

Biodiversity Conservation in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve

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New federal protected area in the Sierra Gorda bio-region. On February 2, 2007, the legal decree creating the Sierra Gorda of Guanajuato Biosphere Reserve was published in the Official Federal Register. This new federal protected area has a surface area of 236,882 hectares, including the counties of Atarjea, Santa Catarina, San Luis de la Paz and Xichu, directly abutting the western border of the existing Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve in the state of Queretaro.

The local authorities in the state of Guanajuato, particularly mayors of those counties, pursued the petition to gain the Biosphere Reserve status, intending to repeat the strategies and field activities underway in the state of Queretaro in partnership with the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda. Having visited the Sierra Gorda (Queretaro) and interviewed participants in environmental education, recycling, economic development and other activities on various occasions, they became convinced the region would benefit from a similar development strategy.

The Sierra Gorda of Guanajuato is located on the western slope of the Eastern Sierra Madre. Established ecosystems contain species more adapted to scarce rains and prolonged dry seasons and are dominated by three ecosystems: temperate forests of pine and oak species, dry tropical forests in the deep canyons in the mountain range and xerophyllous scrub in the more arid and exposed portions.

Jaguar monitoring in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve is underway through a collaboration between Bosque Sustentable (Sustainable Forest, a local civil organization established in 2002) and Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda (Sierra Gorda Ecological Group, established in 1987). The objectives of the research are to learn the distribution, individual habitat, and the approximate number of this large feline within the Biosphere Reserve. On February 24, the first photographs of a local jaguar were recovered from camera traps established for continual monitoring. Other relevant species on film include the white tailed deer and paca. It is satisfying to know that this photographic record is from the private reserves that have been established within the Reserve and prove their effectiveness in strategic conservation.

This ongoing research forms part of a larger project to establish a greater jaguar conservation corridor from Sierra Gorda of Queretaro to the mountains of the state of Nuevo Leon to the north in collaboration with a number of other institutions. We would like to thank Dr. David Sanchez Hermosillo, Head of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources of the San Luis Potosi State Government, for inviting Sierra Gorda to join this initiative and enrich the knowledge of biodiversity wealth that spans the Eastern Sierra Madre from central to northern Mexico.

Building the road to a conservation economy. The Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve hosted a delegation of state and federal legislators on March 23 to visit projects for conservation and sustainable development in the field with the Biosphere Reserve Director and staff. This was a unique opportunity to talk about and demonstrate firsthand the need for legislation that promotes the conservation of forests through the perspective of laying the foundations for a conservation economy. The visitors understood that this has to factor into the livelihood of property owners so that they will care for and improve their forests rather than destroy them to establish traditional livestock and agricultural activities.

Among the participants were district representative Leodegario Rios Esquivel, federal representative Joel Guerrero, who is president of the federal legislature's Commission for People that Live in the Forest, and state representative Maria de Jesus Ibarra Silva, president of the State Congress' Commission for Sustainable Development. The three legislators were accompanied by Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, director of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, the state delegate of the Federal Attorney General's Office for Environmental Protection and representatives from other agencies.

IUCN and Danmuth Foundation protect Sierra Gorda forests. With the generous support of the Holland Committee of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Danmuth Foundation (USA), 379 hectares of cloud forest, pine-oak forest, tropical oak groves, and dry tropical forests were acquired. These lands form four new private reserves that will be strictly protected by the civil organization Joya del Hielo A.C. These forests are home to a diversity of endemic species of flora and fauna, threatened or in danger of extinction, and from now on will be protected in perpetuity. These sites protect a wide variety of species, from magnolias to jaguars, ocelots, bearded wood-partridges, brocket deer, endemic barrel cacti, orchids and cycads, and represent different biomes and climates.

These properties will be incorporated into the Network of Private Reserves of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve and will benefit from conservation management in perpetuity, eliminating extractive uses and other threats to their biological richness. These 379 ha will be added to the 456 ha of property already under the protection of the Association, significantly increasing the area it manages and in turn safeguarding the environmental services of global benefit that these forests provide.

