



Corporación Ambiental La Pedregoza

Una ONG sin ánimo de lucro dedicada a la conservación de la flora y fauna de la Orinoquia colombiana,
y una Organización Articuladora de Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia

Puerto Carreño, Vichada, Colombia

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An Introduction to the Corporación Ambiental La Pedregoza

(ver. Sept. 2017)

In order to work effectively on sustainable development and conservation projects, we established a non-profit, non-governmental environmental organization called the *Corporación Ambiental La Pedregoza* (hereinafter “La Pedregoza”). In English that means the *La Pedregoza Environmental Corporation*. We started work in late 2010 in the Orinoco River basin of Vichada, Colombia, and were formally registered with the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce in 2012, with a libro 1 registration number of 00207600. Our Unique Tax Registration number (NIT) is 900.519.019-3. Bancolombia is the bank where we maintain an account. We are governed by a board of directors, with me as managing director.

Social Objectives:

La Pedregoza has a long list of social objectives, which all revolve around the conservation and preservation of the flora and fauna of the Orinoco River basin of Colombia. This includes the socio-economic ideas of sustainable development and environmental education, so that humans can co-exist with regional ecosystems, instead of destroying them in the name of growth or uncontrolled development. In addition, we have the following International Standard Industrial Classifications (CIU) for our economic activities, which are: 9103 the operation of botanical gardens, wildlife reserves and natural reserves, 7210 research and experimental development in the areas of natural sciences and environmental engineering, 0240 for services in support of silviculture, and finally 9499 to carry on any activity suitable for an NGO.

History:

In 2010 we founded the Reserva Natural La Pedregoza, a civil society protected area that encompasses some 1,200 hectares or 3,000 acres, with 4 distinct ecosystems, being gallery forest, inundation forest, savannah and morichals (heavily treed savannah drainage creeks). Our NGO was in part established in order to manage the natural reserve, which has public access to only 10% of its area, maintaining the rest in strict conservation and for scientific investigations. The natural reserve was first registered with Resnatur, the Colombian association of natural reserves, and subsequently by decree No. 96 of 2014 of Colombia’s Ministry of the Environment as Civil Society Natural Reserve No. 101-11 in the national parks system (PNN) and in the country’s Single Registry of Protected Areas (RUNAP).

Due to our work with communities, the forestry sector and rural residents we were invited to become an Articulating Organization for Colombia’s national parks system, which was confirmed by decree No. 58 of 2015 of the Ministry of the Environment, as civil society Articulating Organization No. 003-14 for natural reserves. This means that we help the private sector to register new protected areas in Colombia, then assist them in characterizing the flora and fauna of the reserve and to prepare a natural reserve management plan with suitable strategies for the conservation of the biodiversity and ecosystems in the newly protected area.

Projects:

La Pedregoza has participated in a large number of projects in the Orinoco River basin, and partnered with an impressive array of environmental organizations, institutions and government entities. Here is a list of some of the most important partnerships and projects:



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Project SuLU (2012):

SuLU stands for sustainable land use, with WWF and TNC. The concept balances human productivity with management of the environment for sustainable ecosystems. At right, a picture of the SuLU scientists and members of the La Pedregoza team, after finishing work at our Reserva Natural La Pedregoza.



Sustainable Farms (2013 – 2014): Resnatur invited La Pedregoza to participate in a project to *Conserve Biodiversity in Productive Farms*, which included TNC, WWF, GEF, Fundación Natura and Corporinoquia, and which resulted in Corporinoquia, the regional autonomous environmental authority, adopting Sustainable Forestry Management Plans as a comprehensive environmental management and impact standard for plantation forestry. We contributed to the resulting book, seen at left.

Proyecto Vida Silvestre (2014 – 2016): Due to our reputation for working with native tree species and endangered tree species, we were invited by WCS to participate in this project, financed by Ecopetrol. Our task was the conservation of the Congrio tree (*Acosmium nitens*), threatened due to illegal cutting for its wood, which is rot and termite resistant and therefore popular for fence posts. We planted over 30,000 Congrio trees, restored 6 degraded areas and signed 6 conservation agreements with large land holders. The project resulted in the publication of two books, namely *Restoration with Congrio in the Río Bitá*, and *Alternatives to Fence Posts*, such as living fences. The project included numerous workshops with the public regarding the problems caused by deforestation, the important role of native tree species, and why rural dwellers should adopt sustainable practices in their farms.



