

## What We Did in 2010

By just about every mainstream measure, 2010 has been an *annus horribilis*. And although the Sangha has proved relatively buoyant, we have not entirely escaped the tide of economic distress. You probably won't be surprised to read, for example, that fundraising has become more difficult, or that we're hearing more stories from volunteers and members about being between jobs. People coping with adversity often have much to teach the rest of us—those of us who, at least for the time being, are more fortunate. Here's one of the lessons implicit in the stories that we hear: Coping demands exertion, calculated risk, and creativity. You might call that obvious, at least as it applies to individual people. But it's too bad that this lesson is so difficult to learn on an institutional level, where the tendency to "play it safe" often ends up making things even worse, by denying an organization those opportunities that it might otherwise have helped to create. So we're grateful for this teaching—and we're trying hard to apply it. You can judge our success in that regard for yourself, from the following overview of our major field programs for 2010.

### TREE BANK

Founded in 2006, our Tree Bank / Hispaniola program works with impoverished Dominican farmers along a section of the Dominican Republic – Haiti border to improve farm incomes and restore native forest on parts of their lands. During 2010:

- ✓ Five more farms joined our native forest planting effort, bringing the total number of farms with such plantings to 11 and the total area planted to about 13 acres.
- ✓ With the support of about 40 very generous donors, we bought a used pickup truck and put it to work for our Tree Bank nursery, hauling materials into the nursery and seedlings out of it. The truck has greatly extended the nursery's planting range.
- ✓ Gaspar Pérez Aquino, our Tree Bank Project Director, succeeded in his two-year quest to incorporate our partner organization, the Asociación de Productores de Bosques de los Cerezos.

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**Photos:** Above, one of our two buffer restoration sites along the Thornton River in November (see page 2). At right, Tree Bank / Hispaniola Project Director Gaspar Pérez Aquino with seeds of west Indian mahogany, an endangered tree native to Hispaniola and one of the species that we are growing at our Tree Bank nursery.

## Just the High Points

Our 2010 was roughly 90% routine and 10% breakthrough. You can find 100% of the results, in one form or another, in the article opposite. But since the Sangha's breakthroughs tend to dissolve pretty quickly into the sweat and poison ivy of our routine, a quick Breakthrough Recap might be helpful. Here goes: During 2010, we signed contracts with the Fish and Wildlife Service and with Fairfax County, Virginia; we incorporated our Tree Bank partner organization; we bought a pickup truck for the Tree Bank nursery; and we made substantial upgrades to our Wild Plant Nursery. What is all this likely to mean for 2011? That will depend in part on how well our fundraising goes, but the menu of major opportunities is available for your inspection on the back page.





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Incorporation will make it easier for us to buy our farmers' coffee. (See our 2011 agenda on the back page.)

- ✓ We launched our Forest Credit program, which is designed to provide our farmers with affordable credit, in exchange for conservation easements on their farms. (See the 2011 agenda.)

**MID-ATLANTIC FIELD SITES**

We started working on public lands in 2002, controlling invasive alien plants and restoring native plant communities. During 2010, we planted and maintained 17 field sites, consisting of both forest and meadow, from the Potomac shore south of Washington, to the Thornton River just east of the Shenandoah mountains. All the plants came from our own Wild Plant Nursery (See below.) A field site break-down:

- ✓ We planted, weeded, and extended 10 Fairfax County, Virginia, stream-buffer sites, amounting to about 6 acres in six drainages.
- ✓ We began collaborating with the National Park Service to restore portions of the Roaches Run Wildlife Preserve in Arlington.
- ✓ As part of a brook-trout restoration project run by Trout Unlimited, we planted two sites along the Thornton River in Rappahannock County, Virginia; one of these sites was an area disturbed by a dam removal; the other was an open area just upstream. The dam removal opened the Thornton up again to trout and other migratory fish. Forest restoration will shade the channel, helping to keep the water cool enough for trout.
- ✓ At Fairfax County's Marie Butler Leven Preserve, the site of our Native Arboretum project, we replanted the rain garden, extended our restoration areas by about another acre of forest, and conducted a series of test-plot trials for managing invasive thicket and groundlayer with various coverings. (See the 2011 agenda.)

