



Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda I.A.P

Our mission is to mobilize civil society and institutions to preserve the protected area with the highest number of ecosystems in Mexico, a mega-diverse country.



Grupo Ecológico
Sierra Gorda^{IAP}

About

Who are we?

Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda leads a group of social organizations who work for the restoration, preservation and conservation of the amazing biodiversity of Querétaro's Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve. For a conservation strategy to directly involve local communities this alliance of local independent civil organizations generate opportunities for the social and economic development of the landowners.

The Sierra Gorda Alliance includes:

- **Bosque Sustentable, A.C.**, dedicated to the holistic management of resources and the restoration of soils, forests and wildlife habitat.
- **Joya del Hielo, A.C.** dedicated to the purchase of lands for strict conservation and creating a network of private nature reserves.
- **Productos y Servicios Turísticos Sierra Gorda S.A de C.V.**, operates Sierra Gorda Ecotours which works with 75 community owned and operated nature and cultural tourism microenterprises. The regional trademark, Sierra Gorda Products, supports local women-run artisanry workshops;
- **Viva Sierra Gorda**, a non-profit partner with tax deductibility in California, United States.

We are pioneers in collaborative strategies for conservation and sustainable development that generate a Social Return on Investment (SROI) of USD\$32.07 for each dollar received. Annually, we directly involve 35,000 local people in community environmental education and solid waste management, organic gardens, artisans workshops, conservation of forests and the regeneration of soils in order to safeguard their land and improve productivity.

Our History

Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (GESG) was founded in 1987 by a small group of local citizens as a response to the alarming levels of environmental destruction and deforestation that were taking place in the region. Investing in environmental education and community participation projects, and the reforestation of six thousand hectares has gained the participation of 600-plus communities, and resulted in the federal decree of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, the only such Reserve in Mexico created through the efforts of ordinary citizens.

Sierra Gorda became one of the first Early Adopters of the Sustainable Destination Standard by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), and gone on to win international prizes for the ecotourism model for conservation. The first project in Mexico to be validated by the Rainforest Alliance under the voluntary market standards VCS and CCB, Sierra Gorda continues to pioneer local protocols to mitigate climate change.

The endorsement of the work of the Sierra Gorda Alliance is demonstrated by 30 national and international prizes ranging from recognition as an "Exceptional Social Entrepreneur" by Ashoka Innovators for the Public and the Schwab Foundation, and the prestigious UNEP Champion of the Earth, the Wangari Mathaai Forest Prize, and the National Geographic Conservation Leadership Award to the Director of GESG.

Savory Institute certified the GESG as the Savory HUB in Central Mexico— part of a global network to mitigate climate change and poverty. We are leading a work groups in five states in central and northern Mexico for the regeneration of soils in agriculture and livestock management landscapes.

The Founders

Martha Isabel "Pati" Ruiz Corzo

With 30 years' experience in innovative conservation and community participation, Pati is one of the most respected environmental leaders of Latin America. When the decree for the Biosphere Reserve was approved, she served 14 years as the Federal Director of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, as well as the coordinator of a full size GEF project administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and operated by Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda.



Roberto Pedraza Muñoz

Co-founder and Executive Director of GESG, Roberto directs Payments for Environmental Services and Lands for Conservation programs. His extensive knowledge of the region and its landowners has earned their respect to act as mediator for the rural communities with federal agencies and their confidence to manage a civil network of vigilance against environmental crime.



The Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve

With an exceptional variety of species and ecosystems, the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve (SGBR) covers 384,567 hectares, 32% of Querétaro State. In terms of ecosystem diversity, it is first in Mexico among natural protected areas.

The ecosystems present are found at altitudes between 300 and 3,160 meters above sea level, covering peaks, canyons, valleys and a multitude of sinkholes thanks to the limestone geology. The vegetation types go from arid scrub to temperate forests, cloud forests, riparian forests and two varieties of tropical forest, as well as the dry deciduous and sub-deciduous forest.

The Reserve is home to a rich diversity of species of flora and fauna threatened with extinction. For the moment, 110 species of mammals, 339 birds, 134 reptiles and amphibians, 27 fish, 800 butterflies and 2,308 plant species have been registered in the Reserve, although there are species that are only just being discovered.

