property owners in addition to creating new areas for conservation or regeneration and assuring the long-term services provided by ecosystems.