

**History of The Monteverde Conservation League and
The Children's Eternal Rainforest:
by Leslie J. Burlingame (April 2019)**

The Monteverde Conservation League (MCL), founded in 1986 in Monteverde, Costa Rica, initially focused on buying land for conservation. Donors from more than 40 countries and territories contributed to the purchase of almost 23,000 hectares by 2018. This protected area, known as the Children's Eternal Rainforest (CER) or Bosque Eterno de los Niños (BEN) includes land in three provinces and four Conservation Areas and has become the largest private reserve in Costa Rica. MCL has emphasized long-term conservation through forest protection (via guards and legal action), environmental education, reforestation and restoration of degraded land, sustainable development and eco-tourism, and scientific research. Its mission is "to conserve, preserve, and rehabilitate tropical ecosystems and their biodiversity."

The seven of Costa Rica's twelve life zones included in CER have produced its great biodiversity. It forms the largest part of the Monteverde Reserve Complex, joining the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, the Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve, and Bosque Eterno S.A. Adding the adjacent Arenal Volcano National Park and the Alberto Manuel Brenes Biological Reserve yields an approximate total of 50,000 hectares of contiguous natural forest. MCL has been recognized nationally and internationally for its successful conservation efforts, most recently (2018) including the highest level (5 stars) Costa Rican Blue Flag (Bandera Azul) award for protected natural areas. The Costa Rican postal service, honoring the League's 25th Anniversary, issued four commemorative stamps on National Parks Day, August 24, 2011. Each of the stamps, bearing the title, "Bosque Eterno de los Niños, Monteverde," carried a photo showing a special feature of CER: a margay, a green-eyed frog, the smallest orchid, and the Pocosol Laguna. CER has been supported for many years by Sister Organizations in Sweden, the United States, England, Germany, and Japan.

Origins and Development

By 1985, agricultural development in the Monteverde Zone was threatening much of the remaining Pacific slope forest. A group of community members, recognizing the urgent problem, founded the MCL in 1986. MCL's attention quickly shifted from the Pacific to the Atlantic side of the Continental Divide because of a deforestation crisis threatening the Peñas Blancas Valley. Government promises to buy out claims of Valley residents and squatters had not materialized since 1977, when it was included in a Forest Reserve to protect the Arenal Hydroelectric Project. Several Monteverde residents and Canadian researchers started a fund-raising campaign to purchase claims and protect the Valley. Fund raising through the World Wildlife Fund in Canada and the US was enormously successful. A Debt-for-Nature swap in 1988 transformed the MCL from a small organization made up primarily of foreign-born volunteers to a large organization with a paid staff composed primarily of Costa Ricans. This swap provided funds during five years for land purchases, administration, environmental education, and protection programs. Settlers and squatters in Peñas Blancas lined up to sell their claims to MCL. Problems surfaced immediately; few people had legal papers for their claims. Efforts to establish legal titles are still ongoing. Borders had to be marked and purchased land also had to be protected from new or the original squatters, so the League hired its first full-time forest guard.

The Children's Eternal Rainforest (CER) has become MCL's central focus. In 1987, Sharon Kinsman, a U.S. biologist who had lived in Monteverde during research visits, traveled to Sweden to talk about rainforests. Teacher Eha Kern invited Kinsman to give a slide presentation at her school. The students came up with the idea of raising money to save rainforests, and Kinsman put them in touch with MCL. The children raised money to purchase six ha of rainforest bordering what had already been purchased

by MCL. Kern and her late husband Bernd formed the Swedish non-profit Barnens Regnskog (Children's Rainforest) in 1987 to raise and channel funds for MCL's land purchase campaign. When the targeted land was purchased, MCL bought additional land, which they called Bosque Eterno de los Niños to honor the Quaker settlers who had protected their forest watershed as Bosqueterno, S.A. and the children's contributions. Barnens Regnskog expanded its support for CER. Between 1988 and 1992, they raised \$2 million for land purchases and obtained grants from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), which supported reforestation, environmental education, the guard program, and construction of a hydroelectric project for MCL's San Gerardo biological station.

