

LAS ZAHINAS Community projects

A critical component to sustainable conservation efforts is building trust through outreach within the community. Using Cocobolo as the base of operations, CREA develops programs that focus on the health and welfare of the families living in and adjacent to the village of Las Zahinas.

Programming is developed based on ongoing assessment of community needs and in conjunction with state officials where possible. A sample of programs that have been developed and implemented recently include:

1. Hazardous waste education

The village of Las Zahinas, like many others like it around the world, is not served by the national electricity grid. Hence, its inhabitants rely on batteries to work their flashlights and radios. Once these batteries are dead they are often discarded around the house, in fields and rivers. CREA has been teaching Las Zahinas' inhabitants about toxic waste and how best to dispose of it.

2. Las Zahinas Primary School Improvement project

CREA is promoting the appeal and attendance of primary school to the local population. In order to do this CREA has combined with volunteers and visiting school groups from the US to paint the school inside and out, re-surface the blackboard, provide reading and study material, as well as develop a home garden surrounding the school where young students can learn the basics of sustainable agriculture.

3. High School scholarship program for young girls.

Rural children tend not to attend high school due to the relatively high cost and the distance that the schools are from their villages (high schools are usually placed in towns and cities). Young girls are particularly vulnerable to a lack of education. It has been found that rural families where the mother did not attend high school have on-average more children, higher malnutrition rates and lower standards of living than families where the mother did have the chance to attend high school. CREA is offering several full scholarships per year for young girls from Las Zahinas to attend high school in the nearest town.

4. Community-based iguana farm.

Iguana, once were abundant in the local forests around Las Zahinas, however through hunting and egg collection, their numbers have dwindled and are now a threatened species throughout Panama. CREA is addressing this problem by promoting iguana farming within villages. Eggs or adults can be collected with ease for protein and a proportion let free into the wild to replenish wild populations.

5. Health post

Health is important to the developmental goals of poor rural villages like Las Zahinas, where the community currently needs to walk 10 hours to get to the nearest town to see a qualified person. CREA has negotiated with the local government so that the costs of constructing a health post will be shared between government, CREA and the local inhabitants of Las Zahinas.