

# Mexico Signature Initiatives



**Why Mexico?** The U.S. and Mexico share significant natural systems and biological resources. We share ecosystems including the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts, the Sierra Madres, and several cross-boundary watersheds. We also share 450 species protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and 119 species protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), all of which depend on habitats in Mexico for survival. Ecological and atmospheric processes link the two countries so much that what happens to rainforests in Yucatan affects Gulf of Mexico fisheries. Mexico is the 3rd most biologically-diverse country in the world. Comprising only 1% of the Earth's land surface, it contains an estimated 10% of all species known to science. This biological wealth is threatened by loss of habitat, illegal wildlife trade and other practices, and inadequate land management.

**Why people?** Over half a century of our experience conserving biodiversity around the globe shows that to effectively protect wildlife, we must work with people—not only gathering scientific data, but engaging stakeholders. The most effective and



*Mexican House of Representatives votes on environmental legislation. USFWS*



*Training for protected areas personnel at the US-Mexico border. USFWS*

efficient way to accomplish this is by providing key target groups the skills they need to become agents of change.

**Signature Initiatives.** Training to build capacity for conservation has been identified by the Mexican government as the country's most critical need to sustainably manage its natural resources. To address this, in 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wildlife Without Borders-Mexico program and the Government of Mexico created three Signature Initiatives. The goal of these programs is to build human and institutional capacity to conserve biodiversity in Mexico by: (1) Strengthening the capacity of Mexico's legislative and decision-making bodies to enact and implement legislation in support of a sound and sustainable environment (*Voices for Nature*); (2) Creating cadres of future protected areas managers to elevate the effectiveness of state-level natural resource management within the Government of Mexico (*Managing for*

*Excellence*); and (3) Creating a network of subsistence farming communities with the capacity to sustainably manage biodiversity lands under their ownership or stewardship (*Stewards of the Land*).

Signature Initiatives target grass-roots problems that are not effectively addressed by current conservation efforts. They strive to be highly strategic, innovative, and results-driven, and to build new partnerships and conservation networks. They rely heavily on commitment from local authorities and communities, and can be replicated in other settings.

To be effective, training curricula, methodologies, and delivery have to respond to the specific needs of each audience. Training through Signature Initiatives aims to be user-friendly, accessible, practical, holistic, and field-oriented. Success is measured not by the number of individuals trained, but by their impact on conservation as a result of this training.

# *Wildlife Without Borders-Mexico operates three signature initiatives to build the capacity of local people, wildlife managers, and decision makers to conserve wildlife and habitats.*

## **Stewards of the Land:**

In Mexico, 90% of forests are managed by subsistence farming communities and indigenous peoples. In many cases, these communities own the lands where protected areas have been established. However, conservation practices have largely ignored or ostracized these communities, resulting in unsustainable resource use and dramatic loss of habitat.

*Stewards of the Land* provides training initially to 150 members from 50 communities in 17 Mexican states. A non-traditional, participatory, problem-oriented curriculum is based on learning skills each group has and shares, 'communities of learning.' It uses innovative farmer-to-farmer methodologies such as 'outdoor classrooms' and 'live training.' The result is an expanding network of subsistence farmers skilled in sustainable natural resource management, and the recognition of the key role of this sector of Mexican society in conservation. USFWS funding (FY10 & FY11): \$152,986. In-country match: \$200,000.



*Local farmers practice cultivation and reforestation techniques. USFWS*



Scan with your smart-phone to learn more about Wildlife Without Borders-Mexico!

## **Voices for Nature:**

In recent decades, Mexico has taken unprecedented steps to advance natural resource protection. Multiple agencies have been formed, culminating in the creation of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT). This has elevated the issue to the Cabinet level for the first time in history. However, the new institutions have not been matched with relevant, focused, effective legislation to protect natural resources. Further, Mexican legislators are not well aware of conservation issues or solutions.

Through an interactive website and on-the-ground site visits, *Voices for Nature* will provide accurate, science-based information to members of the Mexican Congress to enhance natural resource legislation in Mexico. Legislators will be exposed first-hand to successful conservation projects at work in their country. A network of multi-partisan, environmentally active Mexican legislators will explore creation of an environmental caucus within the Mexican Congress. USFWS funding (FY11): \$90,080. In-country match: \$172,700.



*Forest management in Mexican protected areas. Maria de la Luz Rivero Vertiz/CONANP*

## **Managing for Excellence:**

The primary obstacle identified by Mexico to managing protected areas is a lack of trained personnel. *Managing for Excellence* trains field-level staff from Mexico's Natural Protected Areas Agency (CONANP), focusing on new employees. The target is to train CONANP's 500 field operations positions around the country.

The training curriculum is developed by field personnel, based on training needs revealed by a comprehensive assessment of the target audience. The curriculum accounts for differences in age, academic level, and working conditions. To reach the largest number of trainees, the program has an on-line component, but retains a strong field orientation. Training is university-certified so trainees can apply credits towards the completion of academic degrees. Incentives encourage supervisors to support replication of this training locally, and maintain a network of trained personnel. This initiative is scheduled to launch in FY12.

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A well-informed Mexican Congress, new generations of top-notch protected areas managers, and a network of subsistence farming communities proactively managing their extensive land base, will provide a powerful impetus to sustain Mexico's biodiversity well into the future.

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