

# COMMUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION

## Project Summary for Jocotoco Foundation

### Sustainable Forestry Initiative



**Organization Name: Fundación Jocotoco**

**Primary Address: Lizardo Garcia E09-104 and Andrés Xaura, Quito**

**Principal Activities: Habitat protection and restoration**

**Main geographical area(s) of activity: Ecuador**

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

Submitted by David Agro and Martin Schaefer

We apply for support to scale-up an existing model of sustainable forestry in Ecuador's most threatened habitat, the Chocó lowland rainforest. The Chocó lowland rainforest is restricted to the Esmeraldas province in north-western Ecuador. Only 2% of this critically threatened habitat remain in Ecuador. Esmeraldas is one of the poorest provinces of Ecuador. Within Esmeraldas, we will work in one of the poorest areas, the rural part of the Canton Quininde. Approx. 95% of the people within the local district are considered poor, compared with 87% at the provincial level and 75% throughout Ecuador. The lack of economic choices for local communities leads to the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. This exploitation in turns results in an increasing socio-economic vulnerability of local communities including the Chachi indigenous tribe.

Our partners are Verdecanande and their US arm WholeForest ([www.wholeforest.com](http://www.wholeforest.com)). Verdecanande is a community-owned business that generates an annual net income of \$600,000 for 64 employees, feeding families of 500 people. WholeForest sells value-added timber products (table tops and cutting boards) directly in the Boston-DC belt to allow the community to participate from increased revenues without intermittent sales agents.

Direct participation is an important feature that enables the ecological sustainability of the harvest model through biomass extraction. Verdecanande has developed a sustainable harvest model of extracting 1 m<sup>3</sup> of timber per hectare, per year. This low

intensity forestry model is actually carbon-negative as it removes less biomass than the annual regrowth in this tropical forest.

## **WHERE YOUR DONATION WILL GO**

We seek to expand an ecologically and economically sustainable model of forestry in order to preserve the little remaining forest cover, while improving local livelihoods. We apply to fund the position of one project coordinator who is coordinating with local communities and Verdecanande to expand this model, which will require \$15,000 dollars to operate for the full 3 years of this pilot. Any amount helps to cover the costs of this project.

What makes the model ecologically sustainable is that they harvest a larger number of species than a typical forestry enterprise (hence the name WholeForest of their US branch). Harvesting various distinct species requires extensive research and development (R & D) on timber quality in order to optimize the drying process. Over the past 15 years, Verdecanande has invested in this R & D and is now able to integrate dozens of tree species into six standardized color categories.

Most importantly, Verdecanande hauls the timber per cable out of the forest, thereby avoiding road development with its ensuing waves of exploitation and colonization by outsiders.

We would like to start our project in September 2019. Our project consists of scaling up Verdecanande's model in order to expand it to other communities. Essential activities are to socialize this project and its benefits through workshops, to conduct studies of tree regeneration and ecological impact to safeguard its conservation outcomes and to map zones of distinct use (harvest, no harvest zones in ecological sensitive areas such as riparian areas or sites where globally threatened flora and fauna exists). We further need to equip communities with tools and equipment.

## **OUTCOMES OF PROJECT**

- 1) Provide long-term employment based on sustainable economic activities for community members.

2) Protect water resources for local communities. Ensure 75% of the local community water supply comes from protected areas where there is no risk of pollution or reduction in quantity of water.

3) Provide meaningful engagement opportunities for local people to learn about the significance of the Choco and have opportunities for them to enjoy the environment in which they live. The engagement opportunities will be created by establishing the first scientific station in the Chocó. This station will provide employment opportunities of community members to work as guides, assistants, and cooks as well as grocery providers. Particularly guides and field assistants will have the opportunity to learn about the Chocó and act as environmental ambassadors in their communities.

