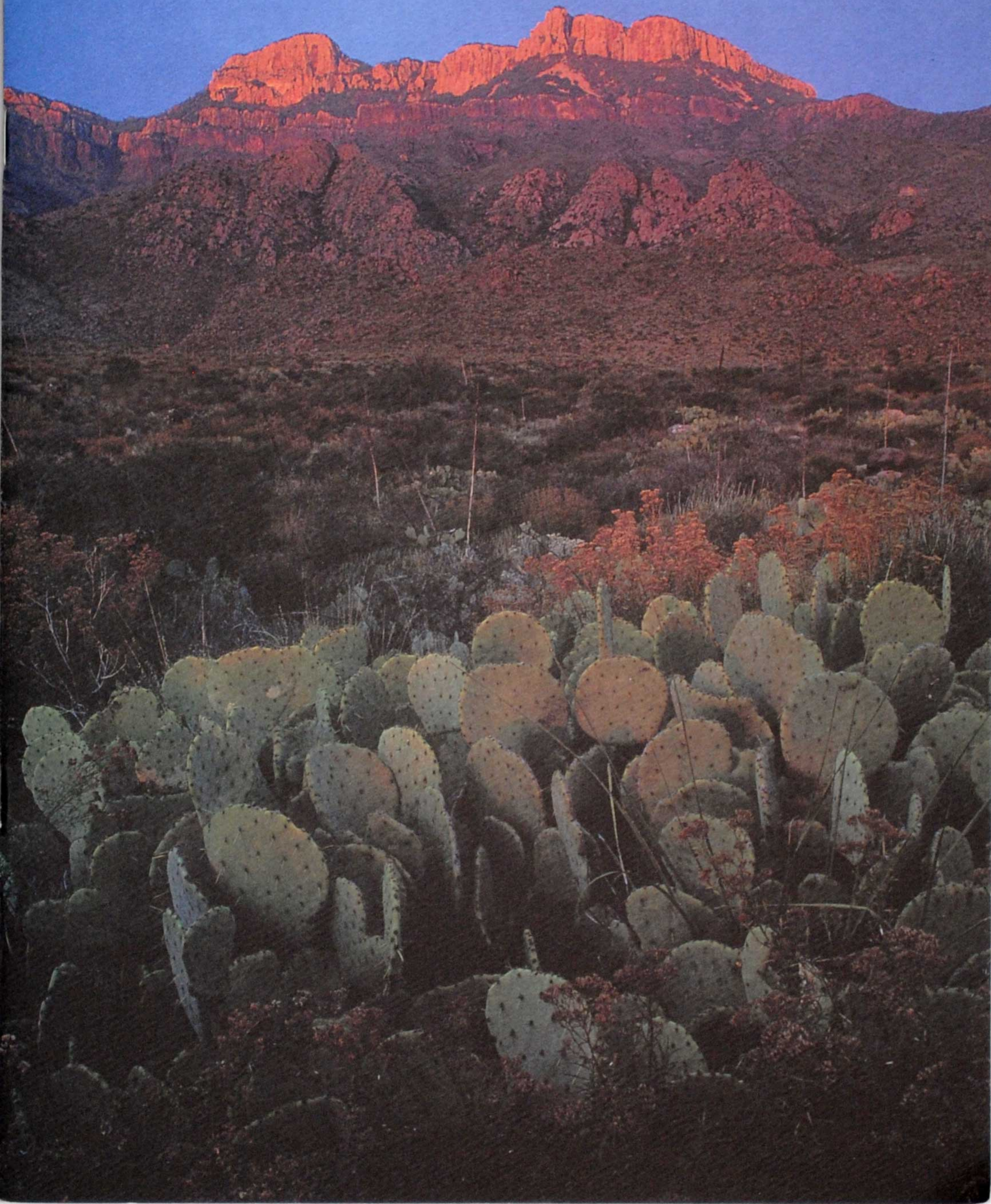


ELCARMEN · BIG BEND

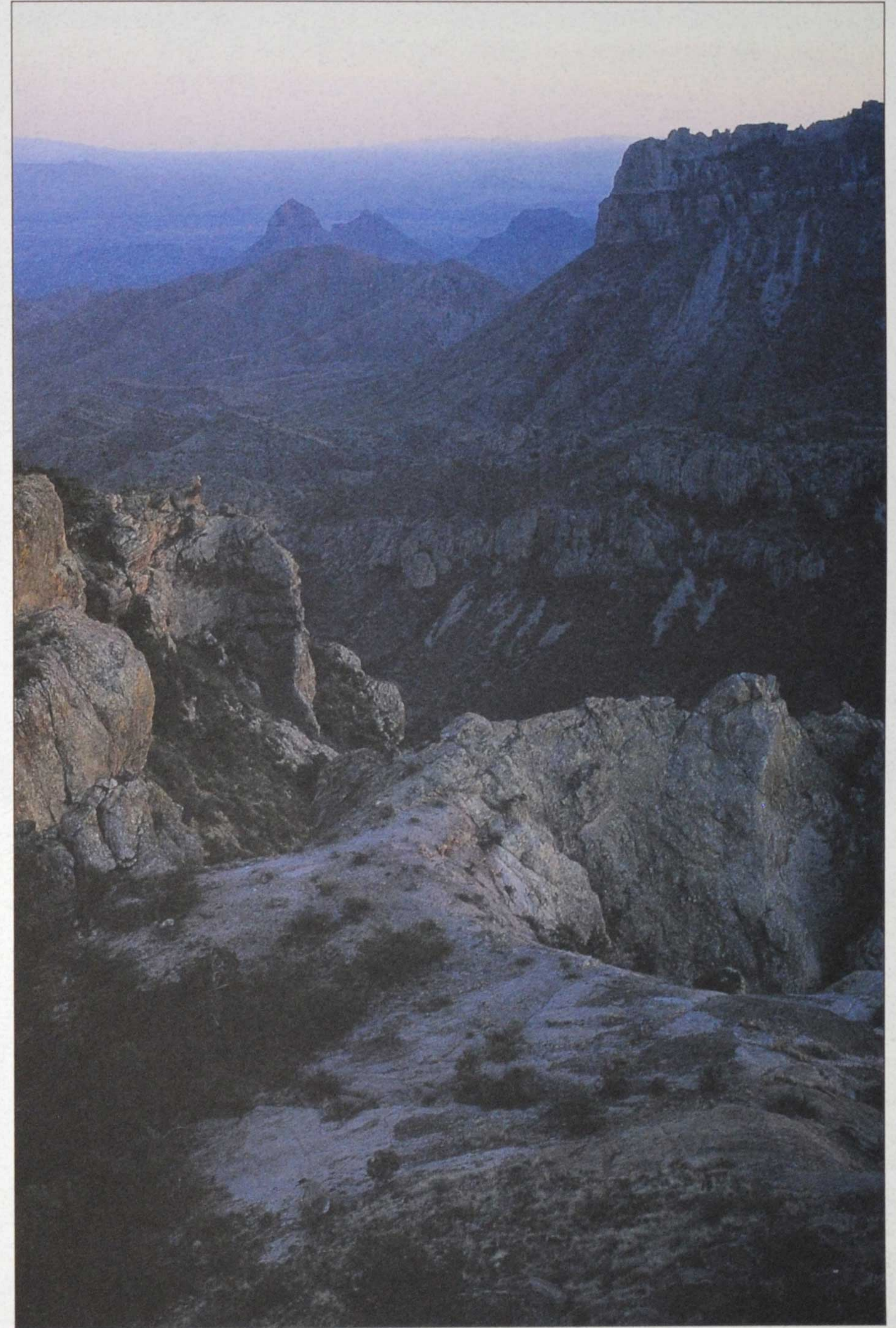
CONSERVATION CORRIDOR INITIATIVE

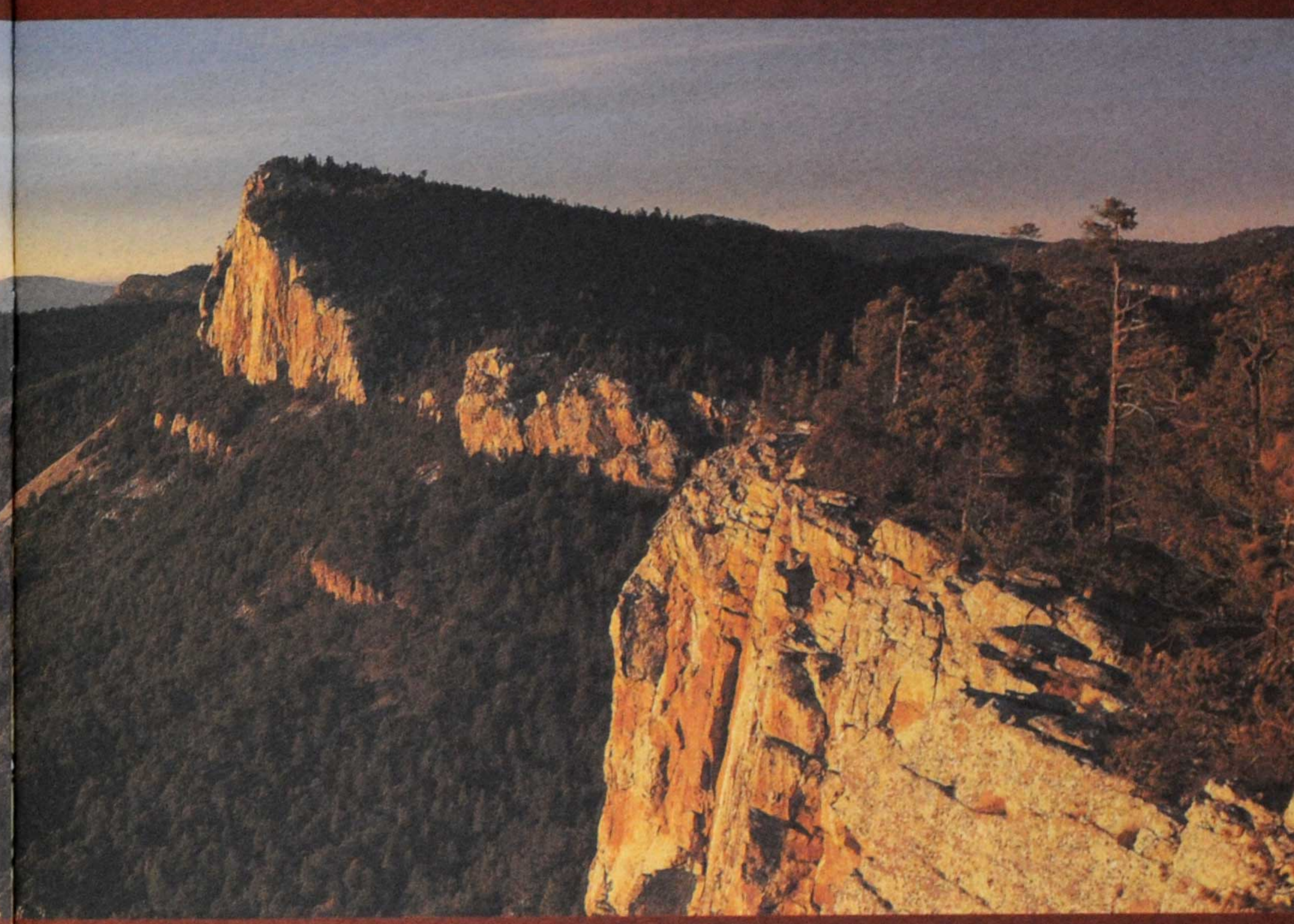


A VISION

THE CONSERVATION OF WILD OPEN SPACES HAS EVOLVED INTO ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES FACING MANKIND IN THE NEW CENTURY.

WITH OUR RENEWED UNDERSTANDING OF THE VALUES OF NATURE, THIS ENDEAVOR REPRESENTS AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW WHAT THE HUMAN RACE CAN ACCOMPLISH IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER. WE MUST THINK BIG IF WE WANT TO LEAVE A WORTHWHILE LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. WE HAVE LEARNED FROM OUR MISTAKES THAT, IN CONSERVATION, SIZE IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE. WE NEED TO MAINTAIN LARGE PROTECTED AREAS, INTERCONNECTED BY MEANS OF UNDISTURBED BIOLOGICAL CORRIDORS. ONLY ON THESE TERMS CAN BIODIVERSITY BE PRESERVED AND TRUE WILDERNESS SECURED IN THE LONG RUN. THE EL CARMEN-BIG BEND REGION IS WITHOUT DOUBT A GLOBAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY, A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THIS