*Continued opposite*

# EARTH SANGHA

**BUDDHIST VALUES IN ACTION**

The Earth Sangha is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity based in the Washington, DC, area and devoted to ecological restoration. We work in the spirit of Buddhist practice, but our members and volunteers come from a wide variety of religious and secular backgrounds.

**Want to contact us or make a donation?** You can support our work by becoming a member. Membership starts at \$35 per year. Donations are tax-deductible. You can mail us a check (made out to "Earth Sangha") or donate on our website. We will send you a receipt and include you in our mailings. (If your name and address are correct on your check, there is no need to send us anything else.) **Contact us at: Earth Sangha, 10123 Commonwealth Blvd., Fairfax, VA 22032-2707 | (703) 764-4830 | earthsangha.org.** Complete program information is available on our website.

**Want to volunteer or meditate with us?** We work with volunteers at our Wild Plant Nursery and our field sites in northern Virginia. We meditate in the Del Ray section of Alexandria on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. For more information see our website or call Lisa Bright at (703) 764-4830.

**The Acorn:** Our newsletter is produced with "print on demand" technology, which consumes far less energy and materials than does conventional printing. This paper is 100% post-consumer waste recycled, process chlorine-free, and manufactured entirely with wind-generated electricity. This issue © copyright 2010, Earth Sangha.

**One of the best:** The Earth Sangha is recognized by the *Catalogue for Philanthropy* as "one of the best small charities in the Washington, DC, region."



**Photos:** Above, students from the Sacred Heart School in Bethesda adding plants to the Native Arboretum rain garden in October. At right, volunteers amending a stream-buffer planting along Fairfax County's Big Rocky Run, also in October.

**On line:** For more on stream buffers, go to [earthsangha.org/dca/sb.html](http://earthsangha.org/dca/sb.html).

- ✓ We launched three preliminary meadow-restoration projects, two of them on Fairfax County parkland, and the other on federal land, at Meadowood. (For more on Meadowood, see the BLM entry below.) Our efforts have yet to amount to much; we've done some inventories of the site floras, some test plantings, and, of course, some invasives control. We plan to expand our meadow work next year. (See the 2011 agenda.)
- ✓ We signed a contract with the Fish and Wildlife Service for the management of 12.5 acres of grassland at the Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Prince William County, Virginia. Our project involves invasives control and the creation of a more open and diverse grassland community to provide better habitat for grassland birds.
- ✓ At the Bureau of Land Management's Meadowood Recreation Area, on the Mason Neck Peninsula in southeastern Fairfax County, we continued work on two pasture sites, amounting to just under 5 acres, where we have been reestablishing forest and old-field communities since 2008. We also started work on the meadow project mentioned above.

### WILD PLANT NURSERY

Our Wild Plant Nursery, established in 2001, is the Washington, DC, area's most comprehensive effort to propagate the region's native flora directly from local ecotypes (local, wild native-plant populations). We are currently working with over 180 species, collected (with permission) from over 50 natural areas. During 2010:

- ✓ We expanded our nursery inventory by 10-20 species. (At the time of writing, we were still sorting seed from the fall, hence the imprecision.) Nearly all of our new species are meadow plants. Besides adding these new species, we substantially expanded the volume of many of our herbaceous (nonwoody) species.
- ✓ As part of our epic and episodically heroic structural upgrade, we renovated 5,500 square feet of the nursery container yard (the area where we grow plants in containers) for meadow species, and grew out our first substantial lots of containerized meadow plants.

