



PROYECTO VALORES: PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FORESTS NEAR LA SELVA

By Jossy Calvo, project manager

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With funding provided by “First USA-CR Debt for Nature Swap” administered by Forever Costa Rica (<http://costaricaporsiempre.org/portfolio/first-usa-cr-debt-for-nature-swap/?lang=en>), OTS-La Selva Research Station continues to implement the project known in Spanish as “Proyecto Valores.” The project promotes the restoration and conservation of the tropical rain forest of the San Juan-La Selva Biological Corridor by creating a model of sustainability and landowner-led forest monitoring in communities near La Selva in Sarapiquí, Costa Rica.

Since June 2018, the program has been conducting surveys with more than 100 farmers in 15 different communities, to understand how they perceive the forests and landscape of Sarapiquí. In 2019, the project will conduct more surveys and use the data to design environmental education programs and participatory citizen science models in the region.

To foster greater community involvement in this pilot program, OTS held a workshop in September 2018 for 21 farmers interested in learning more about the project and improving the native forests on their farms. The goal of this workshop, which is the first of many, is to create a network of forests along four rivers in the region (Sarapiquí, Tirimbina, Bijagual and Peje) that will serve as a biological corridor for flora and fauna. The project has already initiated ecological restoration with landowners on their farms.

These workshops will be essential to promote and execute new forest valuation models, especially for second-growth forests, which are one of the most vulnerable ecosystems to disappear from land use change. Associating these second-growth forests on private farms with strategic incentive programs, such as payments for environmental services (PES), sustainable use of forest products, or ecotourism, helps landowners perceive that their forests are valuable for their farm and for society.

The Proyecto Valores also provides a new generation of scientific information for scientific articles, case studies, educational material, maps or infographics. One important product will be an Atlas of Forest Conservation of the Sarapiquí River Watershed (produced in collaboration with Wagner Lopez, OTS) that will allow farmers to better visualize the landscape context of their farms. Ecological restoration strategies, water quality, spatial analysis with GIS or social diagnostics are just some of the many topics that the project will embrace and make available to the community in the next few years.

A team of scientists, who are very committed to the conservation of the tropical forest and the well-being of the communities, leads the program. For example, one member of the technical team, Dr. Robin Chazdon, contributes information from her long-term research on forest regeneration in Sarapiquí to inform many of the educational materials. The program also receives support from scientists such as Dr. Matthew Fagan of the University of Maryland Baltimore County (USA) and Dr. Eben Broadbent and Dr. Angelica Almeyda of the University of Florida (USA). The scientists collaborate with studies on land use spatial analysis, riparian forest structure and ecosystem services of agritourism. Finally, the project encourages internships that allow students to give their technical and scientific skills while gaining experience working in a variety of tropical environments. For additional information, please contact the principal investigator Dr. Amanda Wendt (amanda.wendt@tropicalstudies.org), or the project manager Lic. Jossy Calvo (jossy.calvo@tropicalstudies.org).