VISION. THANKS TO THE LONG-TERM FUTURE COMMITMENT OF DIFFERENT GROUPS IN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES, WE CAN ENSURE THAT THIS EXPERIENCE WILL BE A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS IN THE CENTURIES TO COME. THIS INITIATIVE MARKS THE BIRTH OF A TYPE OF BI-NATIONAL COOPERATION WHERE INDIVIDUALS, RANCHERS, GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, CONSERVATION GROUPS AND EVEN PRIVATE CORPORATIONS HAVE JOINED FORCES AS NEVER BEFORE FOR THE PROTECTION OF AN INTERNATIONAL, TRANSBOUNDARY MEGA-CORRIDOR.





Seventy years have passed since the earliest efforts were made to conserve this vast, diverse region between Mexico and the United States. In 1935, the U.S. Congress passed legislation to acquire land for a national park in the region, and the state of Texas deeded the Texas Canyons State Park to the federal government. In 1944, Big Bend National Park became a reality under the management of the National Park Service. The dream of creating an international conservation network has persisted since those early years: a network that will protect the extraordinary biological and scenic riches of both countries.

In 1948, the state of Texas began the land acquisition for Black Gap Wildlife Management Area; in 1988, it acquired the land for Big Bend Ranch State Park. These sites are located along the border on either side of Big

Bend National Park and are managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). In Mexico, the response was slower in coming; as late as the 1990s, two enormous reserves were designated Flora and Fauna Protection Areas: Maderas del Carmen in Coahuila, and Cañón de Santa Elena in Chihuahua, both of which lie along the banks of the Rio Grande which, in turn, runs parallel to the natural protected areas in the United States.

At the same time, the U.S. Congress gave a 196-mile stretch of the Rio Grande the denomination of Wild and Scenic River.

We should also mention the important contribution made by ranchers, local conservation groups like Conservadores de Ecosistemas del Puerto del Pino (CONECO), Agrupación Sierra Madre, Unidos para la

