Photo courtesy Peter Dean

reforestation

GAVIOTAS

The sensible and sustainable management of natural resources provides a living wage and supports local ecosystems.

PROJECT Las Gaviotas
LOCATION Gaviotas, Colombia

+ Paolo Lugari and Gunter Pauli

PROJECT Carbon Offset Initiative
AGENCY Gaviotas/Marion Institute

+ Peter Dean

The threats to wild forests are widely reported. Each year, tropical deforestation releases an estimated 1.5 billion tons of carbon into the atmosphere. Frequently, local business people assert that cutting down trees is necessary to support local economies. Sustainable reforestation proves that healthy, managed forests can balance ecological benefits with the need for local, living wage jobs.

HOW IT WORKS

Since 1983, more than 8,000 hectares (20,000 acres) of tropical pine tree have been planted. Pine tree saplings are inoculated with natural fungi that enable trees to thrive in soils damaged by acidification and deforestation that are the result of both natural and man-made causes. The restored forest purifies the existing groundwater, which was formerly dangerous to drink because of microbial content.

After the tree canopy of the initial planting is established the soil cools enough to allow dormant seeds—already in the soil—to germinate. In Las Gaviotas, this has produced an incrediblely diverse forest of nearly 253 species. The new forest has restored the hydrological cycle, increasing local rainfall by 10 percent.

BENEFITS

Las Gaviotas is now a self-sustaining program that provides 200 full-time jobs and part-time work for about 3,000 people. The community sells high quality resin harvested from the pine forest, bio-fuels and turpentine refined from that resin, and high quality drinking water. The Marion Institute, Las Gaviotas sells carbon offsets. The proceeds of the program fund further planting projects.

+ Controls erosion
+ Cooler local temperatures
+ Provides jobs

When the initial seedlings (above) mature, the leaf canopy permits the growth of an extraordinary diversity of native plants (right).