



NEWS FROM HONDURAS

Honduras Community Support Corporation

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

December 2012



REPORT ON WATERSHEDS (CUENCAS)

We bought our first micro-cuenca early in the century – 24¼ acres to serve the communities of Camino Nuevo and San Miguelito, whose joint water system construction Nola had overseen in her years with Peace Corps in the early 90’s. This parcel reached the top of the watershed, and had been declared a protected zone by the government, but by 2000 cattle, houses and aggressive people had intruded. We paid top dollar to rescue it from the current owners (\$330/acre) and we became aware that the only way to protect land in Honduras was to own it and protect it vigorously.

We have not had to pay that much again – our average cost per acre over the last 10 years is \$177, but the big question was how to protect it... So the Honduran non-profit was created by ourselves and the communities where watersheds were being bought.

Fundacion Eco Verde Sostenible (Corporation for Sustainable Ecosystems) or **FECOVESO** has a Board composed of representatives of each community, four members-at-large elected by them, and a representative of HCSC. Watershed purchases are recommended by FECOVESO, and approved by HCSC. The rules and regulations are created by the FECOVESO Board, and overseen by the community with support from the organization. As of now, the rules allow no use of watersheds.

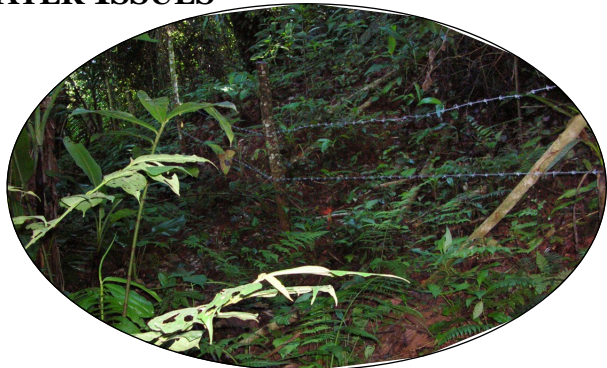
Currently there are 12 smaller communities served by the purchases and one large and rapidly growing town, Corinto, on the Guatemalan border. This year we helped them to add an additional water tank. Their watershed is about 75 acres, and borders on a higher parcel we bought for Las Brisas de Rio Negro and so is protected to the top of the mountain.

At its last meeting, the HCSC Board again declared the protection of watershed land as a priority goal.



FECOVESO has had a busy year, which included a work hour before the Board meeting in February when the Directors scraped and painted the ‘balcones’ (ironwork window guards) on the office building. Various directors have joined Nestor (the coordinator) visiting communities, evaluating the solicited projects and informing folks of the work of FECOVESO.

WATER ISSUES



Cutting the perimeter of a watershed, setting posts and stringing 3 strands of barbed wire takes a fair amount of time. As well as providing a definition for the protected area, fencing keeps out large domestic animals who would otherwise contaminate the water.



While we never assume water is potable in Honduras, no one can underestimate the relief and joy it brings to folks who have been carrying it from a distant river. Part of any work with water involves education and information on simple methods to purify the family's drinking water.

OUR FIRST WATERSHED SIGNS were made by 3 different volunteer interns some years ago, and have now weathered to the point where they are barely readable. Two years ago the government of the Omoa region promised to make new ones for the new watersheds and refurbish the old ones, but it hasn't happened. We are now thinking we need to get it done ourselves. It's a fairly expensive project as there are now about 40 signs needed at close to \$20 per sign!



SAN FRANCISCO

The residents of the small mountain community of San Francisco have been busy since HCSC funded FECOVESO acquisition of 19 acres of watershed land for the community in 2010. The work accomplished by community members since that time has included the fencing of the land with three strands of barbed wire and cement corner posts, and the construction of the water system itself with heavy-duty flexible tubing and a masonry tank. It is a fairly simple system with a cost under \$2000, but every household now has its own faucet — and no one has to carry water!

In October Nestor, his daughter Daniela, and HCSC Board member Susan Alancraig made the 3-hour trek into the mountains to celebrate the formal inauguration of the system with the community and some of its neighbors.



MULE BACK VIEW OF THE TRAIL TO SAN FRANCISCO
Community members met their guests at the trailhead with a horse and a mule to carry the piñata, Susan's heavy camera, and sometimes people!



San Francisco Community members prepared an impressive feast for visitors and neighbors to celebrate the completion of the water system.