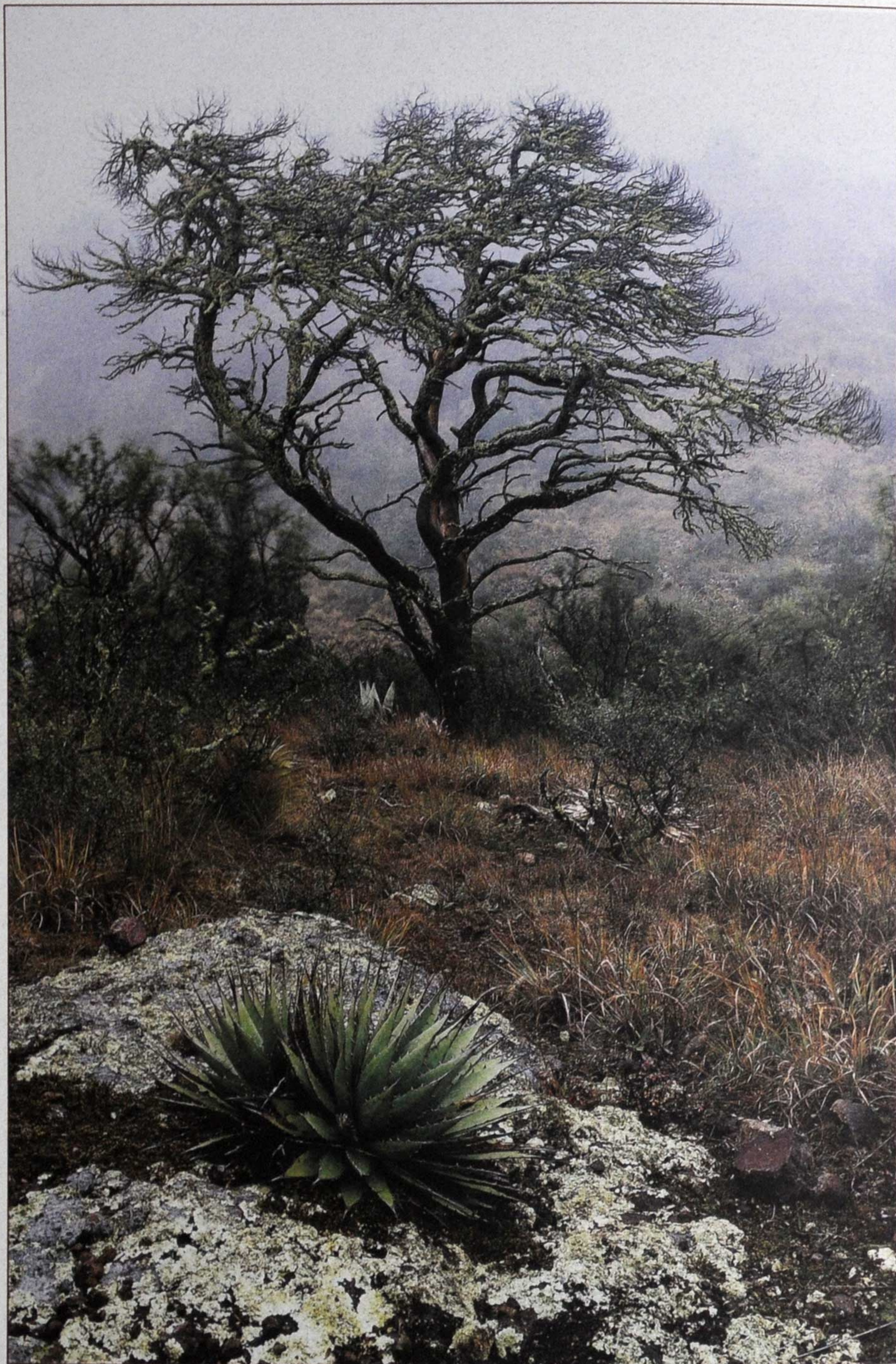
Conservación and corporations whose commitment has helped, principally in Mexico, to bring about the rebirth of the original idea of making the dream of protecting this bi-national region a fortunate reality.

There is no doubt that the current climate is very encouraging, although it lacks a regional vision and a joint plan of action for the different actors who share the same interest in and concern about the future of the region's wilderness.

Additionally, it should be recognized that the region's long, eventful history has left a certain amount of ill feeling on either side of the border: wars, loss of territory, drug trafficking, illegal migration and increased border security in the wake of the recent terrorist attacks all constitute ticklish challenges to be faced. For this reason, the recent

advances on conservation issues represent a wonderful opportunity not only to deal with the ever-present threat of land fragmentation, but also to unite the different actors and models to be followed and provide them a with common vision.

The cards are once again on the table. This is the right moment to set up alliances and channels of cooperation that define the path to follow. Conservation must not be limited by a country's political borders since ecosystems extend far beyond. This document, therefore, seeks to bring the different actors in both countries together in one single group capable of setting up negotiations with the united aim of implementing the initiatives required to guarantee the future of biodiversity conservation in this mega-biological corridor. 🐾



SKY ISLANDS IN A DESERT SEA: BIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Sky island is a biological term which describes an archipelago of high mountains surrounded by deserts and prairies.

In very few places in North America is it possible to go, in barely two or three miles, from a rich desert environment to the summit of a high sierra capped by a temperate forest of pine-oak and even fir trees. This short, but diverse, journey becomes even more impressive when you consider that the absence of human beings and wide, open spaces is a rare occurrence these days, especially in the mid-latitudes.

This region is located in the far north of the eastern Sierra Madre in Mexico, a mountain range whose northern tip extends onto the plains of south Texas. It is thanks to this long corridor that many species of neotropical flora and fauna thrive at these latitudes.

Enormous ecosystems are divided by this mountain range here at the border: the Great Chihuahuan Desert to the west and the Tamaulipan Natural Province to the east.

In the 90s, several world conservation groups emphasized the region's significance and biological value. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in its Living Planet campaign describes the Great Chihuahuan Desert as one of the twenty most important ecoregions in the world because of its biodiversity of plant life and endemism and, in an apparent paradox, this desert is the only Global 200 ecoregion classified both for its terrestrial and freshwater importance.

In its most recent analysis, *Hotspots, Earth's Biologically Richest and Most Endangered Ecoregions*, Conservation International (CI) informed us that the pine-oak forest of northern Mexico and southwest United States,

where the Chisos, El Burro and El Carmen mountains are located, has met the criteria for inclusion in its classification of 35 hotspots worldwide.

