

NEWS FROM HONDURAS

Honduras Community Support Corporation

November 2005

Helping rural Hondurans to live better on the land
and to protect the land they live on

Local Organization Takes Title to Local Lands

Honduras Community Support Corporation is now in the process of transferring six parcels of land to Fundacion Eco Verde Sostenible (“FECOVESO”), a local Honduran nonprofit organized with HCSC’s support. Formally incorporated this year, FECOVESO is governed by a board of directors that includes representatives of all the communities for which it holds land, plus three other Hondurans from the region and one representative of HCSC. Its mission, as broadly defined by its board, is “to support community efforts to protect the environment of Northwest Honduras and promote the health, education and well-being of the people.” Its immediate priority is watershed protection.



Nueva Vida ridge-top. Newly acquired land drops away to the left. The man is FECOVESO Board-member Nestor Lainez

The lands being transferred to FECOVESO include four parcels acquired by HCSC prior to 2005 and two additional parcels acquired this year (see accompanying story). All six parcels provide crucial protection for steep slopes above streams feeding gravity-feed water systems serving mountain communities.

The FECOVESO board is intensely interested in the reforestation of these watershed parcels, most of which have suffered from cattle grazing, as well as the cutting of trees. HCSC and FECOVESO are planning to complete the fencing of all parcels to exclude cattle and are now seeking professional help in planning for and carrying out appropriate reforestation.



The small dam that impounds water to supply the Las Flores system

New Watershed Acquisitions

This year HCSC bought parcels of land in Las Flores and Nueva Vida. Both parcels will be permanently protected by FECOVESO.

The Las Flores parcel consists of 52 acres around the small stream that is the source for the community’s water system. Trees on the upper part of this land had been cleared to create pasturage for cattle, and further cutting was under way. The community was already having trouble getting enough water in the dry season. Further deforestation of the slopes above the source

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Nola on mule crossing larger stream at foot of Las Flores watershed. Though clear, this water is polluted by upstream homesteads.

Las Brisas de Rio Negro Water System

A new gravity feed water system for the remote community of Las Brisas de Rio Negro has finally been completed through the persistent efforts of a diverse set of players – including Honduran activists Alex del Cid and Rolando Lopez, a group of students from the University of New Mexico, the Honduran government’s SANA agency, the Puerto Cortez Chamber of Commerce (which facilitated government assistance), and the regional government (which improved an impassable stretch of road so that materials could be delivered), as well as local community leaders and HCSC.



Water tank under construction in Las Brisas de Rio Negro

HCSC has played a critical role at several points in the two-year process – beginning with the acquisition of land surrounding the water source, and concluding with “gap funding” that allowed completion of the project by covering costs not covered by



The community of Las Brisas de Rio Negro



Las Brisas de Rio Negro residents outside the old school building

government sources. In between, HCSC provided transportation (in HCSC’s pickup) to and from the remote site (three hours from Omoa on barely passable roads), and Nola spent many hours coordinating the efforts of various players and accompanying community leaders to meetings with government officials.

In addition to its water system assistance, HCSC has provided funding for the community’s purchase of land for a new school to replace the seriously overcrowded existing school building. With a building site secured, the community can now qualify for a government program that will build a new school.



A Las Brisas de Rio Negro elder on a community byway.

Not far from Las Brisas de Rio Negro, the community of Santa Teresa has asked for a small grant to pay for materials needed to finish another water system that was planned and nearly completed by Alex del Cid and the students from UNM. HCLC has approved this grant and is also considering possible acquisition of land in the watershed that serves this system.

School Improvements

HCSC has responded to requests from two communities for funding to support school improvements.

The community of Veracruz received funding for a fence around their school yard. Veracruz is near the coast, and the school is located close to a busy road. Families wanted the fence because they were concerned about the safety of their children.

The community of Milla Tres was given a matching grant for a badly needed new school roof. Replacement of the existing leaky roof with a more durable new roof will be a major expense. HCSC committed a substantial portion of the cost and asked the community to try to raise the balance from the regional government and from families within the community. The local school committee (“Padres de Familias”) has agreed to ask each family to contribute 100 lempira (about \$5) for the project.



Veracruz school yard

HCSC has also received a request for funding to fence in Camino Nuevo’s school yard. The Camino Nuevo school is located on the narrow summit of a steep ridge, with only a small piece of level ground in front of the school where children can play. A soccer ball that escapes from this small area ends up at the bottom of a ravine a hundred yards below. A fence would help keep the ball in play, as well as increasing the security of the school.



After-dark pinata in Camino Nuevo school yard



Rio de la Paz in mountain forest

Sustainable Timber Harvest

Two years ago we reported an HCSC loan to a worker co-op in a remote area of eastern Honduras. The funds paid for the completion of planning required for government permission to carry out an ongoing selective harvest of mahogany and other tropical hardwoods in the densely forested mountains. The loan (funded with a loan to HCSC from Equity Trust, Inc.) was to be repaid at the rate of one lempira (about 5 cents) for each board foot sold and delivered. We are now happy to report that several orders have been delivered and that the loan is being duly repaid – with more orders in the offing.

To complete these sales is no small accomplishment for the co-op. Purchasers pay half the price of the timber when placing orders. Workers then cut the trees designated in the harvest plan, mill them (where they fall) with chainsaws into timbers that can be moved by men and mules to a point where they can be rafted down-river to the coast and then transported by barge to the seaport of La Ceiba.

Rotary Connection

In March, Nola met with the Rotary Club of Puerto Cortez to describe HCSC’s work and discuss cooperation between HCSC and Rotary projects involving water systems for rural villages. The Puerto Cortez group gave HCSC an enthusiastic written endorsement, which we expect to present to one or more U.S. Rotaries in the hope of getting their support for a joint project with the Puerto Cortez Rotary.

New Acquisitions (continued from front page)

would have created a serious problem. With cattle now removed, and with eventual reforestation, the water source will be protected for the future. The other parcel consists of 34 acres of steep mountainside on the east flank of the community of Nueva Vida. The small stream at the foot of this slope provides water for about ten families who are not served by the system that serves most Nueva Vida homes. The land is still thickly wooded but would have been deforested eventually if not protected.

HCSC Projects: A Summary

Over the past three years, HCSC has provided assistance on one or more issues to a total of eleven communities in the Omoa region.

Camino Nuevo & San Miguelito

Assistance in improving and managing shared water system. Acquisition and fencing of two watershed parcels.

Nueva Vida

Funding for completion of water system. Acquisition of two watershed parcels. Funding for construction of teacher's house.

Omoa

Small grant to cooperative secondary school.

Buena Vista

Funding for suspension bridge (near Omoa) allowing residents of this and other mountain communities to reach highway during high water.

Betania

Funding for improvement of road to community.

Milla Tres

Funding for division of school into two classrooms and initial salary for second teacher. Matching grant for new roof.

Las Flores

Funding for site acquisition and construction of teachers house. Annual teachers' bonuses. Road repairs. Acquisition of watershed land.

Veracruz

Funding for schoolyard fence.

Las Brisas de Rio Negro

Acquisition of watershed land. Completion of water system. Purchase of new school site.

Santa Teresa

Commitment of funding to complete water system.

For six of the above villages, HCSC has also funded legal incorporation so that they can own land.



New HCSC web site now under construction: www.hcsc-honduras

All donations to the Honduras Community Support Corporation are tax deductible. HCSC is recognized by the IRS as tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Code and is registered as a charity with the New York State Attorney General's Office.