Doing environmental education with local people.





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Doing workshops with local communities.



Signing a Conservation Agreement with a small land owner.

Río Bita Protected River: In April 2014 La Pedregoza was one of 10 organizations and institutions to sign the declaration creating the *Río Bita Protected River* project, the first of its kind in the world, where a model is being developed to conserve an entire river system, while allowing for sustainable production by local residents along its banks. During the first phase of the project, coordinated by Colombia's renowned Alexander von Humboldt Institute with financing from the Vichada government, La Pedregoza worked with local communities and land owners to implement sustainable practices, ecoagriculture, natural silviculture and analog forestry in their day to day operations, all with an eye to conserving this river's unique, but fragile biodiversity. The project includes restoring degraded areas with native trees, establishing new natural reserves and continuing to sign conservation agreements.

Soil Amendments with Biochar: This project is self-funded with some help from Tree-Nation in Barcelona, Spain. The Orinoco River basin has some of the oldest and poorest soils on the planet, with an extremely low cation exchange capacity (CEC) of around 1 on a scale of 1 to 50, which means that there is no soil nutrient retention or humidity retention. As a consequence, when people add agrochemicals to the soil, there is a complete leakage of those chemicals into adjacent water systems, such as creeks, rivers and ground water, causing contamination with a severe impact on ecosystems. Using pyrolysis ovens, or low oxygen burn retorts, we are producing biochar and experimenting with how to improve soil nutrient retention using organic fertilizers, while improving productivity with sustainable practices. This is perhaps our most important project with the biggest environmental impact.



Adams Retort based on pyrolysis principle which we built at La Pedregoza for Biochar production.



Alternative Energies: This project is self-funded with some assistance from Tree-Nation in Barcelona, Spain. It involves demonstrating the efficiencies of alternative forms of energy, such as solar well water pumps, solar and wind energy for lighting, and biomass pyrolysis power generation using boilers for cashew processing and other energy needs in rural off-grid settings.



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Programs:

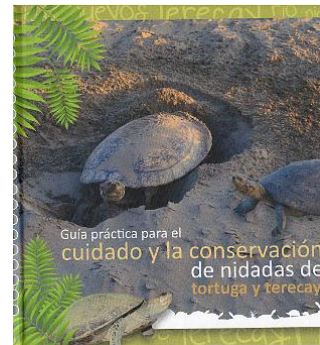
Since our inception, we have operated several programs, of which we are very proud. What follows is a brief description of each program.

Giant River Turtle Rescue Program (2012 to Present):

Several large turtle species (*Podocnemis expansa*, *unifilis* and *vogli*) are endangered, threatened or vulnerable due to human exploitation (egg removal and hunting of adults for meat), contamination (agrochemicals, river traffic, garbage) and the pet trade. We are now entering our 5th year of a dedicated program to rescue nests, but whenever possible to protect the nesting beaches, by working with river dwellers and local communities. This includes assisting with alternative solutions for protein, such as fish farming, and by conducting environmental education in schools and public events. Together with 2 other foundations we co-authored a 10 year Action Plan for the Conservation of Threatened Turtle Species in the Orinoco River Basin (2016 – 2026), as well as a guide book on how to protect nesting beaches and how to manage artificial nests. La Pedregoza holds an annual turtle liberation event with local communities.



Taking turtles to a protected release location.



Aceite trees (*Copaifera pubiflora*) in the La Pedregoza tree nursery.



Planting Sassafras trees in the rain forest, as they require a lot of shade and very particular conditions to survive.

