



NEWS FROM HONDURAS

Honduras Community Support Corporation

November 2008

HELPING RURAL HONDURANS TO LIVE BETTER ON THE LAND
AND TO PROTECT THE LAND THEY LIVE ON

WATERSHED PROTECTION

This year's watershed protection efforts have taken on a new character. In the past 5 years HCSC has funded the acquisition of eight parcels of watershed land, affecting the water systems of seven communities (about 200 acres for a total cost of about \$30,000). These lands are now owned by our grassroots-controlled Honduran partner FECOVESO (Fundacion Eco Verde Sostenible: see stories on page 3). This year's efforts to protect additional land have faced new complications, from which we have learned some lessons and have developed some significant relationships, including relationships with local government and the Honduran military.



DEFORESTED CORINTO WATERSHED

Efforts to complete the protection of the watershed serving the rapidly growing community of Corinto on the Guatemalan border are one example. Two years ago, Corinto requested funding for the acquisition of three parcels, totaling more than 75 acres, from three owners who had agreed to sell for a single per-manzana price (1 manzana = 1.73 acres). Two of these purchases were concluded last year, and HCSC agreed to support the acquisition of the third parcel as well, but only if Corinto – a community with a little more wealth than most of those we have assisted – could raise part of the cost on its own. The community did raise its part of the cost, but, in the meantime, that owner decided to take advantage of the situation and doubled his price for the land. He also cut over and burned his parcel and turned cattle onto it.

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NAVAL SUPPORT

The good – and surprising – news from Corinto is that the Naval Base in Puerto Cortes sent cadets to plant trees in the watershed. The initiative derived from a national policy of using the military to help protect the country's forests. Cadets were bussed to Corinto, where they were served breakfast by the community and then joined residents in the hike to the watershed and in the work of planting.



PLANTING IN CORINTO

Seedlings were supplied from a small nursery operated by the base. More seedlings were needed to complete this and the other watershed reforestation projects that the base would like to assist. The base was eager to start more seedlings, but needed more seeds. Nola was able to obtain seeds for them from a Honduras program operated by the US-based nonprofit "Trees for the Future." So we look forward to seeing more sailors in the mountains in the future.

FUNDRAISING: BALEADAS TO YOGA

This year we again held a tag sale in Cambridge, NY, featuring Honduras coffee donated by a local on-line merchant, clothing made by Chaio Gomez of Milla Cinco, and Baleadas made in the Honduran fashion by HCSC Board members, among many other donated items. The sale brought in more than \$800.

This fall, a yoga teacher in Saranac Lake, NY, has contributed a portion of her weekly fee for the 3-month gentle yoga class that she teaches, amounting to a generous cash donation.

And of course we continue to receive generous support from many others, and we are grateful to all.

SCHOOLS

MEDICAL SUPPLIES. The community of Nueva Vida asked HCSC to provide a medical supplies kit for its school. The idea struck both HCSC and FECOVESO as a good one and we are now working to provide kits for schools in more than a dozen communities, where medical help is otherwise likely to be hours away in an emergency. What the kits will include will be decided by a meeting of Guardianas de Salud (“guardians of health” in each community, who receive some medical training). Some of the requested supplies will then be provided by CAMO (Central American Medical Outreach) through a contact made at this year’s Project Honduras Conference. A generous donation from the Saranac Lake, NY, Episcopal Church will cover costs for the first round of medical kits.



LAS CHICAS CLASS MEETING ON A NEIGHBOR’S PORCH

LAS CHICAS SCHOOL. HCSC funding has covered the cost of building materials for needed school improvements in the community of Las Chicas. The school had been operating with two teachers but only a single classroom. And that room had no ceiling, so it became extremely hot as the tropical sun heated its metal roof. HCSC paid for materials so that community workers could construct a ceiling over the existing room and build an addition to provide a second room. White paint was also provided to brighten the interior of the building, which has no electric lighting.

SITE FOR MILLA CINCO PRIMARY SCHOOL. HCSC has funded the purchase of a parcel of land in the community of Milla Cinco for the construction of a school for the community’s kindergarten – now housed in cramped make-shift quarters – and for other primary grade students who must now walk more than a mile along the dangerous coastal highway to reach the nearest school. The community has worked hard to find an appropriate site and to raise money for building materials. Construction will be carried out by members of the community.



FUNDRAISER RAFFLE IN MILLA CINCO

DESKS FOR RIO CHIQUITO. Potential colegio (high school) students in the community of Rio Chiquito would need to travel some distance to reach the nearest regular colegio program. Colegio-level classes are therefore being provided in the community’s elementary school. But the colegio students are too big for the elementary school desks. HCSC is funding the community’s request for larger desks.

AND A NEW TANK FOR RIO CHIQUITO

Rio Chiquito’s new water system was otherwise complete, but funding for the project was insufficient for the necessary large holding tank. HCSC provided the funding for the construction pictured below.



BASE OF NEW TANK UNDER CONSTRUCTION

FECOVESO NEWS

PROJECT HONDURAS CONFERENCE. FECOVESO staff person (and board member) Nestor Lainez and two other board members plus HCSC President Nola White traveled in October to the village of Copan Ruinas to participate in the annual 3-day Project Honduras Conference, which brings together several hundred people involved in constructive projects serving the people of Honduras. Nestor gave a presentation to the conference on FECOVESO's unique role as a grassroots steward of watershed land and supporter of community-based projects. As in past years, a number of useful contacts were made.