In 1988, Kinsman set up a non-profit organization, The Children's Rainforest U.S., to formalize her fundraising for land purchases and protection in CER. Also in 1988, Tina and Robin Jolliffe established the Children's Tropical Forests U.K. In 1990, Dirk Jörgens and others established Kinderregenwald Deutschland e. V. in Germany, and Kazumi Fukunaga founded Nippon Kodomo no Jungle in Japan. Many smaller groups, schools, and individuals -children and adults- from more than 40 countries all over the world also raised money in numerous creative ways to expand CER.

Several land acquisitions are of particular interest. The 30 ha Bajo del Tigre sector in Monteverde was acquired in 1988, primarily as a donation. The Pacific slope site is in the rain shadow of several hills, producing a seasonal dry forest. The parcel (with elevations ranging from 1020 to 1380 m above sea level) contains primary and secondary forest, pasture that has regenerated as forest, and an arboretum featuring native trees established by local biologists in a former cattle pasture.

San Gerardo and Pocosol became sites for MCL's two biological field stations. A debt swap in 1991 funded MCL's purchase of land in the San Gerardo area on the Atlantic slope and funds for guards to protect all of MCL's land. About 60% of the land purchased was still primary Premontane rainforest; it is about 1200 meters above sea level and receives about 4000 mm of rain per year with a very limited dry season. Visitors to the station have to hike 3.5 km down a muddy road from the parking lot of the Santa Elena Reserve. However, they are rewarded by spectacular views of Arenal Volcano, two waterfalls, great bird watching and other impressive examples of biodiversity in primary and secondary forests and regenerating pastures.

In 1991, MCL bought the Laguna Pocosol and was interested in establishing a biological field station there. This land is on the eastern side of CER; it is now possible to drive to the station with 4-wheel drive from La Tigra. Although it is in the same life zone as San Gerardo, it is at a lower elevation (720 meters above sea level). The name of the area translates as Little Sun, a sure clue to the heavy rainfall it receives. In addition to the lagoon, there are boiling mud pots and a waterfall.

The third area of particular interest involves the land purchased in the initial Peñas Blancas campaign (1986 to mid 1989). There was a long dispute between MCL and the Tropical Science Center (TSC), owners of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve (MCFP). The League had said it would turn over the land purchased in this campaign to TSC, whose guards had been protecting it. However, the League wanted certain conservation guarantees placed on the land; TSC said they should get the land with no restrictions. The only people to profit from this dispute were the lawyers on each side. A settlement was finally reached in 2007; MCL kept the 5300 ha from its campaign, and some horse-trading of land parcels smoothed out the border between the CER and the MCFP.

In 1992, MCL's Board of Directors consolidated all land holdings under CER. MCL launched its "Rain Forest Partners" program in 1992. As money from the Debt-for-Nature swap and other grants was spent, funds for protection (forest guards) and maintenance, reforestation, and environmental education dried up. MCL urged donors to become Rainforest Partners to support these other necessary programs; however, most donors still preferred to donate money to buy land. The League's financial difficulties in

the 1990s made additional land purchases a low priority until 2002, when Rachel Crandell, a teacher, founded the Monteverde Conservation League, U.S. (MCLUS) in Missouri; it became the main US Non-profit supporter of MCL. She and her husband Dwight wanted to help create an educational nature center on the eastern side of CER; their 1997 donation made the Finca Steller Educational Center a reality. She traveled the US, fundraising, and she brought groups to CER's two field stations. Crandell had learned that giving donors the option of contributing to programs that protected CER did not work. In consultation with MCL's leadership, she launched a new Land Purchase and Protection Campaign, using 50% of the donation for Land Purchase, 40% for protection (which included the operation of MCL and MCLUS), and 10% for endowment. She said, "we reason that you cannot 'protect' the forest without operating trucks, computers, office staff, phones, guards, etc." The land purchase percentage included costs of surveying and legal costs related to title transfer.

The League established a prioritized list of new properties to buy, focusing on filling out the borders of CER to natural boundaries and blocking points of easy entrance, buying land to connect pieces of CER, and buying inholdings. In a return to the original vision for the League, they also wanted to extend CER on the Pacific slope to help create a corridor for animals with altitudinal migrations, such as quetzals, bellbirds, butterflies, and species requiring large territories (such as cats). They also decided to buy only land with clear legal title. Unfortunately, the land they wanted to buy was much more expensive and more deforested than previously purchased land. MCLUS started fundraising for the Land Purchase and Protection Program in 2004. By 2011, about 270 ha of strategic land purchases had been added to CER. MCL sister organizations in the U.K. and Germany and other groups and individuals also contributed to the land purchases. Although Rachel Crandell died in 2009, a year after her husband, her legacy is very much alive. Friends and supporters in the U.S. were inspired by her example and continued to run MCLUS and support CER and the League. MCLUS changed their name in 2012 to Friends of Children's Eternal Rainforest (FCER). Two years later they broadened their mission to include other conservation efforts in Monteverde and became Friends of the Rainforest (FR).