This natural wealth provides a great variety of ecosystem services, such as hydrologic recharge, capture and storage of carbon, soil formation and retention, scenic beauty, biodiver-

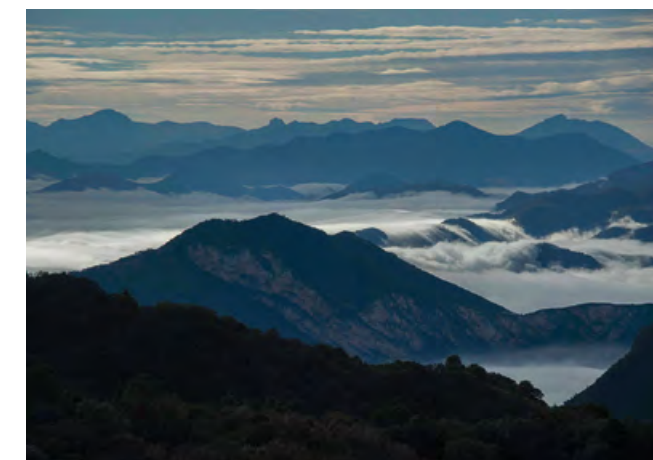
sity, and the production of oxygen. The Biosphere Reserve is the green lung of Querétaro.

Thanks to the conservation of the area, emblematic animals such as the jaguar, puma, ocelot, bearded wood partridge, and military macaw find a refuge here.

The SGBR is part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves, within the Man and Biosphere Programme (MaB) and is recognized as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA).

Additionally, it has over 500 archaeological sites and five Franciscan missions from the XVIII century that have been designated by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites.

It is also home to around 638 communities and 100,000 inhabitants, who are owners of 97% of the land, and as such, play a critical role in its conservation and protection.



Our Work

We believe that climate change adaptation and the fight against poverty should go hand in hand. Our experience has shown us that the sustainable conservation of ecosystems in the SGBR can only be achieved through the generation of economic opportunities for the owners of local lands.

Therefore, we operate innovative programs that involve benefits for people, nature and the local economy.

Community-based Tourism

With community ecotourism on the rise and our support of local micro-entrepreneurs, new income opportunities are providing earnings for families, strengthening their capacities and converting the Sierra into a Natural and Cultural Destination.

Currently, we support the restaurants of the Flavor Trail (Ruta del Sabor), ecolodges, artisan producers of herbal remedies, ceramics, cheeses, embroidery and processed foods, creating a complete tourism experience. We also offer educational tourism, hikes in natural sanctuaries, and cultural and gastronomic experiences in which interaction with local people is paramount.

Due to the above, Sierra Gorda is recognized as a model under the Sustainable Destination standard of the World Tourism Organization.

Climate Change Adaptation

To conserve the biodiversity of the northern third of Querétaro State, we have been able to obtain payments for forest owners in exchange for the environmental services which their ecosystems provide us. By excluding cattle, chainsaws and eliminating forest fires, the regeneration of forests increments the carbon captured in biomass. Simultaneously, local people improve their quality of life with the income they receive.

With our Biodiverse Carbon project, individuals, companies, and the state government mitigate their carbon emissions in the Sierra Gorda's forests. To date, more than 14,000 hectares of forest have been protected through CO2 emissions offsets that establish a precedent in the country for climate change mitigation mechanisms.

GESG has influenced public policies at a state and federal level through inter-institutional partnerships and its proven track record inspires replication of the local methodologies.



Foto: Thalia Davidoff



Our Work

We are also working with 23 pilot ranches in five states of Mexico where, through the holistic management of livestock, we are capturing carbon dioxide in soils under a series of regenerative practices. In this project, we have the collaboration of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA) and support from the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), with the plan of achieving the replication of these regenerative practices in other areas of Mexico in the next three years.

Lessons learned over the decades

The organizations within our Alliance offer to share the accumulated experience through educational packages offered at the headquarters in Jalpan de Serra, known as Centro Tierra (Earth Center).

Centro Tierra offers a wide selection of on-site courses, workshops and online classes about areas of expertise such as Social Return on Investment and the UNESCO curriculum for Sustainable Development Education for teachers and professionals.

