



Volume 1, Issue 2

Winter, 2006.

Welcome!

To **El Bosque Pluvial's**

Winter, 2006 issue. As usual it is packed with interesting stories about the Caribbean NF (El Yunque), America's **only** tropical rain forest and the professional staff who work to conserve this vital resource.



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Parrots Released into State Forest Ecosystem Team Efforts Contribute to Historic Event



At daybreak on November 19, 2006, Biological Science Technicians from the Caribbean NF's Ecosystem Team watched expectantly as twenty two Puerto Rican Parrots were about to be released into the wild. As the door to the parrot's "flying cage" was opened, the parrots had to be encouraged to leave, but then, with a flurry of brilliant green and blue wings, they flew-out and began foraging for food that had been staged for them in nearby trees.

This unique event marked the first time in the history of the PR Parrot Recovery Program that parrots trained by scientists in the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources' Jose L. Vivaldi aviary had been released into a State Forest. To prepare for this

event, EcoSystems Team Biologist **Felipe Cano**, Supervisory Biological Science Technician **Orlando Carrasquillo** and Biological Science Technicians **Benjamin Fuentes** and **Anastasio Gomez** spent over a year assessing land conditions in the Rio Abajo State Forest determining proper placement for artificial nests, planning access trail locations, building artificial nest cavities and assisting DNER personnel with the construction of a huge 25 foot high, 900 square foot "flying cage." The cage, located in the forest near the aviary, is used to train the birds to forage for their natural food sources while avoiding simulated predators.

Ecosystems Team bio-science techs also trained members of the DNER Wildlife Research Bureau in proper tree climbing, trail building and maintenance techniques and taught them how to construct nest monitoring platforms in trees near the nesting cavities.

Ecosystem Team Leader **Pedro Rios** was a vital

contributor to the Inter-agency Technical Advisory Team, joining advisors from the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Forest Supervisor **Pablo Cruz** provided valuable input to the Inter-agency Management Team that monitored the project; the R8 Regional Forester or his representative attended yearly Management Team meetings as observers. CS & P Team Conservation Education Leader **Blanca Ruiz** collaborated to provide outreach on the details of the parrot release to local schools and communities.

The survival of the PR Parrot is not yet assured, but the Caribbean NF's involvement in vital projects such as this one contribute significantly to the ultimate success of the parrot recovery program!

The release of these parrots into the Rio Abajo State Forest is a vital part of the Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Plan, whose ultimate goal is to return 500 parrots into the wild. Plans are to maintain two separate "captive/wild" populations on the island..

From the Forest Supervisors Desk Sustainable Management in the Caribbean NF (cont.)

In the Fall edition of El Bosque Pluvial, I shared some answers I gave in an interview regarding Sustainable Resource Management and the Caribbean NF.



When I ran out of space, I promised to continue my comments in the Winter edition, so here goes:

I was asked; “How does the Caribbean NF help developers use open spaces in a sustainable manner?” I replied that when there’s been a conflict between environmentalists and developers, we’ve worked with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to create laws that will encourage more prudent management of the island’s resources. By doing so we’ve effected a noticeable change between how developers did business in the past, and what they do now.

The next question was “How important is interagency

cooperation to the Caribbean NF? I replied that I am convinced that the only way for us to survive in light of dwindling resources is to collaborate with other agencies. What we have here is a coalition of federal agencies with much in common, e.g., the Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service; we meet quarterly to plan how we can combine our resources to maximize our land management efforts. For example, on St. John in the neighboring US Virgin Islands, we provide a unified eco-management command for the Virgin Islands National Park to work on emergency response problems as well as budgetary crises. Much of our work entails combining our resources in a cohesive manner.

I was then asked: “How does the Forest Service’s current focus on “partnerships” play-out in this part of the world? I said that we work with Non-Government Organizations (The Forest Gateway Community Council is a good example of this), as well as community leaders, and local business people. We have a partnership agreement with the Puerto Rican Conservation

Trust, which lobbies Congress to purchase adjacent lands and transfer them to us, and also raises funds for conservation projects. NGOs provide important attributes that we don’t have; they can do things that we have neither the skills nor the authority to do. As an example, the Wildlife Foundation helps us raise funds to support vital species recovery projects. These “symbiotic relationships” between us benefit all involved.

Well, that’s the rest of the story; I’ve enjoyed sharing my views with you. I welcome your comments or observations about these vitally important sustainability issue and how they directly affect both the Caribbean NF and Puerto Rico’s many other valuable natural resources. Send your comments to my e-mail address: pcruz01@fs.fed.us.

Hasta pronto,

Pablo

Caribbean NF’s YCC Summer Employment Program; A Teen Success Story!

The Caribbean National Forest hosted a successful Youth Conservation Corps Program from June through August, 2006. YCC provides summer jobs for young men and women 15 to 18 years of age; participating students can gain greater awareness of the environment, while earning a salary. Administration & Planning Team HRP Specialist

Elizabeth Trevino, chose the following six YCC candidates by web-based lottery:

Zahily E. Rodriguez, Carlos E. Estrada, Kidany E. Perez, Carmen E. Rodriguez, Anthony Alicea and Briceyra G. Ortiz. **Robertito Rios, Jr.** led the team to clean trash from forest trails and roads.