The idea of a corridor to connect the conserved areas in Monteverde all the way down to the Gulf of Nicoya had been talked about for years. TSC had taken the lead with the purchase of the largest remaining forest patch on the Pacific side, a 240 ha farm subsequently called the San Luis Biological Station. In 2002, local residents, including biologists, established the Costa Rican Conservation Foundation (CRCF) to begin buying land extending down the Pacific slope from CER and MCFP and reforesting it. MCL and CRCF joined the other local conservation organizations in 2008 to form the Bellbird Biological Corridor. The Corridor's mission is to reestablish and maintain biological connectivity, conservation of natural resources, and the well-being of local communities across 88,456 ha connecting Monteverde to the mangroves of the Gulf of Nicoya, spanning 3 watersheds, 2 subwatersheds, and 11 life zones.

Protection, Maintenance, and Operations

As soon as the League acquired land, it had to protect it from various threats. MCL hired its first full-time forest guard in 1987, and then added more guards. Following the 2007 Peñas Blancas agreement between MCL and TSC, MCL had an additional 5300 ha to protect in CER. Squatters are no longer much of a problem, but there are still serious problems with illegal hunting, logging, gold mining, capture of live animals, and removal of plant material such as orchids and palms, particularly on the eastern side of CER. Maintenance work is also essential for CER. The changing outside borders of CER have to be clearly marked and posted. Workers maintain all of MCL's facilities and their grounds and trails. Protection and maintenance staff have faced injury and death from poachers, landslides, treefalls, and slippery conditions. MCL's employees communicate and cooperate closely with their counterparts in the other nearby private reserves and government Conservation Areas as well as with police, Red Cross, and

firefighters. They also work with volunteers who have helped with such projects as cleaning and repairing trails, making and painting signs, building an observation platform at Bajo Tigre and structures at the field stations, and working at the Visitor's Center at Bajo Tigre and at the Information Center in Cerro Plano.

CER guards and maintenance workers also provide environmental education to visitors and area residents, guide people on the long trails, help researchers, and rescue hurt and orphaned animals. They monitor species through reports, photographs, motion-sensing cameras, and plaster casts of footprints. There was great excitement in 2012 when motion-sensing cameras first photographed a jaguar and tapirs; the cameras have also documented the return of other cats, such as pumas and the smaller spotted cats, to CER.

Accurate maps have been crucial as CER expanded its land holdings, for the siting of field stations and trails, for scientific studies, and now for keeping track of what lands are and have been enrolled in the Environmental Service Payments program. For many years, MCL used paper topographical maps made by Costa Rica's Instituto Geográfica Nacional. MCL's mapping capabilities evolved to a sophisticated Geographic Information System (GIS); plotters can print out maps showing many different aspects of CER. The very important Land Ordering Project that began in 2006 employs GIS and GPS to produce an accurate survey of CER's borders that can be used in legal defenses of those borders and in pursuit of legal titles. In 2012, a volunteer used GPS, GIS, and Google Earth to create accurate maps of trails in CER; updated maps are available on MCL's website.

Environmental Education

The League launched its Environmental Education Program (EEP) in 1986 by working in local schools and taking children on field trips. Money from the first Debt-for-Nature Swap and SIDA supported the expansion of EEP, which also ran environmental workshops for adults, including teachers, parents, groups of farmers and women. The goals were to ensure the long-term survival of CER by helping people in areas around CER understand the importance of protecting it while improving their own land use practices in adjacent areas.

