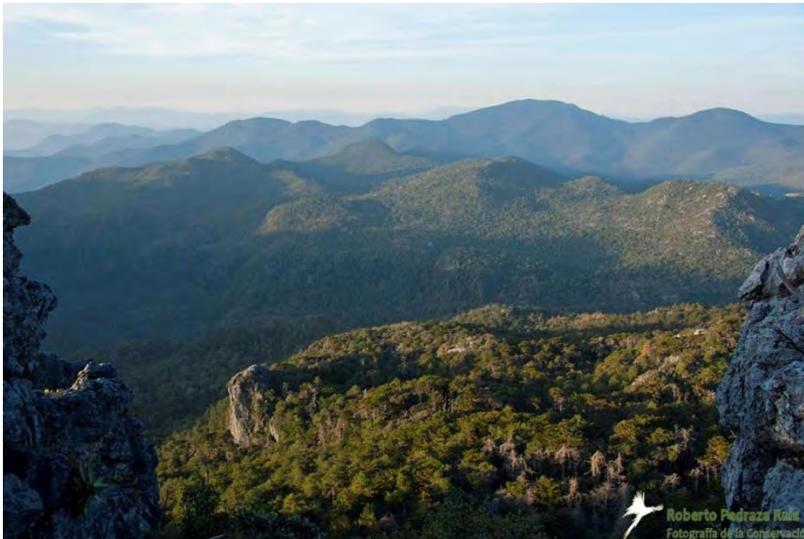


Expanding the Cerro Prieto- Cerro La Luz Reserve, Querétaro, México.

In April, 2014 GCBO awarded a Tropical Forest Fund Forever grant of \$20,000 to **Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda** – our fourth grant in support of the long-range plan to protect all of the ecosystems of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve in Mexico.

Since 1996, **Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda** has protected a network of private nature reserves, via their Joya del Hielo A.C. Foundation. This strategy has been very effective in protecting areas where economic activities (cattle ranching, logging or clearings for agriculture) once were the norm. To date, almost 5,000 hectares (12,350 acres) of cloud, temperate and tropical forest has been protected, all of them along the eastern ridge of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, an important biological corridor for a number of species, such as the jaguar, military macaw, great curassow and bearded-wood partridge, as well as numerous species of neotropical migrants that use these temperate forests as wintering grounds.



This most recent Tropical Forest Forever Fund grant resulted in the expansion of the reserve with the purchase of the 49.42 hectare (122 acres) Hoya de los Escorpiones tract.

Southern view of the reserve, from the Cerro de la Luz.

About our Mexico partners:

Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda was founded in 1987 by a group of local inhabitants of the Sierra Gorda of Querétaro, one of Mexico's poorest and most eco-diverse regions. When it began its work, Sierra Gorda faced numerous threats typical to areas with high biodiversity in Mexico and Latin America: cattle ranching, inefficient agricultural practices, forest fires, inadequate forest management, pollution, lack of solid waste management, and public works that did not comply with environmental regulations, in addition to the extreme poverty of its inhabitants.

In 1997 the region was decreed a Biosphere Reserve: 33% of the state of Querétaro and 383,567 hectares are now under conservation management. It is the only reserve in the country that has been established from the bottom up.

The Project Site:

This heavily forested, mid-elevation tract is mostly pine, oak, and white cedar on a bed of karst and limestone that serves to recharge the water table. Although no formal wildlife surveys have yet to be conducted in the area, observations of puma and jaguar tracks and scats, as well as other indicator species, such as crested guans (*Penelope purpurascens*) and bearded-wood partridges (*Dendrortyx barbatus*) have been made recently. Neotropical migrants include Townsend's, Wilson's, Black and white, Grace's, Black-throated green and Hermit warblers; Ovenbirds; Hepatic and Summer tanagers; House wrens; Swainson's thrushes; have also been recorded while scouting.

Regional Threats to Biodiversity:

The SGBR, as in other areas in rural Mexico, has suffered environmental degradation because of traditional productive activities, such as cattle ranching, forest clearing for agriculture (and the consequent forest fires) and logging, all of them of high environmental impact and low income return.

For 14 years, the organization made sure the federal protected area policies were upheld. For 8 years it received financing from the Global Environment Facility to manage a conservation project, which was administered by the UNDP, operated by the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas and executed by GESGIAP and its affiliate Bosque Sustentable A.C.. This allowed the capitalization of the region with new skills, infrastructure and economic value for ecosystem services of forests and scenic beauty.



Each year, 35,000 local people are organized to perform different sanitation tasks, as well as community education, sustainable development, forest regeneration and soil conservation, the development of a rural tourism model, payments for ecosystem services, establishment of natural private reserves, and the development of soil and forest carbon offsets.

As winners of the National Geographic Geotourism Challenge, and with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, they are building the "Sierra Gorda Tourist Destination", with more than 75 local tour operators, strengthening customer service capacities, improving infrastructure and developing new products and packages for world-class tourism.

The reforestation efforts established 25 years ago by with small landowners are now available on the voluntary carbon offsetting market, offering their forest products and carbon capture. All of this is aimed towards generating economic value and opportunities for the owners of the forest resources and farmers.

The project has been acknowledged by the National Geographic Society and the Buffet Foundation with the 2012 award for Latin America Leadership in Conservation; in 2009, the project "Reduction of the impact of animal husbandry on biodiversity through payments for ecosystem services and intensive agriculture" was chosen by the Global Development Marketplace and the World Bank. Furthermore, the organization has had special consultative status within the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2008. GESGIAP won the Rolex Award for social initiative in 2002, it has been a two-time winner of the Energy Globe National Prize in the categories of Earth and Youth, and in 1996 it became an Ashoka Fellow.

Want to know more? Contact:

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Bromeliads, orchids and agaves cover the trunks and rocks of this special forest forming unique plant communities that shelter endangered amphibians.