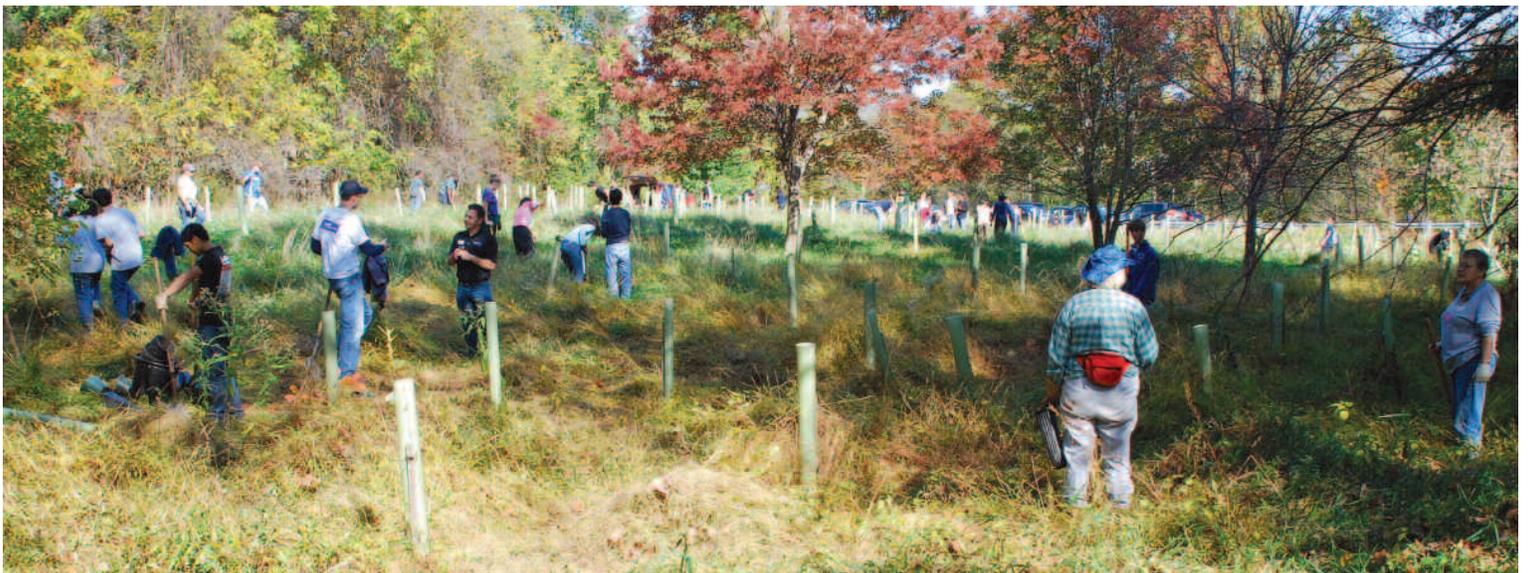
- ✓ We upgraded the container-yard watering system, to save both water and watering time. The new system is more efficient and more consistent—but it's not yet complete. We should be able to finish it next year.
- ✓ We signed a sole-source contract with Fairfax County for the provision of local-ecotype native plants. The contract will likely result in some additional sales—probably not a lot, but some—and we regard it as an important precedent. As far as we can tell, this is the first time that Fairfax County has designated a contractor specifically for the purchase of native plants. In our opinion, it's fortunate that the County has chosen a provider capable of propagating directly from the County's own natural resources. (An aside to more distant readers: Fairfax County is a good place to set a precedent because it covers about 400 square miles, is home to over a million residents, and has a budget of \$3.3 billion.)

## Forest Credit, Funding, and You

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to our first Forest Credit fundraising effort! We greatly exceeded our \$10,000 target: Including the match from our two anonymous benefactors, we had raised over \$15,000 for the program by Thanksgiving. We're looking forward to putting that money to work for our Tree Bank farmers, who, in turn, will create conservation easements to protect the endangered remnant forests on their lands. (The Tree Bank works with poor Dominican farmers along part of the Dominican Republic – Haiti border; for more on Forest Credit, see the previous issue of the *Acorn*, available on the Library page of our website. We had hoped to start making Forest Credit loans in 2010 but that timetable proved a little too ambitious.)

