



PROGRESS REPORT

Project: *Business Planning for a New Protected Area: the Río Grande-Che Guevara Biosphere Reserve, Bolivia*

Since initiating the Rufford Foundation project in July 2008, important progress has been made towards the accomplishment of each of the objectives. In this progress report we detail some of the most important achievement in the past four months.

Objective 1: *Develop plan to conserve the biological diversity of the Río Grande-Che Guevara Protected Area in order to maintain water supply and minimize the impact of future flooding*

In August a hydrologist and soil expert from the Aerspatial Data Collection Centre (CLAS) in Cochabamba were contracted by Natura to spend several days in the Río Grande region in order to collect soil data to model the hydrological balance of the reserve. They are now analyzing the data collected and we expect a final report by November.

Natura has begun a process of building trust with the municipalities to work together on conservation projects in the reserve. At least two meetings have been held in each of the municipalities of the reserve, and these have involved a diverse range of actors, including: municipal governments, local authorities, landowners, grassroots organizations, public services cooperatives, productive associations, irrigators associations, representatives from the prefectural government and, of course, from Natura. We have already signed a formal agreement with one municipality, Cabezas, and plan to sign with each other local government before long.

As part of the development of the management plan of the reserve and the collection of biological diversity data, we are paying particular attention to the Rositas area in the municipality of Cabezas, given that there is a proposal to construct a hydroelectric dam there. We are working closely with the local government of Cabezas to ensure that the energy companies and other actors involved in the Rositas dam proposal are informed of the biological value of the area and of how best to minimize negative impacts of the project should it go ahead.

Taking advantage of a meeting in the municipality of Vallegrande, the Natura team met with the board of directors of the Vallegrande public services cooperative to present the compensation for environmental services initiatives being implemented in Comarapa, Mairana and Pampagrande. With the help of representatives from the Comarapa water cooperative, we

also presented the water fund concept to the Vallegrande cooperative, which was sufficiently interested in the proposal to later send a formal letter to Natura requesting that we work together to evaluate the potential to replicate the water fund in the Vallegrande municipality.

A draft of the management plan of the Río Grande reserve is on track to be completed by mid-November and a final version is expected by the end of 2008. The biodiversity component is virtually finished, the focus now is on the socio-economic studies of the region.

Objective 2: *Improve local livelihoods through financially self-sustaining initiatives such as PES*

As mentioned in Objective 1, meetings have been held in each municipality and these have included municipal government and a range of other local actors. In addition, individual meetings have been held in downstream municipalities with key actors such as: large landholders, local leaders, and businessmen with interest in investment or the development of ecotourism activities in the reserve. The goal is to progressively involve influential people with interest in conservation and sustainable activities in the management of the Río Grande reserve. Where possible and/or appropriate we will be encouraging these actors to contribute to future payments for environmental services schemes in the reserve.

Objective 3: *Develop business plan for large-scale “payments for environmental services” initiative to serve as a model for Bolivia and internationally*

We have hired an economist, Josefina Marin, who in the course of the next year will develop a proposal for the financial sustainability of the Río Grande-Valles Cruceños area. Ms Marin will identify at least three productive activities which could strengthen the relationship between conservation and income generation, and she will also coordinate the realization of a study of the impact of cattle in the reserve.

A tourism study of the reserve has been completed. Initially 300 sites were identified as potential attractions, of these, 75 tourist sites have been selected and grouped into nine “Ecotourism Units”. These units will form the basis of future efforts to develop tourism as an income-generating proposition for the conservation of the reserve.

We have also hired Mr Aldo Sacre to develop a business plan for what we plan to promote as the “Che Guevara Forest”. Mr Sacre will identify, design and develop a project for forest protection within the Río Grande reserve and will present the proposal with at least five high-level executives from airline companies, banks and other companies to promote private investment in this conservation initiative.