

The Guatemalan Military Helps With Reforestation

Record drought has gripped Central America this year. This has become a regional security issue. Some portion of the cause is because of excessive tree cutting which has dried the region. This is in addition to changes produced by climate change.

Our effort sought assistance from the local detachment of the Guatemalan Army. Because the drought is a matter of life and death for local residents, the Army responded with help. This is because reforestation is a key path to restoring moisture and rain to the region.



Here (at left) are several soldiers who helped dig holes and plant trees into the back country. In this situation we are restoring keystone species in an area of second growth which needs species that grow tall and that can hold more moisture in the forest. These tall species will attract monkeys and birds that actually develop the infrastructure of the forest by dropping seeds and plant refuse. There are too many species for us to plant on our own and this allows the forces of nature to complete the reforestation process.

Some of these soldiers are new recruits to the Army just out of basic training. These guys enjoyed working in the forest and recognize that they are contributing to the improved health of their country.



These soldiers, above and to the left, work alongside college students from Guatemala's University of Rural Studies that we recruit. An easy cooperation emerges on these tree planting ventures.

Guatemala has never in recent history experienced a drought such as what they are now experiencing. This is partly because of climate change, but also because they have severely overcut and reduce forest cover. This has caused this region somewhat continuously since at least 2014 to experience various stages of national emergency because of the severe lack of rainfall. (See this reported on the NBC News link, immediately below).

Guatemala's government has declared a state of emergency in 16 of the country's 22 provinces as Central America suffers one its worst droughts in decades.

Experts warn that major crop losses – mostly in the region's staples of corn and beans - and the deaths of hundreds of cattle could leave hundreds of thousands of families without food. More than 236,000 families have already been affected, mainly in western and central Guatemala.

The state of emergency ... would allow the government to provide funds to those who have lost their crops, and to stabilize food prices. In Nicaragua, where the drought has killed more than 2,500 cattle and left 600,000 people in a state of malnutrition, the government is asking international food agencies to help it feed 100,000 families in parched areas.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/guatemala-declares-emergency-over-central-american-drought-n189146>

Our foreman Jose Luis Morales (at the right) says that this lingering drought is causing a deepening deterioration in the economic condition. This is the primary reason why so many Guatemalans are abandoning their ancestral homeland and heading north to find a means for survival. Yes, survival. They can no longer grow the basic crops upon which they historically survived, primarily corn, beans and tomatoes.



The Guatemalan people have unwittingly brought this drought onto themselves by excessive cutting of the rainforest and shifting to cattle ranching. About half of their former rainforest is now gone. This causes regional drying beyond the impact of global climate change. We see this because other areas, beyond these logged areas where forests remain intact, continue to have rain and sufficient moisture for normal food cultivation. If the US government could provide education about this relationship, that would be far more effective and cheaper than building a wall.



The Guatemalan government is finally recognizing that immense damage has occurred because of logging and lost forests. They are now awakening to the need for massive reforestation. This has made it easy for Jose and our team to recruit a detachment of the local Army to assist in our tree planting efforts.

The photo at the left shows a soldier carrying saplings into the forest. Too bad we can't bring this example of the military lining up to fight climate change into our own country! All of this work is done by hand and without any modern equipment.