

Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve



News Bulletin.

Third Quarter 2006

Marking the VI National Conservation Week, the Sierra Gorda Earth Center will be inaugurated on the 19th of November. This important event will be attended by authorities from CONANP and the Training Center of Sustainable Development (CECADESU), branch of the Ministry of Environment (SEMARNAT). The Earth Center is an office complex that includes training center and headquarters for the Sierra Gorda Ecological Group, the civil association Bosque Sustentable (Sustainable Forest), the United Nations Development Program staff of the Global Environment Facility full-size project, and the Biosphere Reserve. The Earth Center facility began operating recently and has hosted a number of public courses and events including the UNESCO certified course entitled: "Strategies of Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future." The Earth Center will without a doubt serve as a fundamental corner stone for our activities and be focal point for education in the Sierra Gorda.

With the change in municipal governments about to take place, Sierra Gorda Earth Center is adding Environmental Agendas to the courses of special relevance in building local capacity for sustainability. These workshops directed to the newly elected municipal government officials and their cabinets will undoubtedly help in achieving harmony between equally important economic development and the conservation of natural resources, both of which heavily depend on the actions of local authorities. The workshop entitled "Integration of an Environmental Agenda to be exercised by the Municipal Government" will take place on the 26-27 of October. Topics to be covered include: Environmental Norms and Regulations, Management of Waste Water, Public Works and their Environmental Impact, Solid Waste Management and the Lack of Productive Options. This workshop will be directed towards personnel of other non-government organizations, Natural Protected Areas, private development contractors, and functionaries and directors of the municipal governments. The new administration will therefore operate in full knowledge of the regulations, environmental problems and possible solutions to the same. During the event there will be interventions by Earth Center personnel, the Reserve management, the Ministry of Urban Development (SEDESU), the Mexican Environmental Protection Agency (PROFEPA), the Autonomous University of Queretaro (UAQ) and CONANP.

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The Earth Center will host the first workshop for "The Construction and Maintenance of Low Impact Roads" to be facilitated by personnel of the Pacific Northwest Research Station of the U.S. Forest Service on the 7th - 11th of November. This is an international partnership of many years that continues to benefit the region. Invited participants include newly elected local public officials, members of other Natural Protected Areas, and state and federal government department representatives of transportation and communication in the hopes of having a direct impact in the field and reduce the environmental impact of public works. This workshop includes classroom lectures and discussions accompanied by site visits in order to see living examples of environmental impact caused by poor road construction. The Forest Service instructors have extensive experience in the topic and Latin America.

By invitation of the Holland Committee of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the World Land Trust (UK), a representative of the Sierra Gorda Ecological Group (GESG) participated in the symposium "Land Purchase as an Intervention Strategy for Biodiversity Conservation," celebrated in Holten, Holland. Representatives from Central & South America, Asia and Africa also participated, whose conservation organizations are currently using land purchase as an effective tool for the protection of sites with outstanding biological value. During this event there was an interesting exchange of experiences and presentation of projects including the on-going strategy in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve to build the Network of Private Reserves managed by organizations such as the civil association Joya del Hielo, Reforestamos México and the Cummins Philanthropic Association. This strategy incorporates various mechanisms to pay land owners for environmental services, land rental and compensation for conservation along the same bio-corredor. It is our hope that the contacts made during this event will help crystalize new ideas for long and short term projects in favor of the Sierra Gorda.

With financial support from the Pacific Northwest Research Station of the U.S. Forest Service, water quality analyses are being conducted at various sites throughout the Escanela River watershed which discharges into the Jalpan reservoir and as a result many other populations in the Sierra. The parameters of the study are being applied relative to the presence of heavy metals, given that previously fish specimens had shown signs of bone malformation which may be a result of contaminated waters. Therefore, the water samples are being taken from past and present sites of mines with mercury extraction within the watershed in order to fully evaluate levels of toxicity.

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In the core protected area of Joya del Hielo, protective fencing was installed around the private reserves of Joya del Hielo A.C. and Reforestamos México A.C. in order to prevent cattle from entering. Fencing is of the utmost importance taking into account cattle from neighboring communities which otherwise graze extensively in the woods and are affecting the natural processes of forestry succession and undergrowth structures which provide vital habitat to priority species such as the Bearded Wood-Partridge (*Dendrortyx barbatus*). The benefits and results of fencing are notable and immediate, allowing for wildlife and natural conditions in the protected area.

After a long process of evaluation and negotiation, the Board of Directors and the Water Committee of the Gonzalo Rio Arronte Foundation approved the project "Support for the Recharge and Rehabilitation for Priority Springs in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve," presented by the Sierra Gorda Ecological Group I.A.P. This four year project's primary goal is to increase the natural production of water in priority springs and drainages within the Reserve, providing important socio-environmental benefits inside and beyond the designated area. This project includes activities relating to restoration and protection of soils, reforestation, water infiltration, prevention of forest fires and compensations to land owners for forest and jungle conservation in priority hydrological recharge areas. It is our hope that these efforts will have an effective impact on the future availability of sufficient supplies of fresh water.

Recently, Conca was the site for the International Street Theater Workshop organized by the young members of the Sierra Gorda Ecoclubs and hosted by the Sierra Gorda Ecological Group. Representatives from the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua as well as the 18 Ecoclubs in the Sierra Gorda regions of Guanajuato and Queretaro States were welcomed during this three day event. Participants were equipped with tools and alternative methods of theater expression in order to raise awareness and further communicate topics of environmental conservation in their communities. The historical center of Jalpan de Serra was literally "taken by siege" by the newly trained Eco-clubs who presented their explosive skit "Clean Your World," which addressed community sanitation. The theater troop was well-received by the local population and support from local transit authorities.

Following a period of intensive field and office work, the Biosphere Reserve's geographic information system proved to be an indispensable tool that was used to complete the Territorial Ordinance Plan for the zones corresponding to the Ayutla and Conca Rivers. In recent years, these areas have suffered an accelerated process of urbanization, tourism development and sand extraction from the Conca River all which are causing serious damage to the zones ecological integrity. Financing for this project is provided by the Program for Sustainable Rural Development of the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP). Also included is the support of local authorities who we hope will continue to enforce zoning regulations that permit an organized development of the area with respect to the environment in this fragile area.