



Ecosystems Grants
Programme

EGP
THE NETHERLANDS


FUNDACIÓN
VIDA SILVESTRE
ARGENTINA

SUPPORTING FOREST RESTORATION AND IMPROVING WATER QUALITY IN ANDRESITO (Misiones, Argentina)

22.000 native trees were planted by local farmers

Andresito Municipality, established during the early '80s, represents the last event of organized colonization within Misiones Province. Public lands covered with native forests were granted to colonists, conditioned to their proving sufficient resources and capacities to transform the forest – viewed as unproductive land – into agricultural plots. This process of colonization led to a large number of small farms – ranging between 20 and 50 hectares – where deforestation reaches the banks of rivers and streams. Farmers are able to link poor soil management with the gradual loss of good quality water supply, crucial for family consumption and for raising livestock. For Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina (FVSA) there are also clear indications that losing the natural biological corridors represented by strips of forests along watercourses, had an impact on the biodiversity conservation in the area. In order to revert this situation FVSA, with the support of the Ecosystem Grant Program (EGP) and with the commitment of the local community, is carrying out restoration of the forest cover along stream margins. This initiative takes advantage of federal funds aimed at promoting forestry development. Some 22.000 native trees were planted during 2009 and the project expects to double this effort during 2010.

Comandante Andresito Municipality is located in the Northeastern part of Misiones Province, 60 kilometers upstream of the Iguazu River Waterfalls. It is an area of great importance for conservation purposes, because it acts as a connectivity area among several protected areas: the Iguazú National Park of Argentina, the Iguassu National Park of Brazil, the Uruguá-í and Foerster Provincial Parks. The rural areas of Andresito have important roles either as biodiversity corridors or as buffer zones of the mentioned strictly protected areas.

However, since its colonization started in the early '80s, government policies promoted forest conversion to agricultural areas, aiming to settle a stable rural population and thus securing the national sovereignty in this border area. The process lacked adequate technical support for the farmers and agroecologic production was not

stimulated, the result of which was that most of the farmed lands nowadays have lost soil fertility. Subsequently, new areas for crops are still being cleared through deforestation.

In the smallest farms – ranging 20 to 50 hectares – this forest receding process is more notorious, due to the fact that the landholder family size keeps growing and the soils are constantly impoverished by intensive farming - mainly tobacco - pushing the families to advance over the forest remaining in their properties. Deforestation, or intensive selective logging, in these cases very often reaches the margins of the streams that cross the properties.

Due to global climate change, severe droughts and intensive rains are increasingly frequent in this subtropical region. The loss of the forest cover that protects watercourses thus produces a

larger impact on the regulation of water flow and water quality on which the human activities depend. Besides, the forests that persist along rivers and streams have an important ecological role for wildlife dispersal among the remnants forest in private properties and the existing protected areas. This role is being reduced or lost as this riparian forests shrink.

In order to contribute to improve the described situation, FVSA with support from the Ecosystem Grant Program (EGP) of the Netherlands National Committee of the IUCN, and along with the local community, conducts since June 2008 the project **“Strengthening government incentives for restoration activities in priority areas of the Paraná Watershed in Misiones, Argentina”**.

The project started analyzing satellite images to identify the most critical areas in need of intervention. With the assistance of park rangers at the Misiones Ministry of Ecology, Renewable Natural Resources and Tourism, the project staff contacted key representatives of the target communities. After an initial series of outreach talks and other communications activities aimed at inviting landholders to participate in the initiative, a first group of fourteen farmers was established, committed to carry out forest restoration covering 10 - to 20 - meter wide strips along stream margins in their farms.

As part of the project, FVSA submitted an application to the Argentine National Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Fishing and Food (SAGPyA) to request subsidy federal funds provided under the Law 25.080. The application was made under the Grouped Small Farmers category. For 2009 the project includes reforestation with a varied array of native tree species on a total of 40 hectares – half of them as stands on clearcut areas, and the other half as enrichment of highly degraded forests.

This initial goal was attained in early October 2009, thanks to the farmer's effort – who received a payment for the work – and with the collaboration of a team of FVSA's volunteers. The project provided the farmers with materials to build fences around reforested areas in order to protect saplings in early stages from domestic animal activity. As livestock is no longer allowed to freely access the streams the project also provided funds to install alternate water sources for the animals. In addition, the project is

covering plantation maintenance costs during the first 18 months.

Some 22.000 native trees have been already planted, and the project expects to double this effort during next year. During 2010, again with support from EGP, an additional 30 hectares will be added to the initial restoration work. Afterwards, starting in 2011 new plantation cycles will be funded with resources coming from the reimbursement of the federal incentives provided by the Law 25.080. To keep the project area expanding, new groups of farmers will be convoked annually to join the initiative.

The farmers already engaged in the project have expressed their satisfaction with the activity, given that it contributes to recuperate the stream water supply on which them depend. In addition to this expected result, in the short term the project constituted a modest income earning activity. In the longer run, farmers will be able to sustainably use the timber produced in the restoration plots, avoiding the negative consequences of previous clearcutting practices.

Once the project is advanced, FVSA will disseminate its results, along with results of similar experiences conducted in Paraguay and Brazil. The dissemination will be targeted to public and private organizations, with the objective of encouraging the development of comparable initiatives in other areas of Misiones.

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