



## Case Study

# SCOPING POTENTIAL PARTNERS NORTHERN MEXICO

*A disciplined, yet personal, methodology to partnership scoping assures optimal partner selection in the cloud forests of North Eastern Mexico.*

The Nature Conservancy became very interested in El Cielo Biosphere Reserve when, in January 2008, it was identified as a priority site for conservation action. It is an area where tropical and temperate species collide, and the highest biodiversity of the region is concentrated.

The Conservancy was new to this geography and to its social, economic and conservation dynamics. El Cielo was already an internationally known as a hotspot for biodiversity in North America and many different individuals, organizations, and government entities were involved with it, yet its long term protection remained uncertain.

Selecting partners to work with for this area was taken very seriously by the Conservancy. The El Cielo team began a process of creating a database that captured information from a large number of personal interviews. Each conversation allowed them to increase their understanding of each other's goals and to identify issues that could complicate or reinforce collaborative efforts. To make sure that this effort was systematic and comprehensive, the El Cielo team used the following methodology:

1. Identify the broadest range possible of prospective partners and create a long list of stakeholders. Prospective partners present in the area were divided into categories: NGOs, government institutions, community-based organizations, academic institutions, inter-government agencies, foundations, private entities and individuals, international agreements and protocols.
2. Filter and prioritize potential partners by examining their strategic value and capabilities and understand the resources that each potential partner could bring to the site. These 'strategic values' run the gamut, from local land knowledge and influence to technical expertise to community development resources.
3. Understand the prospective partners' relationship to each other. [Stakeholder influence mapping from the International Institute for Environment and Development](#) was used to determine the strength of influence that potential partners had on conservation in the region. This methodology organizes key potential partners in a "pyramid," with the potential partners with the greatest influence near the top.

Throughout the partners' selection process, potential partners were engaged in in-person meetings. The Conservancy worked hard to manage and keep expectations low, and to better understand the interests, motivations, current projects and overall influence that each entity had.

The database created for El Cielo ultimately indicated which organizations the Conservancy decided to partner with, and also illuminated the relationships among the greater circle of stakeholders that merited attention and support. The process had also given them an understanding of the most strategic way to enter the area's social dynamics.

Due to the thoughtful, yet sometimes time-consuming approach taken to creating a complete partnership database, the Conservancy is now involved in a successful Conservation Area Planning process in partnership with the Mexican government in collaboration with NGO's, academia, community groups and service providers.