On the subject of wilderness, CI includes the four North-American deserts among its five top priorities because of their exceptional biodiversity and wilderness values; once again, the Great Chihuahuan Desert is classified as being of global importance.

Furthermore, the Sierra Madre Oriental was designated an Endemic Bird Area by BirdLife International and the National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity of Mexico (CONABIO) included large portions of this region on its list of priority terrestrial regions.

The remoteness of some corners of this mega-corridor is apparent on a Wildlife Conservation Society map called *The Last of the Wild*; however, at this latitude, where it is easy for humans to make their mark on the landscape, just a few places meet the criteria for inclusion. On the other hand, in 2002, *Agrupación Sierra Madre* and *Unidos para la Conservación* highlighted the importance of wild places in Mexico as a priority for conservation through the campaign *Last Wild Refuges*.

The mountains are important recipients of fresh water: heavily-laden rain clouds form above them, helping fill the underground aquifers of the critically important Rio Grande watershed. For all of these reasons, the different threats to this region must be addressed jointly by the stakeholders in the two countries. We can not allow the fragmentation and loss of the wilderness spirit in the largest, most biodiverse, bi-national mega-corridor in North America. ■

The practice of setting aside land to preserve its natural values was first adopted in the United States. Exactly how worthwhile this endeavor has been may be evaluated by the thousands of protected areas that now exist around the world: hard evidence of the lasting values inspired by this early example of environmental conservation.

Successful natural area conservation in the United States stemmed from the efforts of visionaries and the existence of vast federally-owned lands that were made available for conversion into parks and other similarly pro-

