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## **Loggers Destroy 162 Hectares in Monarch Butterfly Preserve**

*by LADB Staff*

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The government's efforts to restore the population of monarch butterflies to Michoacan and other parts of central Mexico have suffered a major setback. At the Third Annual Regional Conference on the Monarch Butterfly, Mexican Environment Secretary Jose Luis Luege Tamargo acknowledged that loggers have continued to destroy the habitat of the butterflies in the center of the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere, which spans a large area in Michoacan and Mexico states. The government created the biosphere in the 1980s to protect the butterflies, which migrate annually to the region from the US and Canada.

The butterflies are not considered endangered or threatened despite a recent decline in numbers, but the survival of their habitat in central Mexico is important from an environmental standpoint.

As part of the effort to protect the area, the government convinced about 10,000 area villagers to give up logging in exchange for jobs in tourism, reforestation, trail maintenance, trout farming, and other areas. Residents also received housing payments and other subsidies. The effort is supported in part with grants from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Hewlett Packard Foundation.

Many residents have complained, however, that government efforts to help them have not been sufficient. Many jobs are provided only during the winter months, when tourists flock to the biosphere to observe the butterflies. "You can't eat butterflies," Abel Cruz, leader of Rosario village, which is host to the most monarchs and monarch watchers every year, told *The Chicago Tribune*. "If the government doesn't comply with what they promised, we are not going to comply either."

### ***Logging interests infiltrate forests***

Luege acknowledged that outside logging interests have managed to infiltrate the forests and take down trees. These heavily armed loggers, usually associated with organized crime, have intimidated or bribed residents and local authorities to allow them to cut trees on about 162 ha near the core of the biosphere. "We have lost the advances that we have made in the past five years to seal and guard the biosphere with the depredation in the nucleus of the biosphere," said Luege.

The Mexican government claims to have eliminated 85% of the illegal logging operations carried out in the biosphere by organized gangs in recent years by installing checkpoints, hiring local residents to keep vigilance in the protected areas, and prosecuting loggers. The government has been fighting deforestation in the area for many years (see *SourceMex*, 2001-12-12 and 2002-02-20).

A series of satellite photos compiled by US scientists in 2005 showed that large stretches of the 55,847-ha biosphere had been logged and cleared (see *SourceMex*, 2005-03-16). Luege acknowledged

that safeguards that were created to prevent logging in the protected areas had broken down because of a lack of coordination among state and federal agencies.

The environment secretary said the government's efforts would now focus on reforestation of some of the core areas in the biosphere that have been clear-cut. In addition, armed patrols will be increased in much of the biosphere. Some environmental advocates contend, however, that the government has to take a more comprehensive approach to the problem, such as creating jobs year-round for the area residents. Oscar Vidal, director of the WWF's Mexico office, recommends that the government create a tourism campaign to bring tourists to the area even when the butterflies are not present. "You have to offer a different way of making money to the landlords," Vidal said of the local residents. (Sources: The New York Times, Associated Press, 11/08/05; The Herald-Mexico City, 11/09/05; The Chicago Tribune, 12/01/05; La Jornada, Reforma, 05/23/06)

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