

## **Morethanmonarchs.org**

Morethanmonarchs.org was created in 2006 to raise awareness about the devastating impact of illegal logging on the environment and local communities in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve in Central Mexico. This website provides a platform for villagers, community leaders, government officials, tourists, biologists, students and other interested parties to collaborate on key issues, challenges and solutions.

It captures the stories and accounts of those experiencing the loss of their livelihoods, their forests and the endeared monarch butterfly. The goal of this forum is to bridge the gap in communication between the people of this region and the Mexican government to end the destruction of these precious resources. Morethanmonarchs.org ensures that the real story is being told by local community members and cannot be distorted by third party interpretation or speculation. Indigenous populations can now have a dialogue directly with the Mexican government by sending letters by email via [www.morethanmonarchs.org](http://www.morethanmonarchs.org) or [www.masquemonarcas.org](http://www.masquemonarcas.org).

Miraculously traversing thousands of miles, through mountain ranges and deserts, from Southern Canada to Central Mexico, the monarch butterfly's amazing triumph may one day prove to be in vain if illegal logging practices in Mexico continues to destroy the habitat of its winter resting place, critical to its survival. Record low numbers of butterflies occupying these areas over the past few years have evidenced a trend of decline, alarming both conservationists and local communities.

While media attention has largely focused on the impact to the monarchs, illegal deforestation is also having grave effects on the lives of local villagers who are fighting against outside logging syndicates to protect their resources and livelihoods. Indigenous communities are being threatened and coerced by armed logging syndicates, after trying to intervene and stop the logging. Community leaders are trying to get the attention of the Mexican federal and state officials in a desperate attempt to end the cycle of corruption initiated by illegal deforestation. To date, the Mexican government has failed to adequately address these illegal activities and take action.

The ECO-LIFE foundation created Morethanmonarchs.org as a unique communications outlet, giving the people of this region a voice that can be heard by the Mexican government and the world at large. ECO-LIFE was founded by Bill Toone, a conservation biologist with more than 25 years of experience in domestic and international conservation. He created ECO-LIFE to promote sustainable development models that are well thought-out and evolve to meet the needs of both humans and ecosystems. To learn more about the ECO-LIFE Foundation, please visit <http://www.ecolifefoundation.org/>.

## **Morethanmonarchs.org Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **What is the mission of Morethanmonarchs.org (masquemonarcas.org)?**

Morethanmonarchs.org was developed in 2006 to raise awareness about the devastating impact of illegal logging on the environment and local communities in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve in Central Mexico. This website provides a platform for villagers, community leaders, government officials, tourists, biologists, students, and other interested parties to collaborate on key issues, challenges and solutions.

### **How does the site serve as a tool to communicate with the Mexican Government?**

The site houses a discussion board and a “tell your story” section where participants can select government officials as recipients, and send a email letter directly to those responsible for protecting the reserve. A letter library posts all these emails as well as numerous previously written letters. The site is available in English and in Spanish through the mirror site Masquemonarcas.org.

### **How do indigenous communities learn about how to use this site?**

The ECO-LIFE Foundation works with community coordinators in Mexico trained to educate indigenous populations about the purpose of Morethanmonarchs.org and the functionality of the site. Community leaders and members are instructed on how to use the site as a tool to communicate to government representatives. Villagers can access the site at local internet cafes, at the offices of the community coordinators, and the local indigenous radio station to send emails to the government voicing their concerns about the impact of illegal logging on their communities. Coordinators are equipped to take dictation if necessary and facilitate the letter writing process. Handwritten letters are also accepted and can be scanned into the database on the site.

### **Why is Morethanmonarchs.org unique?**

Morethanmonarchs.org leverages the communication power of the internet directly for communities so there is no room for third party interpretation or distortion of their perspective. This site is teaching communities that they can communicate directly with their government and that their true opinions can be heard. It is an example of how technology and the internet can be used in developing countries by indigenous populations to generate awareness about important conservation and humanitarian issues.