The Caribbean NF hopes to host the YCC program again next year!



Firefighter training in the Caribbean NF An interview with Bruce Drapeau.

We asked EcoSystem Fire Program Coordinator **Bruce Drapeau** to tell us about the Caribbean NF's Firefighter Training Program; here's what he said:

The Caribbean National Forest trains firefighters and dispatchers to be available for deployment to stateside fires or other incidents. Our firefighters can be deployed as a crew, or if they are bilingual, as a single resource to fill in on a crew anywhere in the country. To get a crew properly prepared, requires both extensive training and a huge commitment from the trainees. Prospective candidates must complete a work capacity test to ensure that they are physically able to handle the arduous duties assigned to them on the fireline. This test consists of completing a 3 mile hike within 45 minutes while wearing a 45 lb. backpack. Candidates who pass

this test receive basic firefighter training and are then qualified to head-out to the fireline. Each year, firefighters must repeat the work capacity test and take part in a one day Fireline Refresher Course to maintain their firefighter qualification. Firefighters who display leadership skills and the ability to communicate in English take part in further "squad boss" training. The most responsible and reliable of the squad bosses are selected for intense training to become Crew Bosses. The Caribbean NF currently



trains and administers approximately 200 firefighters each year. Of this number, 14 are Squad Bosses, and 3 are Crew Bosses.

We also train dispatchers who deploy to fires and coordination centers throughout the US. Dispatchers are not required to pass the work capacity test to be eligible. Candidates receive training in dispatch procedures and must be completely fluent in English. We currently have 4 fully trained dispatchers, and another 18 who will complete their training on assignment.

For more information about the Caribbean NF Firefighter program, e-mail Bruce at: bdrapeau@fs.fed.us or write: **Caribbean NF, HC-01, PO Box 13490, Rio Grande, PR 00745-9625.**

Volunteer Work Cuts Labor Costs at Caribbean NF NGO Volunteer labor saves forest \$30,000

Again this year, volunteer organizations from the mainland US have done extraordinary work in support of conservation projects on the Caribbean NF. Over the summer, teams from the **Sierra Club** (photo below), **Michigan State University** (photo lower right) and the **American Hiking Society**

(photo upper-right), labored arduously under the management of CS&P Team Supervisory Forest Technician **Jaime Valentin** to complete tasks vital to the Forest Service mission; re-opening the La Coca Nature Trail, cleaning-up and repairing the Quebrada Grande, Angelito, Big Tree, La Mina and Caimitillo Nature Trails, painting the bridge at the Palo Colorado Visitor Center and collecting garbage along access roads. Their efforts saved the Forest Service approximately \$30,000 in labor costs!

Please join us in applauding them for dedicating their precious time and effort to help the Caribbean NF accomplish the Forest Service mission: **"Caring for the land and serving people!"**



EL BOSQUE PLUVIAL

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Spanish and English at:
www.fs.fed.us/r8/caribbean,*



FOREST SPOTLIGHT



This issue's **Forest Spotlight** illuminates another VIP (Very Impressive Professional): LE & I Team Law Enforcement Officer **Ismael Monge** who has patrolled the Caribbean NF for the past 27 years. Forest visitors frequently comment on his pleasant and helpful attitude, while his tenacious investigative skills are the bane of potential lawbreakers.



Monge was born in Canovanas. In the 1950's his family moved to Chicago; when he graduated from high school, the family returned to the island. His university studies were interrupted by the Vietnam War. He was called to active duty, attending the Army's Jungle

Warfare School and then saw combat with the 1st Air Cavalry Division in Vietnam where he earned his Combat Infantryman's Badge, and was awarded the Air Medal and several other decorations.

Upon his return he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education at the University of Puerto Rico. He taught Senior High School English at schools in Canovanas and Rio Grande until retiring in 1991. He began his "next" career, attending the Federal Law Enforcement Academy in Glynco, Georgia. He has served the Caribbean NF as a Federal Law Enforcement Officer ever since.

Monge will be retiring "for good" in January of next year. He will be sorely missed in the forest for his absolute professionalism and his sunny, easy-going personality.

Monge lives in Colinas del Yunque with his wife Lillian Cabrera and their black Rottweiler "Oso." Their three children Lillian, Alexis and Ismael Jr. and their five grandchildren are frequent visitors.

BLANCA WINS AGAIN !

CS & P Team Conservation Education Leader Blanca Ruiz has captured the prestigious **Gifford Pinchot National Award for Excellence in Conservation Education**. She was selected from a list of top Conservation Education Leaders from all nine Forest Service Regions to receive the honor (photo left) at the annual National Association for Interpretation Workshop in Albuquerque, NM in November.

Well Done Blanca! We join the Forest Service community in applauding your selection as the winner of this award and the well-deserved national recognition that comes with it!