



**MEETING OF THE ALLIANCE FOR THE REGENERATION OF THE ALTIPLANO-WIRIKUTA
JULY 12th, 13th, & 14th, 2023**

From July 12th through July 14th, 2023, a third face-to-face meeting was held in the Las Margaritas ejido with the participation of various organizations and with the purpose of promoting the ecological, economic, and social well-being of the Altiplano Potosi, also known as Wirikuta to the Wixárika people. The Wixárika Research Center oversaw general coordination, that included invitations to Wixárika communities and inhabitants of the Altiplano region, as well as some delegates from Sonora and Jalisco who were invited to participate to share their environmental work.

The three days of work included free hands-on workshops in the morning and collective co-design sessions in the afternoon. After two years of practical workshops where we planted dozens of mesquites,

agaves, and tuna-producing cacti in a milpa near the sacred place of Tamatsi Kauyumarie (Bernalejo) and at the primary school of the Las Margaritas ejido, we wanted to consider proposals to create a model for arid agroforestry in a single physical space in the region, thus articulating the economic needs of the region with contributions from local participants, Wixáritari from different communities, and civil associations focused on agroecological and biocultural training and development.

The meeting took place this time within the school calendar year to allow for a greater presence of the Las Margaritas primary school, and the parents of the ejido. In addition, we wanted to respect the planting season that occupies so many Wixárika families during the rainy season.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS



Arborigen and **Agroasis** participated for the second consecutive year to give workshops on the properties and uses of the mesquite. With a successful history of harvesting, processing, and selling mesquite products, this team brought their materials, recipes, and enthusiasm for mesquite back to the gathering. The Arborigen team also actively participated in the planning and general logistics of the meeting.

Proyecto ConcentrArte accompanied us for the second year coordinating the participation of colleagues from Tateikié (San Andrés Cohamiata). They provided a workshop on the installation, uses, and benefits of micro tunnels as a strategy for the cultivation of vegetables. In the company of Arborigen, they facilitated recreational activities and the mesquite processing workshop given to the children of the community. In addition, ConcentrArte consolidated the participation of **Brigadas Cheyenne**, a project supported by General Motors, to facilitate the delivery of materials to places with difficult access. Finally, Proyecto ConcentrArte supported the coordination of the Comca'ac commission that traveled in the company of Michelt Chávez Reyes, coordinator of the DIF, Sonora.

The **Sincronía Wirikuta** collective, created in 2022 to promote the defense of Wirikuta, also joined this year's gathering. This group supported the invitation of **Abel Segura**, an agronomist from Texcoco, who gave a workshop on the care of and micro propagation of cacti. **Haniel Gibson Medina** from **Teuan**, an organization that provides consultancy for training and agroecological processes, gave a workshop on low-cost biofertilizers. Sincronía Wirikuta also supported with the photographic documentation of the activities.

Finally, we had the participation of **The Soulfire Project** who brought a bus that uses fuel made from recycled vegetable oil. They not only supported us with the transport of materials and some of the meetings participants, but also provided us with light and sound for the concert that brought closure to the workshops and gathering.



INTERCULTURAL, INTERGENERATIONAL AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY

These meetings are born from the idea that we can regenerate and restore not only our threatened territories but also promote activities that strengthen the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the communities with roots in this sacred and biodiverse area. While last year Wixáritari women attended in high numbers, this year we had strong participation from men with professional studies, and others with a greater presence in the ceremonial centers and in traditional education; this included people with a history of traditional ceremonial positions. The latter also participated by imparting their knowledge on the cultural bases that exist in this sacred Wixárika territory.

Faced with the drought in the high plateaus of San Luis Potosí and the scarcity of firewood, corn, and beans, firewood, beans and corn were brought from Wautia and Tuapurie to share with the families of the ejido. With the same intention of highlighting the importance of food, the flavors of tsinari (atole) and nawá (a traditional fermented corn drink) were shared along with regional dishes prepared by different women from the ejido. We were also grateful for a calf from the same ejido that fed us for three days with broths, stews, and traditional mole from the region. In the locality of La Pila, we ate local tunas (prickly pears) and apples, as well as tostadas prepared for the occasion. In addition, the Arborigen and Agroasis teams once again shared the flavors of mesquite with tortillas, marzipan, syrup, and the fun alternative to coffee made from mesquite named 'mezcafé', with the participants from Las Margaritas, the Sierra Wixárika and the guests from Mezcala and Desemboque de los Series.

With the participation of people and organizations from Sonora, Texcoco, Veracruz and Mezcala, this gathering expressed an intention to unite knowledge and practices to improve the environment from an intercultural approach, and in a region with characteristics that present challenges and opportunities. Experiences of environmental struggles and community projects were shared, such as the Committee for the Defense of Water and Land in Catorce, the Universidad de la Tierra in Mezcala (Chapala, Jalisco), and the Taamatsi Páritsika community high school in Nueva Colonia (Tuapurie, Jalisco).

Once again, several playful games for adults and children were organized and led by the ConcentrArte team and thanks to the coordination of the primary school teacher, Julieta Luna. On the second night, the children from the ejido attended a screening of *My Neighbor Totoro*, a Japanese animated film that brings together a touching story about childhood imagination and nature. Finally, the third night we closed with a concert coordinated by The Soul Fire Project with musicians from Tuapurie who pleased us with a great dance and with traditional Wixárika music.