MCL's economic difficulties ended the EEP in 1995, except for projects supported by outside grants. However, many programs and efforts that MCL's EEP initiated continue through other conservation organizations, and the government-approved curriculum now requires Environmental Education (EE). Most of MCL's personnel continue some EE activities, including leadership roles in community recycling and roadside and stream clean-up. Staff and educational displays at MCL's facilities provide EE information to Costa Rican and international children and adults. MCL is an active member of the Commission on Environmental Education of Monteverde (Comisión de Educación Ambiental de Monteverde; CEAM), a cooperative group of local environmental educators that formed in 2003. They coordinate environmental activities including special fairs focused on environmental issues such as water, raise local environmental consciousness, and contribute to sustainability. CEAM has also sponsored annual prize contests for ecological stories by students from 14 schools and ran a 3-year training program for adults involved in EE.

A revival of funding has helped support more EE activities. MCLUS/FCER increased funding for EE beginning in 2007. Local children have been coming to Bajo del Tigre for EE activities for years. A five-year grant (beginning 2012) provided for an environmental educator based at the Finca Steller Education Center to work with 17 elementary schools on the eastern side of CER on such topics as recycling, biodiversity, reforestation, climate change, animal welfare, water resources and the importance of wetlands. When that grant ran out, new funding from FR and the US-based non-profit Engage Globally continued support for the environmental educator. In 2018, the MCL added a new project (with a grant from BESA, Bosqueterno, S.A., an organization founded in 1974 by the Quaker settlers to protect their

watershed): “Protecting water resources through environmental education in the Peñas Blancas watershed” for communities along the eastern side of CER. Additional grants in 2019 support an environmental club for girls and water resource conservation for younger students than those in the previous year.

Environmental Education for children and young-at-heart adults featuring MCL, CER, and the Monteverde Zone has continued in books, videos, and other media. Illustrated children's books, such as Patent's *Children Save the Rain Forest* (1996), Cherry's *Flute's Journey: The Life of a Wood Thrush* (1997), and Pratt-Serafini and Crandell's *The Forever Forest* (2008) are still available. The Internet has opened up whole new possibilities for communication, environmental education, and fundraising. Websites and Facebook pages for the League, its sister Organizations, and the Children's Eternal Rainforest/Bosque Eterno de los Niños offer a wide variety of material, including photos and videos, blogs, e-newsletters, annual reports, and archives.

Reforestation and Rehabilitation of Degraded Land

MCL's reforestation projects have planted 1.6 million trees in CER and buffer zones around it. They rehabilitated degraded land, protected watersheds, established windbreaks, preserved forest fragments on farms, and created connections between forest fragments and reserves. These trees helped to control erosion, improve production on farms, decrease pressure on remaining forest, and create more habitat for wildlife. Adrian Forsyth, a Canadian naturalist and author, played a key role in the establishment of MCL's reforestation program. In 1988, he obtained a three-year grant for MCL from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and WWF-Canada. Other reforestation funds came from a grant obtained by the Kerns from SIDA. The windbreak project meshed MCL's push for reforestation with the stated needs of farmers. Most of the farms in the Zone are small, so farmers could not afford to use a large portion of their farms for reforestation. The negative effects of strong winds during the dry season in the Zone (e.g., soil erosion, stresses on grasses and crops, and resulting decreases in milk and crop production) created intense interest among farmers to plant windbreaks. Farmers also needed trees for fence posts, lumber, fuel wood, food for cattle, and soil enrichment. Windbreaks that included leguminous trees were the solution. Tree seedlings were produced with help from the U.S. Peace Corps and other volunteers at MCL nurseries and delivered to farms by MCL personnel, who also provided technical assistance. The farmers had to invest their own labor, which tied them to the project. They received financial incentives provided by The Netherlands through the Costa Rican Forest Service (DGF) to cover their expenses in the form of a loan, which was forgiven if the farmer cared for the trees for three years. By 1994, more than 500,000 trees produced in the nurseries had been planted in 320 windbreak projects. Later, scientific studies showed that the windbreaks served as corridors for many species of birds, particularly if they were connected to forest fragments.

At first, exotic tree species were planted because they were known to farmers and foresters and were on the DGF list of species approved for incentives. MCL investigated the use of native species in its nurseries and found several species that worked better than exotics for windbreaks. DGF eventually added some native species to their list of approved trees. In 1995, MCL's grants for windbreaks ran out and government restructuring ended DGF's incentive program, so the windbreak program closed down. Most windbreaks remain since they benefit the farmers.