Forest Credit is a way of opening two realms up to each other: It puts the nascent science of tropical forest restoration in contact with the economic development of small-holder farms. Such openings can benefit both of the realms concerned; openings are an efficient way to innovate, which is why they are one of our specialties. They also help us do a lot with a little. (Our annual revenue is usually under \$200,000.) The Sangha itself has grown from such an opening: A merging of Buddhist practice and environmental work.

We hope that you'll help us expand these openings—and create new ones—by making a year-end contribution to the Sangha.





**FORECAST FOR 2011:**

**PRODUCTIVE.**

**HARD WORK LIKELY.**

**W**hat's the best way to create social benefit on a very small budget? Hard work obviously helps—especially when most of it is coming from volunteers—but it's also important to be pointed in the right direction. Strategy! We need that too—and the prospect of a new year is a great time to make sure that we've got it. Given the relatively modest scale on which we work, given the places where that work is invested, given our particular capabilities, what are our biggest opportunities for progress in the new year? We see six of them. They're listed below, along with funding notes (as of the end of November).

- 1. Forest Credit:** As part of our Tree Bank / Hispaniola, we will begin lending to our Tree Bank farmers, in exchange for conservation easements on their properties. Strategic value: Forest Credit will provide a badly needed financial resource and is by far the most efficient way to use small amounts of capital to conserve the forest fragments remaining in our project area. Funding for 2011: Thanks to our donors' generosity, Forest Credit has enough funding to start.
- 2. Coffee:** We plan to import our Tree Bank farmers' coffee for sale in the United States. In 2010, we incorporated our Dominican partner organization, so we have an exporter of record, and our farmers are already growing excellent coffee. Strategic value: In our project region, coffee is almost always grown as a shade crop; improving coffee marketing will create a powerful incentive for conserving and restoring forest canopy. Funding for 2011: Not yet funded.
- 3. Meadows:** In the mid-Atlantic, we plan a major expansion of our meadow restoration work. We'll focus on invasives control, and on

reestablishing native meadow plants with stock propagated from the wild, at our Wild Plant Nursery. Strategic value: Meadows are among this region's most species-diverse and most threatened plant community types. Funding for 2011: About one-third funded.

- 4. Invasives Control:** We plan to improve and extend our efforts to control invasive alien plants. We hope to scale up control of forest invasives, on the strength of field tests done during 2010; we will also begin large-scale invasives control in meadows. Strategic value: Invasives are a pervasive and (literally) growing threat to public lands, but the cost of invasives control is far too great for public agencies to bear on their own. Cost-effective, volunteer-driven invasives control is now essential to conservation. Funding for 2011: About one-quarter funded.
- 5. Schools:** We hope to enable more schoolyard greening. Many organizations are now working to make school landscapes more natural; our Wild Plant Nursery could be an important resource for those efforts. Strategic value: In suburbia, schoolyards are among the most important outdoor spaces regularly available to children; schools also control substantial amounts of open space. Yet most suburban schoolyards offer few opportunities to learn about nature. Funding for 2011: Not yet funded.
- 6. Wild Plant Nursery:** We will continue work on our nursery's structural upgrade, continue expanding our seed accessions, and continue extending our technical growing capacity. Strategic value: As the Washington, DC, region's most extensive effort to propagate native plants directly from the wild, our nursery supports numerous ecological restoration projects on local public lands; the nursery is also creating opportunities for restoration that would not have been feasible without such a resource. Funding for 2011: Less than one-quarter funded.

**Photo:** Lisa explaining the mysteries of life (or at least plant life) to third-graders at Fairfax County's Centreville Elementary School in October. (Photo courtesy of Elaine Tholen.)