



COMISION NACIONAL DE
AREAS NATURALES
PROTEGIDAS

**THE VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION ON PROTECTED AREAS:
NETWORKS OF SISTER RESERVES BETWEEN
MEXICO AND UNITED STATES**



CONANP

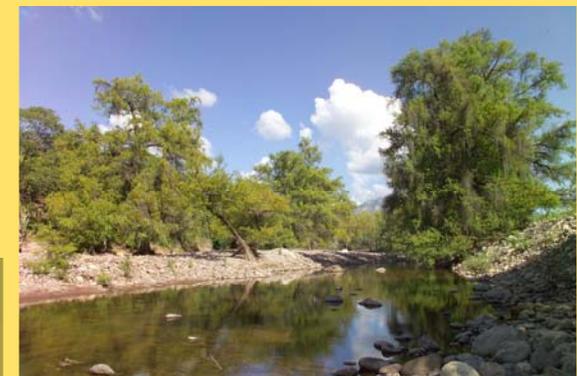
The cooperation between protected areas of Mexico and the United States began its formal stage on May 5, 1997, when the ministers from the Department of the Interior from the United States, and from Environment, Natural Resources and Fish from Mexico, signed the Letter of Intention. This Document establishes the background for the identification and subsequent matching of protected areas among both countries.

The collaboration and cooperation, however, had been occurring in an informal manner, particularly among protected areas that were border neighbors. This collaboration has always been characterized by a common vision towards the conservation of natural resources. Strong friendship bonds and a working relationship based on mutual respect and trust, have always been important elements in this collaboration.



From our experience in international cooperation on protected areas we have identified the following key steps:

- **Definition of the reserve matching process (to make sure we are all speaking of the same concept)**
- **Definition of criteria to select sister reserves**
- **Definition of the scope of cooperation**
- **Definition of the lines or aspects of cooperation**
- **Mechanisms for follow up and evaluation**
- **Identification of challenges and limitations in cooperation.**



DEFINITION...

From work sessions and joint efforts, the concept of sister protected areas has been defined as follows:

“Sister protected areas are two or more protected areas from different countries, officially declared at a national level, and with similar resources or shared management interests, that agree to work together to promote the conservation of their natural and cultural resources”



CRITERIA FOR SELECTION...

The criteria for the selection of protected areas to be developed as sister protected areas would be:

- *Geographic aspects (location)*
- *Type of protected area, management objectives*
- *Description of wildlife resources and ecosystems*
- *Shared species (as migratory routes, etc)*
- *Recognized as part of an International Agreement (v. gr. Ramsar Site, MAB site, etc)*
- *Similar problems for conservation and management activities*
- *Challenges*
- *Socioeconomic aspects*



THE SCOPE OF COOPERATION...

Likewise, the criteria to establish an agreement of matching among reserves were described jointly among authorities from the US NPS and CONANP, as follows:

1. The sister protected areas should have a formal recognition at the federal level.
2. There has to be similarities among the ecosystems of the sister reserves, or there has to be common interest in management of the protected areas.



3. Within the short term, there should be exchange of personnel and technical information. This can be accomplished inexpensively by communications that facilitate the exchange of information like fax, e-mail, or internet. The exchange of personnel, although it tends to be more expensive, it helps to strengthen relationships among colleagues and they become familiar with the resources and management of each protected area.
4. The technical scope should be agreed by the sister reserves.



5. Although it is not necessary to have a Bilateral Formal Agreement, the work relationship between the sister reserves should be formalized through a common Work Program in which the terms and conditions of cooperation are specified.

6. With respect to economic aspects, the sister reserves should agree with their partners regarding the expenditures that each will cover. Likewise, the protected areas shall be able to look for external funds provided from organizations or foundations that support these activities.



LINES OF COOPERATION...

The following are a few examples of lines of cooperation jointly established between sister reserves:

- ***Management for Conservation***
- ***Research and Monitoring***
- ***Social Development***
- ***Exchange and Training***
- ***Financing and Funding Sources***
- ***Inspection and Enforcement***
- ***Legal Aspects***
- ***Environmental Education***
- ***Environmental Emergencies***



FOLLOW UP AND EVALUATION...

Efforts have been made to maintain a permanent follow up program in these processes of cooperation by establishing annual work programs that have been developed by the respective reserves or groups of reserves. Annual meetings to evaluate the cooperation agreements have been organized by the respective institutions.



DIFICULTIES AND LIMITATIONS...

It is evident that the cooperation between countries with different programs and policies for the protection of natural resources and management of protected areas represents challenges, difficulties and limitations associated with these differences. During the experience of working with the USNPS, we have identified the following:

- a) Financial restrictions among the participant countries***
- b) Security policies (mainly from the US)***
- c) Closing of Border (USA-Mexico)***
- d) Lack of diffusion of successful international programs***
- e) Change of personnel in the areas of the participant countries***
- f) Communication barriers due to cultural and language aspects***

