

NEWS FROM HONDURAS

Honduras Community Support Corporation

November 2007

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

FECOVESO Comes of Age

During 2007, FECOVESO (Fundacion Eco Verde Sostenible) continued to build its capacity and reputation as the HCSC-supported, grassroots-controlled land trust that holds watershed lands acquired with HCSC funding. In February, Nestor Lainez was hired to staff the organization on a part-time basis. Nestor, who lives and farms in the mountain community of Nueva Vida, now spends two days a week “abajo” (down from the mountains). On the first day he staffs the office of the micro loan fund Caja Rural, then goes to the FECOVESO office (which includes overnight facilities) and spends the next day there, where his duties include book-keeping and financial management, among other administrative tasks. In addition, he usually spends one day a week, often with board members, visiting



Nestor Lainez (in white chair) with board members

communities where the organization owns watershed land or where requests for assistance have been made. These site visits typically involve community meetings, where Nestor’s familiarity with local people, his reputation for competence and reliability, and his steady, friendly manner have done much to build support for the organization.

Together with board members Rolando Lopez and Nola White, Nestor attended the annual “Project Honduras” conference, where accounts of FECOVESO’s program stirred significant interest among people from other localities (see accompanying article).



Sign in front of FECOVESO office, designed by Libby (see page 4)

Expanding Watershed Protection

This year the watershed protection activities of HCSC and FECOVESO have included acquisition of additional land, fencing, tree-planting and installation of signs on previously acquired land, and discussions with others regarding the exciting possibility of a sister program to protect watersheds “on the other side of the mountains.”

Last year HCSC committed funding for two parcels of land in the watershed serving the community of Corinto. After finally completing paperwork with the owners (who were in the US) FECOVESO closed the purchases this year. A commitment has also been made to acquire a third parcel when Corinto has raised

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Nestor (in black hat) with Monte Vista residents after a meeting.

Water Systems

This year HCSC has funded the construction of a new water tank for an older water system and expects soon to approve a request for funding to build a tank for a new system as well. These concrete tanks, which store water at a point where it can be distributed through pipes to individual homes, are essential components of the gravity feed water systems in the mountain communities.



In the community of Los Achiotes the existing tank is old and cracked, as can be seen in the photo above, and is located immediately above a number of homes, as is evident in the photo below. The homes would be flooded and perhaps destroyed if the tank were to fail. HCSC is providing funding for the construction of a new, relocated tank and the necessary new pipes.



The nearby community of Rio Chiquito has requested funding for a tank needed as the final component of an otherwise complete new system. The system was designed and built with government funding, which, as often happens, was not quite enough to finish the project. After meeting with the community in the coming months, HCSC expects to approve funding for the tank.



This is a sediment settlement box at a water source, from which water is piped down to a tank for distribution.

In March, FECOVESO volunteers Reid and Libby (see page 4), working with staff person Nestor Lainez and with instruments loaned by water system designer Alex del Cid, completed a feasibility assessment for a proposed water system for the community of Monte Vista. Such an assessment entails measuring the volume of water available from the proposed source and the distances between the source and the homesteads to be served, as well as the relative elevations of the various points in the system. It also entails determining the number of people in each household who could contribute labor for construction of the system, as will be required of all households to be served by the system.

The completed assessment facilitated the eventual design of a system by Alex del Cid, which now allows the community to seek government or other funding for the project. Monte Vista is also asking that HCSC and FECOVESO acquire the land around its intended water source (in a watershed shared with Nueva Florida: see “Watershed Protection, p.1)



Measuring the volume of flow from a potential source.

Schools and Community Facilities

Chachaguala Arriba. In the spring of 2006 (as reported in last year's newsletter), HCSC visited the mountain community of Chachaguala Arriba – a four-hour walk from the highway – to meet with community residents regarding their request for funds to buy materials needed to rebuild their leaky old school building and provide living quarters for a teacher. It was more than half a year before Chachaguala Arriba residents could make all of the many trips necessary to transport the materials on the backs of horses and mules to the site, but this year construction was completed and the new school and teacher's quarters are now in use.