NESTOR AND DAUGHTER DANIELA ENJOY THE VIEW

Our newest watershed is a small (8.65 acres) parcel around the **RIO CHIQUITO** dam. The residents are fortunate that the land owner of the larger watershed is concerned with the well being of the land and of the village. However, he does not want to sell. As always, we encourage the community to seek a right of first refusal in case the owner decides to sell in the future.

LAS CHICAS, like other communities, suffers from the ravages of seasonal torrential rains. This year pipes carrying water to the town were washed out and many twisted beyond repair in the mud slides. FECOVESO provided \$943 worth of materials to repair the system. This is one of the communities that does not own the watershed, so they don't have control of reforestation or other changes in the environment to prevent slides.

PROJECT HONDURAS CONFERENCE

This year's Project Honduras Conference in Copan Ruinas was attended by FECOVESO board members Maribel Reyes Ayala, Nestor Lainez, Victor Alvarenga Flores and two HCSC Directors: Nola White and Susan Alancraig. The theme of the conference was "Understanding the Security Situation in Honduras." There has been some dramatic press about the violence in Honduras related to drug traffic and urban gangs. It is a real concern for us, though in our rural environment we have been exposed to little of it. Some programs have been launched by the



Honduran government to offer alternatives to the young people attracted by the gangs in the cities, and we were pleased to hear US Ambassador Kurbiske express U.S. support for these programs.

Other attractions at the conference included demonstrations of efficient wood burning cook stoves and solar applications suitable for remote areas.

Every year it is impressive to hear of all the organizations and people working in Honduras, and to make contact with the people involved in these efforts.



HOW DO WE DECIDE?

Members of the community of El Paraiso have obtained land higher up the mountain and are forming a new community — Altos de El Paraiso. They are oriented more towards farming than their neighbors nearer the beach, and a bit more well-to-do than campesinos in the villages further up the mountain. We had a delightful visit with the community but decided to respond to only a portion of their solicitude for posts to install electricity, thinking they had more resources than many of our other communities.

IMPROMPTU MILLA TRES MEETING AT NOLA'S HOUSE

Our last year's hope to move on the purchase of a large watershed which would serve three communities along the coast has been stalled. [See 2011 Newsletter] Engineers Without Borders was prepared to design and work with two communities on a new system, but implementation got too complicated and other sources of funding for the watershed were not forthcoming. Members of the Junta de Agua (Water Committee) and Patronato (Select Board) came to Nola's house to revisit what had happened and try to think of new approaches that might keep the hope alive.



HCSC/FECOVESO AT THE CLT CONFERENCE

In September, Nola and Kirby White (president and treasurer, respectively, of HCSC) accepted an invitation to give a presentation at the National Community Land Trust Conference in Burlington, Vermont, describing the land stewardship efforts of HCSC and FECOVESO. The presentation was part of a series dealing with international community land trust (CLT) efforts – including those in England (where more than 100 CLTs have been established in recent years), Belgium, Australia, and Puerto Rico.

Most CLT programs are focused on acquiring and stewarding land for the purpose of preserving the long-term affordability of housing on that land for the benefit of the local community. In the communities served by HCSC and FECOVESO, the affordability of the small simple homes is not the major issue that it is elsewhere, but the acquisition and protection of watershed lands for community benefit is crucial to the community's access to water.

The work done by FECOVESO – and by HCSC in organizing and supporting FECOVESO – is similar to the work of the housing-related CLTs in that both must deal with the complicated tensions between the interests of the community and the interests of individuals within and from outside the community, and must build an organizational base capable of supporting the community's interest. It was exciting to participate in a series with other people dealing with similar issues in such very dissimilar circumstances around the world.

Community members provide planning and labor.

We provide funding for (among other things):

WATERSHEDS

- Land (average \$177/acre)
- Barbed wire for fencing
- Cement for posts
- Signs
- Plants for reforestation

BRIDGES

- Chain-link siding
- Cement for posts
- Wood planking

WATER SYSTEMS

- Cement and blocks for tanks and dams
- Pipes
- Faucets, valves, and other hardware

SCHOOLS

- Building and repair materials including roofing and anti-corrosive paint
- Desks
- Teacher bonuses
- School supplies

Costs for common materials are comparable to U.S. prices

All projects are generated by community consensus and benefit the entire community.

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 website

www.hcsc-honduras.org

Your contributions can be sent to...

**HONDURAS COMMUNITY SUPPORT CORPORATION
16 REYNOLDS ROAD
CAMBRIDGE, NY 12816
518-677-3775**