Native Trees (2010 to Present): Native tree species are one of our passions. Forestry in Colombia is done primarily with introduced species, and not with native trees. As a result, we have been working on the creation of technical profiles for a variety of native tree species, which includes everything from the collection of the seeds, their storage, pre-germination treatment, germination, the management of the trees in a tree nursery, transplantation to the field or forest, and observations as to their preferences, needs and behaviour under various conditions. In addition, we are doing this to create seed banks of these species for the future. All of this with an eye to encouraging conservation and to promote the planting of native trees in preference to introduced commercial species, which do not support local wildlife and at times can be invasive. To date we have experiments and field trials for some 40 species, of which 6 are very promising. We also plant species, such as the Sassafras, which is listed in the IUCN's red book of endangered trees. Native trees contribute to biodiversity and their planting allows us to expand niche habitat and wildlife corridors.



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Sacred Seeds Botanical Garden (2013 to Present): The Missouri Botanical Gardens started a world-wide effort to preserve and conserve the ethno-botanical knowledge of medicinal and alimentary tree and plant species, known as the Sacred Seeds Sanctuary program. La Pedregoza responded and has set aside a 16 hectare (40 acre) area for the planting and study of Orinoco River basin medicinal and alimentary trees and plants, which we call the *Sacred Seeds Botanical Garden*. This is obviously a long term endeavour, but a very important one, as traditional knowledge about the healing and food properties of forest species is being lost, even in indigenous communities. At present we have technical assistance from the Missouri Botanical Gardens and some volunteers, but we do not have financial assistance. This year we planted Achiote or Onoto (*Bixa orellana*).



The Sacred Seeds Botanical Garden at La Pedregoza is bordered by a magnificent morichal.



Activities at the Sacred Seeds site.



A caiman baby being cared for at La Pedregoza.



A cusumbo rescued from the illegal wildlife trade.

Wildlife Rescue (2010 to Present): Over the years we have hosted a number of animals in distress, including capybaras, macaws, cusumbos, turtles, caimans, caracaras, boas, rattle snakes and deer. They have been entrusted to us by Corporinoquia, the government's local autonomous environmental agency, and usually involve orphaned animals, animals rescued from the illegal pet trade or animals involved in traffic accidents. As there are not a lot of options in our region, we have taken on this role, which includes the expense of veterinary care, medicines, feed and patience, as we seek to return the animals back to the wild. Having a natural reserve obviously helps with this process of returning them to their normal habitat. In order to become a full-fledged animal rescue center, we need to invest in safe enclosures and other requirements as laid out by Colombian law, which we are willing to do with the appropriate funding.

Interpretive Center: One of our long term plans involves the establishment of an Interpretive Center, where we can educate kids and the public on the roles of the gallery and inundation forests, the morichals, the savannahs and the other ecosystems that make up the Orinoco River basin of Colombia. We already have a design and a program.





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Student Internships (2011 to Present): Young people are tomorrow's leaders. With that in mind we have hosted numerous students from around the world over the past number of years, including from Colombia, Canada, Germany, Austria, Haiti and Venezuela. Giving them the opportunity to truly experience and understand the challenges of conservation work, biodiversity preservation and sustainable development is key to our environmental education efforts. Students must either have an internship requirement in their University or Polytechnic Institution, or be doing field work for a master's thesis, in which case we supply local transport, accommodation and food while the students are at the natural reserve. We can expand this program with appropriate funding in order to offer more students the opportunity for hands-on learning.

Our Team:

- Dexter B. Dombro, B.A., LL.B., Specialist in Natural Silviculture
- Jennifer del Río García, Biologist (turtles and Herpetology)
- Francisco Antonio Castro, Agronomist and Botanist
- Dr. Kochu Rani Dombro, B.Sc., DDS (Ecoagriculture Specialist)
- Adriana Avila Pedraza, Biologist, Program Coordinator
- Dilmun D. Dombro, B.Sc., Biochar Specialist
- Cristian Leonardo Espinel, Tree Nursery Technician (SENA)

Our Location:

67 KM to the southwest of the Orinoco River port city of Puerto Carreño, along the southern banks of the Río el Bitá, in Vichada, Colombia.



Hopefully this document offers an insight into the types of activities in which we are engaged, and illustrates our environmental, social and planetary vision of action for a better world. Please ask us any questions you may have, or for any clarification regarding our programs and projects in the Orinoco River basin of Colombia and its departamento of Vichada. Our mission is to give back to the blue every day. Thank you!

Dexter B. Dombro, B.A., LL.B.

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