HCSC has also agreed to contribute a \$100 bonus for a teacher who satisfactorily completes the school year in Chachaguala Arriba..



Chachaguala Arriba school construction in progress.

Milla Cinco. For several years HCSC has provided supplies for a kindergarten in the community of Milla Cinco. The class is held in a small Milla Cinco church so kindergarten children will not have to walk the one or two miles down the busy, dangerous coastal highway to the nearest school – as the slightly older elementary students must do. Now the community is looking for a way to have its own school for children in kindergarten through third grade. HCSC is funding the legal work necessary to incorporate the community so that it can legally own land – as we have done for a number of these unincorporated rural communities. HCSC will then consider a request for funding to help in buying land and/or building a school.

Las Laureles. HCSC provided funding for a new roof for an old school building that is being converted for use as a community center and clinic.



Las Flores. At the end of every school year, we participate in a school celebration when the community awards the \$100 bonuses to teachers who have satisfactorily completed the year. HCSC provides the bonuses – and also the piñata and candy (see above).

Monte Vista. In the community of Monte Vista – which, like Chachaguala Arriba, is high in the mountains – HCSC provided anti-corrosion paint to preserve the roof of the school building, shown below before the roof was painted.



Soccer balls for all. Two wholesale donations of soccer balls in the past two years have allowed us to provide balls for many elementary schools. At last count, schools in twelve communities had received balls.

Tag Sale. Through the efforts of board members and local friends, HCSC's annual tag sale was held in September in Cambridge, New York. In addition to many donated second-hand items, the sale featured embroidered blouses made by a friend in Milla Cinco, and Honduran coffee imported, roasted and donated by a resident of the Cambridge area. As in past years we raised several hundred dollars and introduced more people to HCSC's work in Honduras.

Watershed Protection (continued from p.1)

the agreed-upon matching funds, which will complete the protection of a 75-acre watershed serving this populous community near the Guatemala border.

The communities of Nueva Florida and Monte Vista have asked that land be acquired that would protect the water source of both Nueva Florida's system and the projected Monte Vista system. The current asking price is higher than the land's market value, but FECOVESO has approved acquisition contingent on a reasonable price being negotiated.



Christine Casey (see '06 newsletter) and Santiago Sifontes planting trees in the Las Flores watershed early this year.

Recently FECOVESO and HCSC have also been talking with people from the Santa Barbara region across the mountains from Omoa. At the "Project Honduras" conference, Nestor, Rolando, and Nola met Roy Lara, a leader in a conservation project with the ambitious goal of controlling a large (500-acre) area of mountain terrain from which 3 small cities and 16 smaller communities draw water. Lara saw the FECOVESO model as the perfect vehicle for such control. With Lara and other Santa Barbara leaders, FECOVESO is now exploring the possibility of either establishing a Santa Barbara "chapter" that could undertake such a project or helping to establish a similar but separate organization in Santa Barbara.

We are convinced that locally controlled organizations such as FECOVESO can provide the most effective vehicle for conservation in this country where the protection of mountain forests is so important – and so threatened by larger economic forces. We are excited by the possibility of applying the model in Santa Barbara. We will seek grant funding as well as donations to support that effort.



Reid and Libby

In March and April, Reid Bryson and Libby Earthman spent six weeks working as volunteers for HCSC and FECOVESO. Having previously worked for rural community-based organizations in northern California they brought useful skills and accomplished much. With local residents they made signs to be posted on FECOVESO property boundaries (as well as a sign for the office). They planned and helped initiate road improvements for the community of Las Flores (see photo below). They conducted a preliminary water system assessment for the community of Monte Vista (see page 2). They helped Nestor with computer work – and whatever else needed to be done at the moment.



If You Would Like to Help...

We are an all-volunteer organization, operating with very low overhead, and we put your tax-deductible donations to work directly for the people of Honduras. 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. 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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