Reserve director recognized for climate change work. In celebration of International Woman's Day, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) launched an initiative to recognize the efforts of women all over the world who are working in diverse ways to stop the rapid advance of climate change, without doubt the greatest threat to the life and humanity of this planet in thousands of years. Twenty-four women were selected for their projects of impact that are making a difference. Among the enterprising women selected was Reserve Director Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, who was recognized for her work in reforestation, establishment of private nature reserves, payment for ecosystem services, and pioneering schemes of carbon sequestration for voluntary markets that have succeeded in carrying out the storage and capture of carbon in thousands of hectares of forests of the Reserve. Information on the 24 women selected can be found on the Web site of the IUCN at http://www.generoyambiente.org/admin/admin_noticias/documentos_noticias/CC%20women%20finalists.pdf

World Land Trust visits Sierra Gorda. Having as its seat a small town in the middle of rural Suffolk in the United Kingdom, the World Land Trust is a non-governmental organization founded in 1989 that has initiated the direct conservation of critical habitat and threatened species in a variety of countries, including Belize, Costa Rica, Brazil, Ecuador, and the Philippines. Thanks to the support of the World Land Trust, there are now hundreds of thousands of hectares of protected forest and jungle where projects of reforestation and carbon sequestration are being carried out.

Among the members of the Board of Directors are highly esteemed personalities like Sir David Attenborough, the famous BBC documentary film maker, and others that give testimony to the seriousness of the organization. Thanks to our attendance at the symposium "Private Reserves as a Tool for Conservation" organized at the end of last year by the Holland Committee of the IUCN, we had our first opportunity to approach the director of the World Land Trust as well as personnel of the organization, who did not have an associate in Mexico and became interested in developing a relationship with the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda in the areas of reforestation, carbon sequestration and the Program of Lands for Conservation. Personnel from this organization visited the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve with the goal of getting to know the field sites for developing projects that will conserve unique species and habitats. We hope to soon count on the World Land Trust as a new and valuable ally.

Diploma course for teachers concludes. The Sierra Gorda Earth Center "Roberto Ruiz Obregon" graduated its first generation of teachers from the diploma course of "Strategies of Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future" on March 24 in the City of Queretaro and on March 30 in Jalpan de Serra. The course utilized educational curriculum of UNESCO translated into Spanish and adapted to the local experience of the Sierra Gorda. This constituted an enriching experience on both parts; the participating teachers acquired new tools and knowledge that will permit them to give environmental meaning to their teaching and on our part the experience obtained will permit the enrichment of successive versions of the same course.

JICA sending two new volunteers. As part of the long working relationship with the Agency of International Cooperation of the Government of Japan (JICA) the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda IAP will receive two new Japanese volunteers who will soon join our work team. For two years they will stay in the Sierra Gorda, where one of them will work in the environmental education program while the other volunteer will work as an instructor for the work group of the carpentry workshop of San Juan de los Duran. Based on the results of the first JICA volunteer, who acted as an instructor in the ceramics workshop in the community of Soledad de Guadalupe, we can expect professionalism and real gains to be made from this sharing of knowledge. For this reason, the new volunteers are welcome help to the project.

Marking the celebration of the World Day for Water, the young members of the Ecoclub “Youth United for Life” of Jalpan organized the first conference on “Water and Youth” with the support of the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda and the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve. Students of the secondary schools of Jalpan de Serra, Landa de Matamoros, Agua Zarca, Ahuacatlan, Pinal de Amoles, Purisima, Conca and Arroyo Seco participated. The event united students of different areas of the Reserve who come from diverse watersheds and exposed them to the problems and need for action to protect and restore the sources of our precious water. Each school was represented by seven students who committed to taking action in their watersheds of origin. In the forum, experts presented reports on themes such as protection of water sources, hydrologic monitoring, cleanup of water sources, as well as putting into action scientific experiments to monitor water quality, showing videos, and story telling. Likewise, in April representatives from Eco Clubs within the Sierra participated in the International Meeting of Ecoclubs celebrated in Argentina.