HANDS-ON WORKSHOPS AND ACTIVITIES AT THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

For this year's meeting, Proyecto ConcentrArte's team coordinated the participation of Brigadas Cheyenne, who were responsible for the transfer of materials for the execution of the micro tunnel workshop, an alternative in the cultivation process for orchards and greenhouses. On this occasion, the micro tunnel was placed (in a demonstrative manner) within the perimeter of the Las Margaritas primary school, and chopped nopal and coffee husks were used to demonstrate the application of different methods that improve the soil and present new tools for food sovereignty. Within this same workshop space, small groups were formed to learn, share, and visualize the associated plants of the Altiplano Potosí region and their environmental, nutritional, medicinal,

and cultural properties.



In addition to several playful icebreakers, ConcentrArte also coordinated a workshop in conjunction with Agroasis at the primary school to show how we can reintegrate mesquite into our diet, in a simple way, and learn about its flavor and processing. María Luisa Astorga of the Comca'ac Council of Elders (Desemboque de los Seris, Sonora) was commissioned to travel to Las Margaritas and share the ancestral knowledge and cultural wealth of the mesquite with songs and stories. After this presentation, an art and mesquite processing activity was carried out with the elementary students in which ice cream and pancakes were made with mesquite flour and banana. A second session on the mesquite was given through a discussion with families from the ejido, followed by a tasting of different products derived from the mesquite pods: syrup, tortillas, and a hot drink that works as a nutritious alternative to coffee nicknamed "mezcafé."



Haniel Gibson Medina from Teuan gave a workshop on natural and low-cost biofertilizers and bio inputs in the irrigated area of the Las Margaritas ejido, and Abel Segura facilitated a two-part workshop that gave a cultural and technical overview of cacti propagation that is rooted in Central Mexican traditions.

Finally, Agroasis and Arborigen brought tuna-producing cacti from Dolores Hidalgo that were planted collectively as part of our annual reforestation activities. Despite the severe drought, we were able to verify that the triad of mesquites, agaves, and nopales that we planted at the primary school in July 2022, have grown well, just like what was planted in the Bernalejo milpa in July 2021.

CO-DESIGN WORKSHOPS

For this meeting, the work of dialogue, analysis and co-design had the goal of articulating different actors who share an interest in a project focused on supporting the biodiversity of the altiplano region and improving the quality of life of the inhabitants who have been struck down by climate change and the industrialization of the region through large-scale agricultural projects. Due to the interest in addressing the issue of a space for a regeneration project for the region, our meeting carried out dialogue activities in La Pila and Las Margaritas where Eduardo Guzmán (Sincronía Wirikuta) and Gerardo Ruiz Smith (Arborigen) presented a first design draft for a proposal for a multidisciplinary space based on a model for ethnobiological gardens.





The three days sought to bring the participants from other states closer to the diverse geography of the region and to open a dialogue around the design of a space that could handle the processing, sale, and storage of products from the region, a nursery of endemic species for regional reforestation, and a space for pilgrims and Wixárika students and researchers to rest.

Among our initial conclusions derived from this critical dialogue on the priorities sought in the sacred region, we saw that there is a sincere interest in uniting the cultural and spiritual needs of the Wixárika people with those of the campesino families of the Altiplano. However, we suggest that this should be carried out through a staggered and coordinated process with agreements between various actors and organizations. Our SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) exercise, pointed out that despite the advances made by various working groups in recent years, political and social conditions continue to present strong challenges for organizations and individuals working in environmental and ecological fields, and challenges remain in matters of intercommunal communication and a coordinated articulation of interests. As a result of these exercises, each organization that participated in this work of dialogue and co-design at the summer gathering will analyze from their respective position how to influence and how to collaborate in efforts for the environmental regeneration of this important ecosystem and cultural sanctuary.



FUNDING AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Wixárika Research Center (WRC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit association founded in California in 2021 by Juan and Yvonne Negrín. As one of its lines of work, the WRC supports ecological projects in territories of importance to the Wixárika people, as is the case of Wirikuta in the Altiplano Potosino. For this year's meeting, a GoFundMe campaign was organized from June through July 2023, to support this year's workshops and meetings regarding the biocultural works which we hope to continue promoting. The campaign raised \$8,298.77 USD (\$138,493.72 MXN) from 79 donors who gave from \$5 to \$1,000 dollars each. In addition, the Chacruna Institute's Indigenous Reciprocity Fund donated a total of \$1,547.25 USD (\$25,826.22 MXN) to us during our fiscal year from May 2022 to April 2023. Funds were spent solely and exclusively for travel, lodging, supplies, meals, and materials required for the meeting and for support in logistics for this year's gathering. Of these expenses, 40% had a direct economic impact for the families of Las Margaritas. We would also like to thank Proyecto ConcentrArte, Brigadas Cheyenne, and Sincronía Wirikuta, for contributing with in-kind donations and for covering the travel expenses of each of their teams. Finally, we thank everyone who volunteered so much of their time to coordinate and make these workshops possible. This dedication is the most valuable foundation of this work.

Pampariyutsi, Thank you!

