



## Rare Pride in La Sepultura

Shrunkен drastically from its original area, La Sepultura Biosphere Reserve's pine-oak forest (right) is under threat from extensive livestock farming, illegal lumber extraction, and swidden agriculture. La Sepultura Biosphere Reserve belongs to the Central America Pine-Oak Forest Eco-region. Comprised of 413,253 acres, La Sepultura's landscape includes cloud forest, tropical forest, and pine-oak forest. The region is home to 10 of the 19 plant species endemic to the region, as well as jaguars, tapirs and Rosita's Bunting. All are threatened by the destruction of this area.



Baseline data of agricultural fire use in the Reserve from the past 10 years indicates that forest fires are the leading threat to the pine-oak forests. A Mexican park service (Comision Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas, or CONANP) conservation plan conducted in 2007 confirmed this, revealing that forest fires are a major threat to the pine-oak forest. Farmers use forest fires to clear land for new agricultural plots, but behavior change to minimize fire impact and utilization of alternative farming practices have not been adopted.

CONANP staff member and recently named Rare Pride Campaign Manager Mario Alejandro Moises aims to reduce forest fires in the pine-oak forests of La Sepultura by 50% during his campaign that will run from September 2008 through June 2010. Partnering with CONANP, Alejandro's Pride campaign will promote sustainable fire management practices among farmers by encouraging use of tools such as seasonal agricultural calendars, fire breaks, community management plans and fire brigades, natural fences, and other barriers to fire. Alejandro will also promote sustainable agricultural alternatives to fire usage including organic agriculture, agrosilvopastoral systems, and sustainable grass production. Alejandro will deliver these conservation messages through local visits, targeting all members of the community from school children to farmers. Campaign messages will emphasize the ecological benefits of introducing sustainable agricultural practices, as well as the increased productivity of agricultural crops that will be profitable for farmers.

With 20 years of experience running Pride campaigns, Rare understands that there are major barriers to behavior change, even if that change enables long-term environmental protection. In the case of the agricultural community in and around La Sepultura, these barriers are economic as well as cultural. A lack of financing options for sustainable productive alternatives and a lack of trust in new farming methods combined create a challenging scenario for conservation. As part of his campaign plan and his current work at CONANP, Alejandro will engage "barrier removal partners" to address the economic and cultural barriers to behavior change. These partners will include farming extension projects from other Mexican government programs (PRODERS and PET) which promote improved farming methods. Moreover, other institutions including the Mexican forest service, CONAFOR, the Mexican fire learning network (CAMAFU) and The Nature Conservancy are interested in following the Pride campaign and supporting its conservation objectives as Alejandro and his team work with local farmers to reduce pine-oak habitat loss from agricultural fire. These realistic interventions will result in the preservation of flora and fauna, as well as increased crop production for the farmers.

***"Rare's Pride campaigns have been very effective in raising awareness about conservation issues, and raising awareness is the crucial first step in combating the environmental challenges faced by Mexico's protected areas."***

*- President of CONANP Dr. Ernesto Enkerlin-Hoeflich*