The Forests on Farms Project (1993-1997), was funded by international conservation organizations and new Costa Rican government incentives. It focused on buffer zone management on the Pacific side of the Monteverde Reserve Complex, particularly the protection of forest fragments on farms that researchers had deemed important for altitudinal migrations of birds and butterflies. MCL worked with 42 farmers to fence their forest patches and reforest with native species to create corridors that linked the fragments with larger protected areas and/or protected water caption locations and the banks

of waterways. These farms are now part of the Bellbird Biological Corridor. Another grant (from the Dutch government in 1995) supported sustainable development and watershed rehabilitation outside the eastern border of CER near La Tigra. It also promoted reforestation (including a corridor from CER to lower areas along the La Tigra River), soil improvement with emphasis on organic fertilizers, involvement of women in tree nurseries and organic gardening, and environmental education in local schools. These projects ended when their funding did.

The Finca Steller Education Center has an active, though small, native tree nursery that produces a few thousand native tree species per year (15 different species in 2017) for reforestation on the Finca and in neighboring communities. The Costa Rican Conservation Foundation's nurseries produced about 220,000 native tree seedlings of 93 species for the Bellbird Corridor by 2018. MCL has used some of these for reforestation of degraded pastureland in its recent land purchases. Willow Zuchowski's ProNativa organization promoting the use of native plants that began with the greenhouse and demonstration project at Bajo Tigre has expanded; native plants have been planted in many locations, including around MCL facilities.

Infrastructure

MCL has offices on the western Monteverde side and on the eastern La Tigra side of CER as well as facilities at Bajo del Tigre and two biological stations. The League has occupied a variety of offices in Monteverde. In 2014, to save money, MCL moved all office personnel to the Information Center in Cerro Plano. This Center continues to educate visitors, promote visitation to CER, and earn money from the sale of items related to CER, Monteverde, and rainforests.

The Bajo del Tigre sector is the only part of CER that is easily accessible from the Monteverde area and the sector receives about 75% of the visits to CER. Volunteers built and signed more than 4 k of trails and reforested a pasture with native trees, creating an arboretum. In 1996, MCL constructed a Visitors' Center and, in 1997, a nearby Children's Nature Center that was remodeled in 2018. Regular staff and volunteers provide information and sell merchandise. A native plant greenhouse was built in 2005 and a labeled demonstration garden was replanted around the Visitors' Center. In 2012, an observation platform overlooking a regenerated forest, a meeting/picnic area, and a greywater treatment system were added. The following year, donors funded the construction of a classroom next to the greenhouse, which itself was rebuilt in 2018. Several local guides started Twilight Walks at Bajo Tigre in 2003, and night walks have become a significant source of funds for the League; since 2013, more than half of the annual visitors came for the night walks. While the number coming for night walks has remained about 2900, the number of daytime paying visitors has increased from an average of 3085 (for 2014, 2015, and 2016) to more than 4000 in 2017 and 2018.

An international debt-swap in 1990-1991 funded MCL's purchase of 1102 ha in San Gerardo Arriba that bordered CER's northwestern land. A large donation from the Walker Foundation (1994-96) funded the construction of the two-story San Gerardo Biological Station that accommodates up to 32 people and provides classroom space. Improvements to the Station since the mid-1990s, again thanks to grants and donations, have included a small hydro-electric generator, a spring house to cool food, a greywater treatment system, a phone connection, 7 km of trails, road access upgrades, and replacement of the building's wooden foundation and floors. Station usage measured by the number of "bed nights" increased to its highest point of 2632 in 2017. In October 2017, tropical storm Nate did major damage to the steep unpaved access road from the Santa Elena Reserve parking lot and required extensive repairs.

To aid in the administration of the eastern section of CER, MCL established a second office in La Tigra in 1994 on the road between San Ramon and La Fortuna. Donations made it possible for the League to buy a farm with degraded pasture on the eastern edge of CER and construct the Finca Steller Education

Center and a native tree nursery in 1997. The administrative office was relocated to a remodeled farmhouse at the Finca Steller property in 2014. The Pocosol Biological Station is accessible by rough road from the eastern side on land that MCL purchased in 1991. A simple shelter near the lake was replaced by the mid-1990s with two buildings that could accommodate 20 people and included a screened classroom/laboratory. MCL developed a 10 km trail network around the station that featured the lake and primary and secondary forest. From 2007 to 2010, grants funded the construction of a much-needed new biological station with 3 buildings to accommodate up to 32 people. A greywater treatment plant, renewable energy sources, internet, and improved access road and trails have been added. Unfortunately, the station suffered serious earthquake damage forcing its closure from November 2016-April 2018. FR raised \$60,000 for slope stabilization and building repairs, which were completed in 2018. Although there were a number of walk-in day visitors, “bed nights” in 2017-2018 were necessarily way down from the 2016 level of 1151.