### **HOW THIS PROJECT SUPPORTS NATURE NEEDS HALF**

This project supports the goals of the Nature Needs Half movement because it is associated with our expansion of Canandé Reserve. Over the past two years, we have expanded Canandé Reserve by 5651 acres to 17,000 acres. Canandé has thus been the reserve that grew most quickly within our reserve network. Overall, the fact that we protect more than 54,000 acres shows that we fully support Nature Needs Half movement and implement recommended actions locally.

Reserve expansion is an integral part of our conservation work and it does provide economic and ecological benefits to local communities. At the same time, it is important to establish ecologically sustainable forms of land use in the productive forest matrix surrounding our reserves. By expanding the sustainable forestry model of Verdecandé we will create an effective buffer area around not only our Canandé reserve but also the much larger governmental Cotacachi-Cayapas Reserve (815,400 acres).

This buffer area will be effective because no roads will be built, thereby avoiding the pitfall of those protected areas that become rapidly deforested owing to an increased human presence associated to roads. For example, the Mache-Chindul Ecological Reserve in the same province in Esmeraldas experienced a 10% deforestation in the period 2000-2008.

More generally, we can develop and scale-up a model of sustainable tropical forestry that can serve as a blueprint to establish effective buffer areas around other protected areas in Ecuador and elsewhere.

We believe Jocotoco has been successful in achieving its conservation outcomes because we have made a considered effort to work with the communities adjacent to our reserves. Our approach is successful because communities and local and regional authorities reach out to us for diverse collaborations.

Moreover, our conservation work is effective. We have averted the extinction of various species, from critically endangered plants and animals that do not occur outside of our reserve system to the once critically endangered Pale-headed Brushfinch, whose population we quadrupled within 9 years through targeted and science-driven activities.

By purchasing land we become invested members of the community and people understand we have a long-term interest in safeguarding the natural heritage around their community, most of which being significant from a global perspective as Ecuador is the country with the highest biodiversity per area. We hire local people (men and women) to work in the reserves for jobs that are seen as attractive long-term employment. The attractive employment opportunities are illustrated by the fact that none of our 41 park guards ever resigned during 20 years. Young people approach Jocotoco seeking to work with us because they see opportunities for stable and interesting employment that allows them to stay in their communities and connected to their families.

Many of our park guards are former farmers and hunters and quickly shift their interest to being stewards of the forest and its associated biodiversity. Our staff already have a first-hand understanding of many ecological issues and the benefits of protecting natural habitats and quickly come to appreciate the international significance of the biodiversity around them. Witnessing that international visitors travel to see the reserves leads our staff to increasingly appreciate their natural environment. Many take an interest in activities like birdwatching and photography and post their sightings and photos on social media accounts.

The staff quickly become an important connection between Jocotoco as a conservation organisation and the communities. Some of them championed local bird observation clubs that regularly visit the reserves. Many of the initiatives described in above section had their origins in ideas suggested by our staff or by community members to our staff. Almost all of the water protection initiatives came from communities. Jocotoco's openness to community interests, which sometimes requires investment in community infrastructure but also sometimes requires saying "no", strengthens our relationship with communities. The reserves are important resources for the communities and in most

cases become linked to the identity of the community the way Banff and Jasper have with their respective national parks. The communities understand that the rare species that live in the reserves have brought them and Ecuador world attention and this generates an enormous sense of pride and identity. Various statutes of endemic wildlife (erected by local authorities but also by a community in one case) around reserves testify to the increasing sense of ownership and identification.

Such statutes show that throughout a wide range of context --from local communities to big towns such as Quito—people start adopting wildlife, which is perhaps the clearest sign of the widespread success of our conservation work. We believe our manner of working with communities is a model of how a conservation organisation can work with communities to achieve conservation objectives and benefit communities. This is especially the case when too many stories of conservation initiatives have generated conflict with local communities (like Kenya or Mahleur).

Communities for Conservation should want to support us because we can tell positive stories of what we can achieve working with communities (Las Tunas got honourable mentioning by the UN). We believe these stories convey hope that conservation can be successful in many communities around the world.