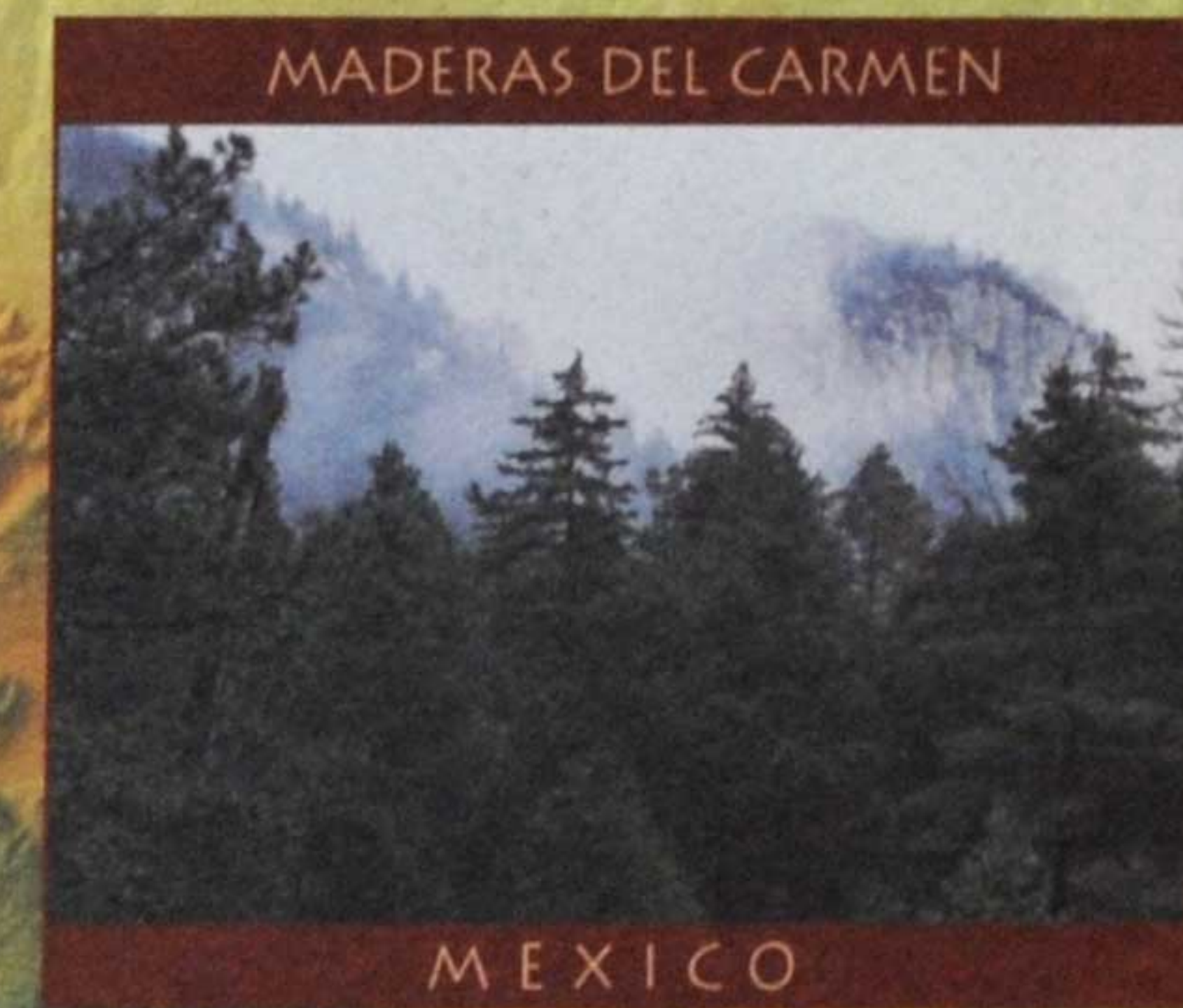
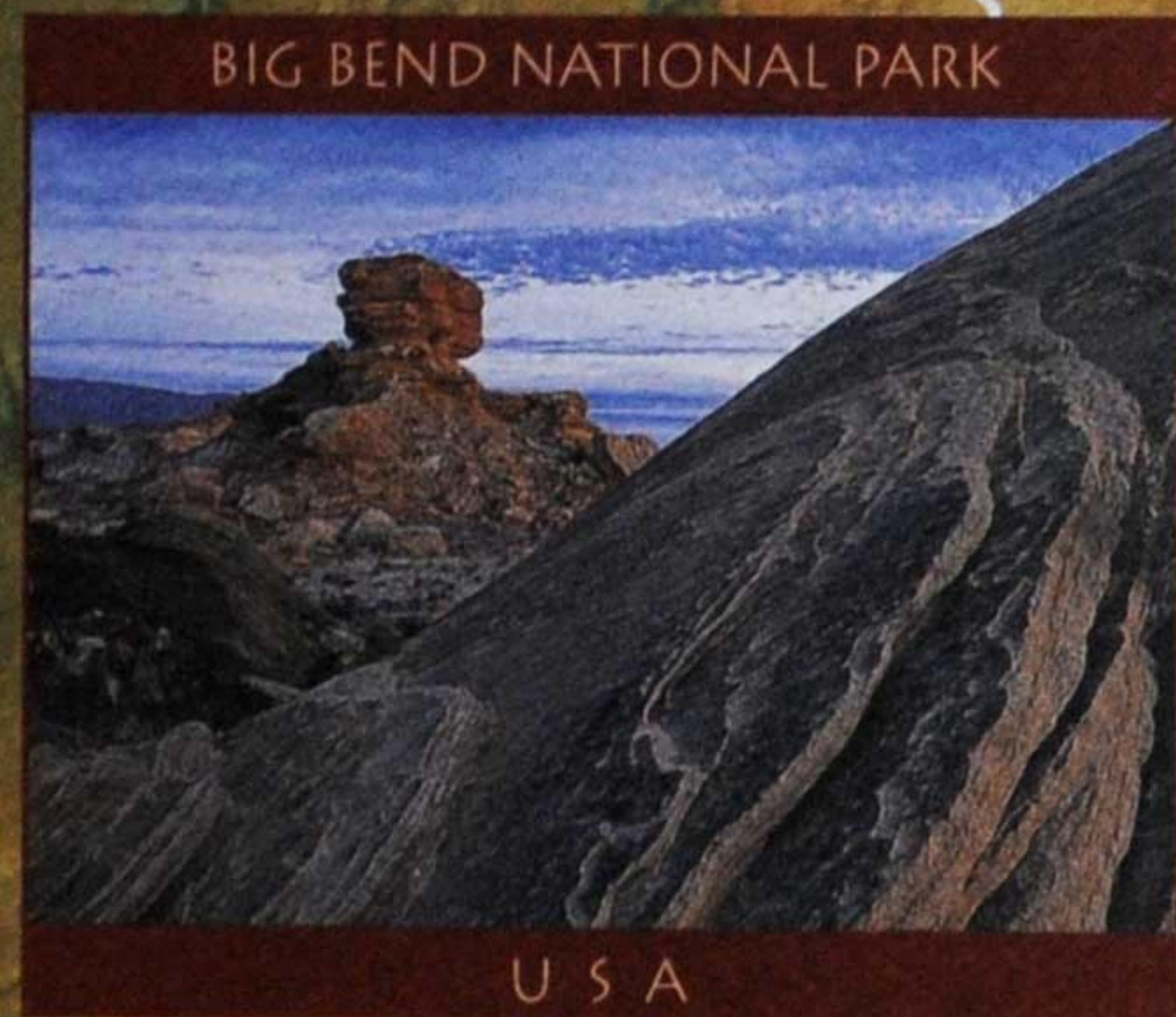
ected areas. Additionally, it became possible for private lands to be purchased for public uses such as parks and preserves. As a result of U.S. Congress legislation in 1935 to acquire land for a national park in the region, the state of Texas donated the Texas Canyons State Park, and other private lands along the Mexican border were purchased to establish Big Bend National Park in 1944.

The U.S. Wilderness Act of 1964 afforded the opportunity for federal lands to be kept free of development and modern intrusion. Much of Big Bend Nation-

al Park was proposed for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, but to date Congress has not acted upon the proposal. Nevertheless, National Park Service policies require that areas proposed for wilderness be managed as such until Congress intervenes and, in consequence, 560 000 acres of Big Bend National Park have been managed as a Wilderness Area since 1973. Additionally, 196 miles of the Rio Grande in and downstream from Big Bend National Park were protected in 1978 as part of the U.S. Wild and Scenic Rivers

system. In 1948, the state of Texas began acquiring land for Black Gap Wildlife Management Area, east of Big Bend National Park, to promote wildlife research and management. In 1988, Texas established Big Bend Ranch State Park west of the national park. Both Black Gap and Big Bend Ranch are managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Since the earliest attempts to protect the Big Bend area, both countries have recognized that the opportunity exists to create an international, protected ecoregion. 🐾