Research

MCL has long wanted to have more researchers in CER. They hired a research coordinator in 1994 to promote and facilitate research in CER, whose 7 life zones hold an abundance of biodiversity. In 1994, MCL sponsored its first scientific symposium, "Altitudinal Migrations in Tropical Forests" at the San Gerardo station. The coordinator did research on bare-necked umbrella birds in 1997-98 with funding from the British Embassy, but his position was cut as financial problems grew. Biologists directing US undergraduates from the University of California's Education Abroad Program (EAP; given through the Monteverde Institute) and the Council on International Educational Exchange Program in Monteverde (CIEE) have encouraged their students to do short-term research projects in CER, especially at Bajo del Tigre. These projects contribute to CER's goal of finding out "what's there"; CER is in the process of compiling a fauna list for each sector. Bob Law compiled an extensive bird list for Bajo del Tigre based on years of observation (Law 1993, rev. 1999, 2002). Camera traps have been helping Matthew Moran (Hendrix College, Arkansas) and MCL staff construct baseline studies of mammals in CER. Moran's student, Benjamin Zamzow, et al, published (2018) findings on the “Status of Large Terrestrial Vertebrates” based on camera trap research primarily in CER compared with forest fragments outside protected areas. The article concludes that the protected area “remains an island of habitat too small to maintain the historic biodiversity of the landscape” and recommends establishing protected corridors that connect with larger protected areas. Several researchers, such as David Ribble (Trinity Univ., Texas) who studies small non-flying mammals, and Cody Cox (UGA) who studies birds, have worked in CER and the BBC. Two researcher projects in CER and MCFP examining climate effects are being conducted by Fern Perkins and Luis Beltrán Lacouture ("Lichens as bio-indicators of air quality and climate change") and Sarah Amundrud ("Effects of climate and elevation gradients on bromeliad fauna"). The “Research” sections of MCL's Annual Reports cite some additional research in CER on small mammals (F. Chinchilla, Monteverde Institute), insect biodiversity (H. Song, Texas A&M), and “Altitudinal variation in composition, structure and growth of primary forest, and its relationship to bioclimatic variables over the long term” (E. González and G. Moore of Texas A&M).

Finances and Revival of the League

By 1994, MCL was having serious financial problems because the original Debt-for-Nature Swap and several major grants ran out of funds and contributions were still earmarked for land purchase. MCL cancelled programs, reorganized, and cut personnel sharply. The financial deficit was at its worst in 2001; then, gradually, the League's finances began to improve with the growth of new sources of income. The most important of these was payment for environmental services or PES by the government program FONAFIFO (Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento Forestal) that started in 1997 and two private hydroelectric companies. Maps and bar graphs in MCL's Annual Reports show the dramatic increase in the areas of CER

included under PES; complicated rules determined what could qualify for PES and for how long. There was an equally dramatic increase in income for the League, going from no income in 1996 to an average 62% of MCL's operation's income from 2009 to 2011! Other income came from fees for entry to trails, mainly at Bajo del Tigre, especially from the night walks; unrestricted donations for operations; the sale of merchandise in MCL facilities, and net income from the biological stations. Donations for specific projects, including land purchase, remain an important source of income. Another source of funds is interest on investment, including a growing endowment fund; Rachel Crandell had made MCL the beneficiary of her substantial life insurance policy, and this became the base of an endowment fund. According to MCL's Board President, the League needs a minimum of about a half-million dollars per year to run the organization.