In addition, we offer the Savory Institute's Holistic Management Diploma, training instructors at every level: community

leaders, farmers and technicians in order to restore fertility to the soils. Centro Tierra hosts 40 workshops a year, directed toward youth, teachers, tourism operators, students, and agriculture and forestry producers. The ongoing work in the communities provides a living laboratory where we organize educational fieldtrips and conferences that attract attendees from throughout Mexico.

Community Environmental Education

GESG carries out an intense community environmental education program in rural schools and in turn in the homes, community and includes authority figures. We produce two radio programs per week, didactic materials, Earth Festivals, film clubs, bird watching, parents' meetings, organization of community workdays, sign and mural painting with environmental messages, and for the voluntary youth, national eco-leader camps, and more.

From 2000 to 2015, GESG's environmental education program has worked in 150 communities in the five municipalities of the Reserve and its buffer zones in neighboring states: Hidalgo, Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí. In this way, we have been able to reach 200 schools and a total of 20,000 children.



Foto: Mario Pedraza Ruiz



In the Press

Here is a selection of our favorite pieces.

2015

John, Bethan. Roberto Pedraza Ruiz: Alleviating poverty through nature's protection in Mexico.

http://www.discoverconservation.org/alleviating-poverty-conservation-mexico/?utm_content=buffer22936&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

Huffington Post.

Viaja, aliméntate, vístete. Y págale al Planeta lo que le debes. http://www.huffingtonpost.es/esther-diaz/viaja-alimentate-vistete_b_7552172.html

El día en que mi hermano entendió para qué sirve un jaguar

http://www.huffingtonpost.es/esther-diaz/el-dia-en-que-mi-hermano_b_8829118.html

Conecto.mx.

Empoderan ingresos a mujeres de la Sierra Gorda. <http://www.conecto.mx/es/empoderan-ingresos-a-mujeres-sg/>

Sobre las hadas y duendes de la Sierra Gorda.

<http://www.conecto.mx/es/sobre-las-hadas-y-duendes-de-la-sierra-gorda/>

Reforma journal. Palabras que cambian al mundo.

<http://www.reforma.com/aplicacioneslibre/articulo/default.aspx?id=510901&md5=346b3439fdaf2b01c9d787ec529754b&ta=0dfdbac11765226904c16cb9ad1b2efe>

2014

Ted talks. A champion in the hills: Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo at TEDxNairobi. <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/A-champion-in-the-hills-Martha>



Regenerative Qualities of Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda.

<http://fieldguide.capitalinstitute.org/grupo-ecologico-shares-stories-of-biodiversity-and-regeneration.html>

Soil Restoration in Mexico's Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve/Restauración de Suelos en la Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda, México.

<http://peoplefoodandnature.org/blog/soil-restoration-in-mexicos-sierra-gorda-biosphere-reserve>

La vida simple y el amor a la tierra inspiran a la luchadora ambientalista de la Sierra Gorda. http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/spanish/2014/10/la-vida-simple-y-el-amor-a-la-tierra-inspiran-a-la-luchadora-ambientalista-de-la-sierra-gorda/#.Vp_bGprhAdV

2012

Ted talks. La Sierra Gorda: Pati Ruiz Corzo at TEDxValledeBravo. <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/La-Sierra-Gorda-Pati-Ruiz-Corzo>

2011

Vu du Ciel en la Sierra Gorda, Yann Arthus-Bertrand (with Spanish subtitles). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrgNRg7cdUc&feature=youtu.be>



Mexico Reaches its First Carbon Standard Milestone.

<http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-641671>

Sierra Gorda Brings Small-Scale Farmers into Mainstream Carbon Market With Dual Validation Under VCS and CCB.

<http://www.ecosystemmarketplace.com/articles/sierra-gorda-brings-small-scale-farmers-into-mainstream-carbon-market-with-dual-validation-under-vcs-and-ccb/>

2010

The Guardian. Conservation can be a weapon against poverty.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/jul/05/conservation-poverty-sierra-gorda>