NESTOR (LEFT) AND JULIO AT THE CONFERENCE

ASSISTING CHINDA. At last year's Project Honduras Conference, FECOVESO representatives met people from the municipality of Chinda, on the inland side of the coastal mountains, who are working to preserve land in a large watershed on which a number of their community water systems depend. The group now wants to create an organization on the FECOVESO model to steward watershed land. In October, 17 people, including representatives from all of the participating communities, made the 3-hour trip to Omoa to discuss their plans and seek guidance from FECOVESO board members. HCSC has committed \$500 to cover incorporation expenses, and a loan of \$2000 so that the group will have the money in a bank account necessary to fulfill one of the requirements for incorporation.

FECOVESO TO MAKE ITS OWN GRANTS. In the past, FECOVESO's work has been limited to owning and managing watershed lands acquired with HCSC funding. Grants for water system construction, school improvements, and other community projects have been made directly by HCSC to the communities. This year, however, HCSC's support of FECOVESO includes \$2000 to be used for grants to communities for the kinds of projects HCSC has been making directly. A FECOVESO board committee has been meeting with Nola to develop a process for making such grants. HCSC's long-term vision involves channeling an increasing portion of such grant-making activities through FECOVESO.



CHINDA PEOPLE MEETING WITH FECOVESO

COMMUNITY FINANCE

NUEVA VIDA. Two years ago HCSC made a grant of \$1300 to a micro savings and loan association – Caja Rural de Ahorro y Credito – organized in the community of Nueva Vida, on a model that is also being implemented elsewhere. The \$1300 grant supplemented initial capitalization of \$2600 raised through member deposits and fundraising activities. Loans are made to community members for such things as agricultural supplies, home improvements, health care needs, etc. The repayment record to date has been excellent, but loan requests now exceed the available capital. HCSC has therefore loaned the Caja 40,000 lempira (about \$2116) at 0% interest. The loan will become repayable in annual increments beginning in 2009, but HCSC's intent is to leave the money in the Caja as long as annual reports show the organization continuing to perform well. Caja Rural is staffed one day a week by Nestor Lainez, who also staffs FECOVESO one day a week.

MILLA CUATRO AND MILLA CINCO. These adjacent communities are working to organize and capitalize their own Caja Rural to address the financial needs of their residents. HCSC has encouraged the effort and is a potential source of additional capital in the future.



INFORMAL DISCUSSION

WATERSHED PROTECTION

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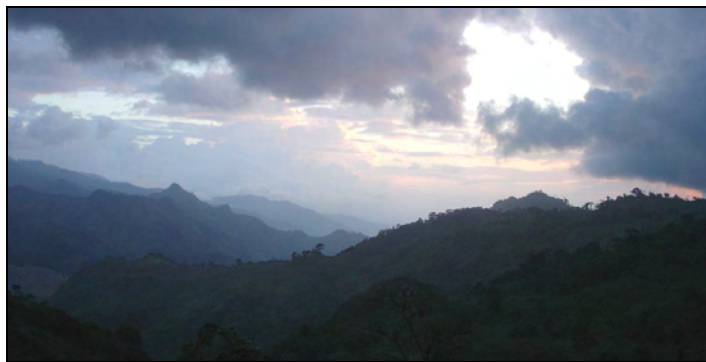
Honduran law prohibits these actions on land affecting a community's water source. Such laws are rarely enforced, but when representatives of Corinto, FECOVESO and HCSC together contacted the regional environmental office, the agency told the landowner that, if he didn't sell the land, he would have to take steps to reforest it and exclude cattle. In hindsight, it was perhaps a mistake to delay purchase of the third parcel, but we now hope that, with continued legal pressure, the parcel will finally be acquired, and the three parcels together can then be fenced.

The regional environmental office was again contacted this year when the owner of a parcel higher in the Corinto watershed began cutting trees and introduced cattle onto land bordering two tributary streams. The agency responded by levying a fine and ordering the landowner to begin reforestation and, if cattle were to be grazed in the area, to build fences to keep them at least 250 meters from the streams. HCSC and FECOVESO offered to buy the land, but the owner chose to keep it and comply with the agency's orders.



MONTE VISTA HOME

ANOTHER COMPLICATED WATERSHED PROJECT. For more than a year we have been working to acquire a 100-acre parcel that contains both the water source for the community of Nueva Florida and a source that the community of Monte Vista hopes to gain access to for their system (plans developed last year with HCSC-FECOVESO support: see 2007 newsletter). The land is high in the mountains. It is owned by a resident of the city of San Pedro Sula who is developing a coffee plantation as well as grazing cattle, and who wants eventually to live on the land with his family.



A MONTE VISTA SUNSET

The Nueva Florida water system was developed with his permission, and he understands the water needs of both communities, but he is afraid that by allowing the development of another water system he would subject his property to environmental regulations that would interfere with his agricultural plans. He has therefore refused permission to Monte Vista, which had acquired materials for a system but is unable to proceed with construction.

Nola, FECOVESO board members and community residents have had several friendly meetings with the owner, who is willing to sell but wants a price that would allow him to buy comparably desirable land elsewhere. He has reduced his price from what he initially asked but the amount is still much more than we have paid for other parcels, both in total and on a per-manzana basis.

FECOVESO is eager to acquire the land, and HCSC has now committed \$18,500 toward a possible purchase – an amount that would cover only half of the current asking price but that almost equals HCSC's current operating reserve. The hope is that the price may be further reduced and/or that additional funds can be raised or that another party will agree to buy part of the land for limited agricultural use while FECOVESO acquires just the land needed to protect the water sources. We will see what happens.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO HELP...

We are an all-volunteer organization, and we operate with very low overhead. We put your tax-deductible donations to work directly for the people of Honduras – and we depend completely on those donations to support our work. You can find more information, including past editions of this newsletter, at our web site...

www.hcsc-honduras.org

Your contributions can be sent to...

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