Unfortunately, in 2012, FONAFIFO changed its policies on PES, deciding to help small landholders with 50 ha or less instead of giving preference to larger farms as it had previously done. MCL and several other conservation organizations in Monteverde saw their incomes dropping dramatically as land under PES phased out under staggered 5-year contracts. Responding to the FONAFIFO changes, the League cut back dramatically on expenses, including personnel, and it put unnecessary office buildings and their lots up for sale. Fortunately, the League was able to find a way to take some 50 ha parcels of CER for PES applications (this involved a lot more paperwork); the result by 2015 was the "highest annual placement" ever of hectares under PESs, resulting in an increase in income. MCL also worked with owners of farms around CER to help them apply for PES payments, thus building goodwill and earning a small fee for the League. MCL and others successfully lobbied the government, which in 2017 made an exception to PES limits for "non-profit organizations that make important efforts in the conservation and care of forested areas in especially biodiverse and fragile areas." The new limit for each NGO is 300 ha/Conservation Area per year. The other good financial news in 2017 was the mutually favorable settlement of a legal case with one of the private hydroelectric companies that had objected to its contract for continued PES; they will pay MCL \$47,800/year for the next 28 years. Legal disputes continue with the second private hydroelectric company. PES continues to provide the largest source of income for MCL, although the percentage of total income (49% in fiscal year 2017-2018) is less than the previous high percentages, showing that MCL is generating more income from other sources.

MCL is looking for other ways to increase income. A key focus is increasing the number of visitors and researchers in Bajo Tigre and the two biological stations, especially now that Pocosol is open again. A promising option for new funding is carbon offset payments for forest protection and reforestation, but first MCL has to get legal title to all the land in CER it wishes to include. Increasing the endowment fund and donations can be another source for funds. The League has improved contacts with its Sister Organizations and current and potential donors (and visitors) through more personal attention from the Director, a new website (2016), enhanced Facebook and Instagram pages that include many videos and photos, and the 2017 revival of the newsletter Tapir Tracks. Tapir Tracks had been published from 1986-1995; the new newsletter is digital (available by email or on the webpage at acmcr.org). There are even live tapirs in CER now. Their return, that of all 6 wild cat species of Costa Rica, two frog species (*Isthmohyla tica* and *Lithobates vibicarius*), and other endangered animals are testimony to the success of MCL's conservation efforts. MCL joins others in the Monteverde Reserve Complex, which abuts Arenal National Park and the Alberto Manuel Brenes Biological Reserve, to provide nearly 50,000 ha of contiguous protected area.

Conclusion

The founders of the Monteverde Conservation League could not have imagined in 1986 that they were starting to create the largest private reserve in Costa Rica. Debt for Nature swaps, government support (especially from Sweden), grants from international conservation agencies and Sister Organizations, grants from family foundations, and private donations big and small from adults and

children from many countries all contributed the rapid growth of the Children's Eternal Rainforest. The League also had major local impacts through its Environmental Education and Reforestation Programs and learned how to mount effective forest protection and reserve maintenance. The League was realizing its mission "to conserve, preserve, and rehabilitate tropical ecosystems and their biodiversity." Yet, all was not perfect. The League was not prepared for the day that the money ran out, and it had to work through very difficult times and choices to make sure that CER could be "eternal." A wiser and more frugal MCL has emerged, again helped by its Sister Organizations, many friends, and government programs. In 2016, the League celebrated its 30th Anniversary with special gatherings at two of its centers. In her report to the League's Annual Assembly in February 2016, Director Stallcup concluded: "As we look ahead to our next 30 years, I believe the Monteverde Conservation League can expect increasing visitation, continued support from communities near and far, and an increasing financial stability that will permit the Children's Eternal Rainforest to be truly eternal in every sense of the word."

MCL SOURCES

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WEB SITES:

Monteverde Conservation League (Costa Rica)

[www: acmcr.org](http://www.acmcr.org)

Friends of the Rainforest (USA)

www.friendsoftherainforest.org

Barnens Regnskog (Sweden)

www.barnensregnskog.se

Children's Tropical Forests U.K.

www.tropical-forests.com

Kinderregenwald (Germany)

www.kinderregenwald.de

Nippon Kodomono Jungle (Japan)

www.nipponjungle.blogspot.com

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Leslie J. Burlingame, PhD, a retired professor of the History of Science and Environmental Studies at Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, PA., has been doing research in Costa Rica and Monteverde since 1991. She published a history of conservation organizations in the Monteverde zone (including MCL) in 2000 with updates in 2014 and 2018 (see Source list above). Leslie continues to write about and visit Monteverde's educational and conservation organizations and serves on the Board of the US non-profit Alliance for the Monteverde Institute. You may contact her at: leslie.burlingame@fandm.edu.