Mexico created its first protected area in the late nineteenth century and some of its early national parks followed the United States model. Nevertheless, a significant difference needs to be highlighted. The scarcity of public lands has determined that protected areas in Mexico have, for the main part, been created on private and communal lands, where land use is legally oriented towards conservation and compatible human sustainability, rather than opting for expropria-

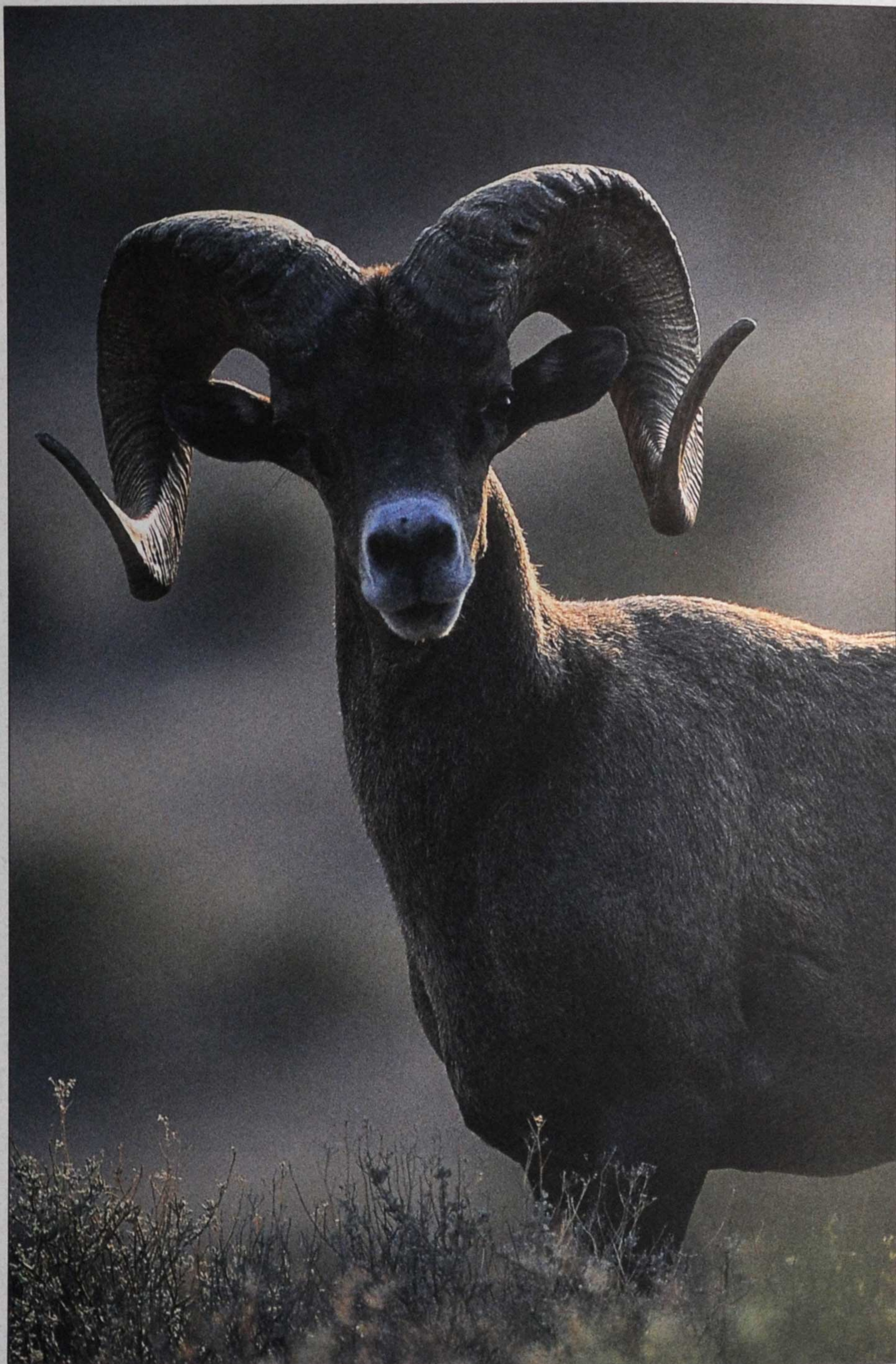
tion of lands and public ownership of the most valuable natural areas of Mexico. Only in the last 10 years has consolidation and strengthening of landscape protection mechanisms in Mexico occurred, largely as a result of the creation of the National Commission for Protected Areas of Mexico (CONANP). Staff increases have resulted in the shifting of protected area management from the office to the field, participatory bodies have been implemented to assist management through social involvement and the

legal framework for conservation has been reinforced. As a result, public and private funding has increased, which has helped in changing attitudes of communities living inside protected areas, providing incentives for them to participate actively in the protection of lands and waters.

Maderas del Carmen and Cañon de Santa Elena were established as protected areas in 1944. In a more recent and positive turn of events, an organization of local communities and ranchers, and the Municipality of Ocampo

supported by Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, the Coahuilan Institute of Ecology, and other organizations have petitioned the government to establish a new reserve, to be called Ocampo, between these two protected areas.