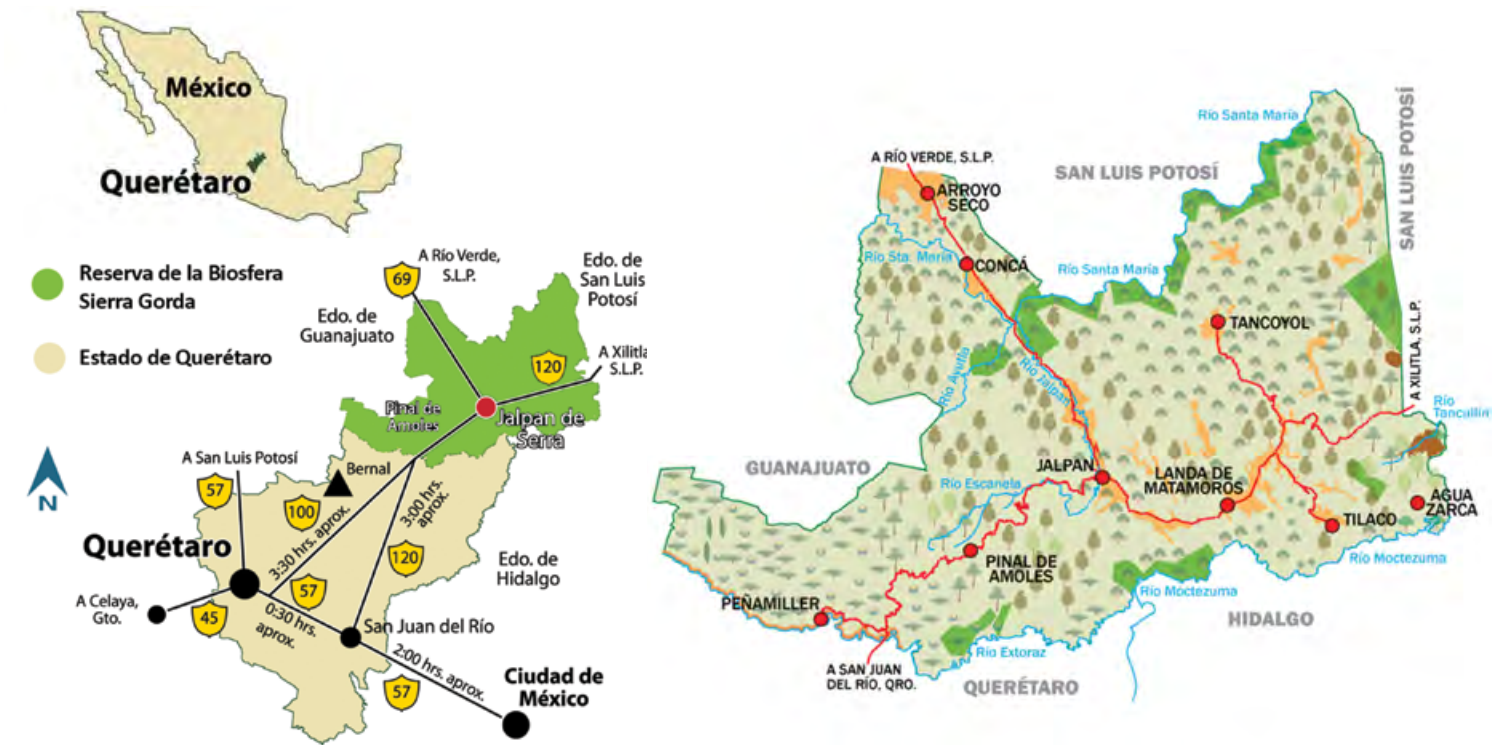
En español: <http://www.ipsnoticias.net/2010/06/conservacion-como-arma-contra-la-pobreza/>



2009

Meet Me at the Oasis, Scott Weidensaul. <http://www.audubon.org/magazine/may-june-2009/meet-me-oasis>

Map of the Sierra Gorda



OFFSET YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT



Mitigate your personal and work trips



Calculate your carbon footprint in our web page



Help to conserve forests and restore soils to combat climate change

www.planetacarbonneutral.org

And our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/vivasierragorda>



Prizes



2016

World Legacy Awards,
National Geographic
Winner in the Conserving
the Natural World Category.



2015

Nicolas Sosa
Ecological Ethics prize,
Spanish Environmental
Education Association.



2014

Wangari Maathai,
Collaborative
Partnership on
Forests.



2013

Champions of the
Earth, Category
"Inspiration and
Action" UNDP.



2012

National Geographic
Society / Buffet
prize for leadership
in Latin American
conservation.

Alianza por la Sierra Gorda



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*All photos are by Roberto Pedraza Ruiz,
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