### **What is the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve?**

It is 56,259 hectares of mostly pine and fir forest that is federally protected by the Mexican government. The Reserve is located in the neovolcanic mountain range of Central Mexico, 80 miles west of Mexico City. International foundations and conservation organizations have rallied to protect these forests, which are critical to the survival of millions of monarch butterflies. The vast majority of the land in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve is owned by *ejidos* and *comunidad indígenas*, which are two forms of communal land ownership in Mexico.

### **What is happening to the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve?**

Illegal logging in this federally protected reserve is leading to severe deforestation. The degradation of this habitat leaves monarchs vulnerable to winter freezing without the protection of a closed forest canopy. Research suggests that deforestation may be the most pressing threat to North American populations of monarch butterflies.

## **What is the cause of deforestation in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve?**

Initially agricultural clearing contributed to deforestation in this area. Recently, the most significant forest loss detected by satellite and aerial imagery is caused by illegal logging. Illegal logging is unauthorized timber harvesting or timber theft for commercial purposes. Organized illegal logging syndicates are thought to be the primary threat to the over-wintering habitat of the monarch butterfly.

## **Why is illegal logging an important issue?**

The conservation of this habitat is critical to the survival of Eastern populations of the North American monarch butterfly. On a humanitarian level, illegal logging and its corruptive practices are dismantling the ecological, social, and economic integrity of communities in this area.

- The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Illegal Logging Report 2005-2006 cites the loss and deterioration of 576.5 hectares of forest, which represent an increase of 140% in comparison to the 239.5 hectares lost annually during the 2003-2005 period. The report shows that deforestation rates are now over 8 times higher than they were 5 years ago. The implications of this increase mean that the integrity of the monarch forest may be degraded to a point where it cannot sustain monarchs in less than 20 years.
- Researchers found in a 28-year period study, the average size of the conserved patches of forest decreased nearly 90 percent, from 5,000 acres to 500. Researchers estimate that in 50 years, at the current rate of deforestation, nearly all the original forest will be similarly degraded.

## **What effect is illegal logging having on the livelihoods of local communities?**

Precious resources are being exploited by external logging syndicates who have the money and power to manipulate ejidos (indigenous communities) and local law enforcement. Local members of ejidos are being seduced by bribery and extorted by threats into selling their forests. Communities are being forced to protect their property by taking matters into their own hands and are often threatened with death if they attempt to stop illegal loggers. They have written hundreds of letters in vain to the Mexican government, while illegal logging continues to plague precious forests and indigenous communities. Local law enforcement is also subject to bribery and has failed to uphold federal protection of the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve.

## **What needs to be done in order to stop illegal logging?**

The Mexican government must enforce the laws that were established to protect the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve. By making this issue public and telling the real story from communities' perspectives, Morethanmonarchs.org hopes to persuade the Mexican government to enforce existing laws set up to protect these forests.

## **What can be done to help?**

- Log on to [www.Morethanmonarchs.org](http://www.Morethanmonarchs.org) for information.
- Write a letter to the Mexican government to support the enforcement to laws that protect the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve.
- Join in the discussion on the forum about what can be done to protect the monarch butterfly migration.
- Forward the website to others who are interested in helping to protect the monarch butterfly.

- Visit the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve both during the migration and in the off-season; tourism to the region gives monetary support to local communities and shows the local and national authorities that foreigners are also interested in having the region protected.

### **Who created [www.Morethanmonarchs.org](http://www.Morethanmonarchs.org)?**

Morethanmonarchs.org was founded by the ECO-LIFE foundation which is a small non-government organization with extensive conservation experience in the monarch butterfly region of Mexico.

### **What is the ECO-LIFE foundation?**

The ECO-LIFE foundation created Morethanmonarchs.org in 2006 as a unique communications outlet, giving the people of this region a voice that can be heard by the Mexican government. ECO-LIFE is based in San Diego, California and was founded by Bill Toone, a conservation biologist with more than 25 years of experience in domestic and international conservation. Toone believes that often, even with the best of intentions, conservation groups can do more harm than good to the areas they are trying to help as a result of not fully understanding the implications of their actions. He created ECO-LIFE to promote sustainable development models that are well thought-out and evolve to meet the needs of both humans and ecosystems. To learn more about the ECO-LIFE Foundation, please visit <http://www.ecolifefoundation.org>