When accomplished, this project will secure all Mexican lands adjacent to the protected areas in the US. Together, U.S. and Mexico preserves will constitute almost three million acres of protected wild land. 🐾



EL CARMEN: A NEW MODEL OF COMMITMENT

The highest peak in the region rises to 2 720 meters. This escarpment crowns the Sierra del Carmen, a 40-mile long sky island high above the Great Chihuahuan Desert at the heart of a bi-national mega-corridor that must be considered a regional conservation priority.

Long ago there were no boundaries, roads or fences. Land fragmentation has since divided El Carmen into many large and small parcels. In many cases, the property lines marked on old maps are only approximated boundaries. It took numerous meetings with local ranchers and communities for CONANP to determine land ownership within Maderas del Carmen and to create the final boundaries of the protected area. Furthermore, extensive ownership fragmentation made implementing conservation programs difficult and sometimes impossible, which is why the recent participation and commitment of the private sector is creating a new model to guarantee long-term protection for some of Mexico's protected areas.


CEMEX, a global cement corporation now involved in El Carmen, is an excellent example of how a private company, NGOs and government can bring about important accomplishments by working together on re-wilding and ensuring the future of this extraordinary mountain range and its biodiverse ecosystem.

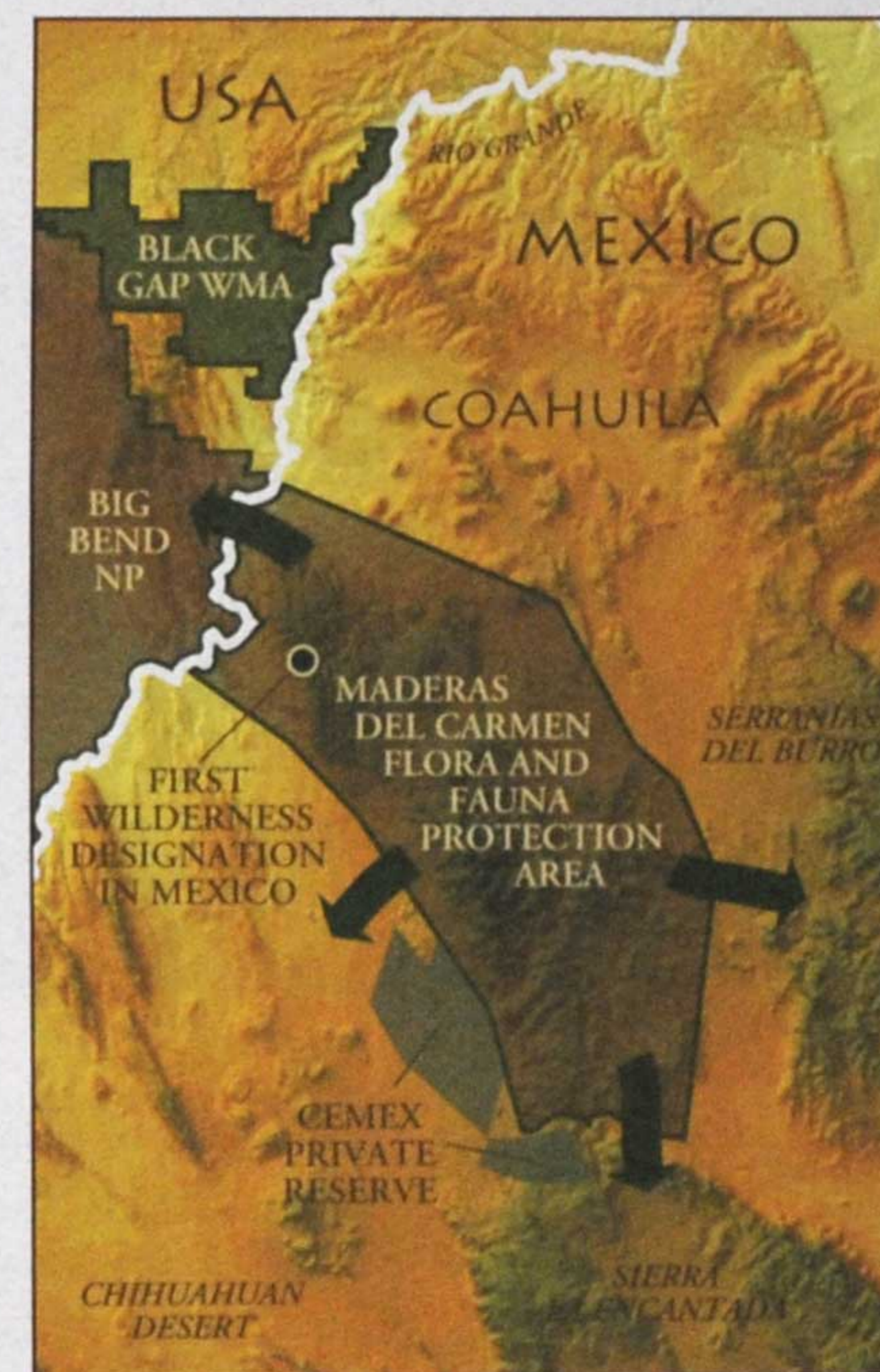
CEMEX has purchased more than 175 000 acres of land and has entered into conservation agreements with adjoining private landowners, such as Museo Maderas del

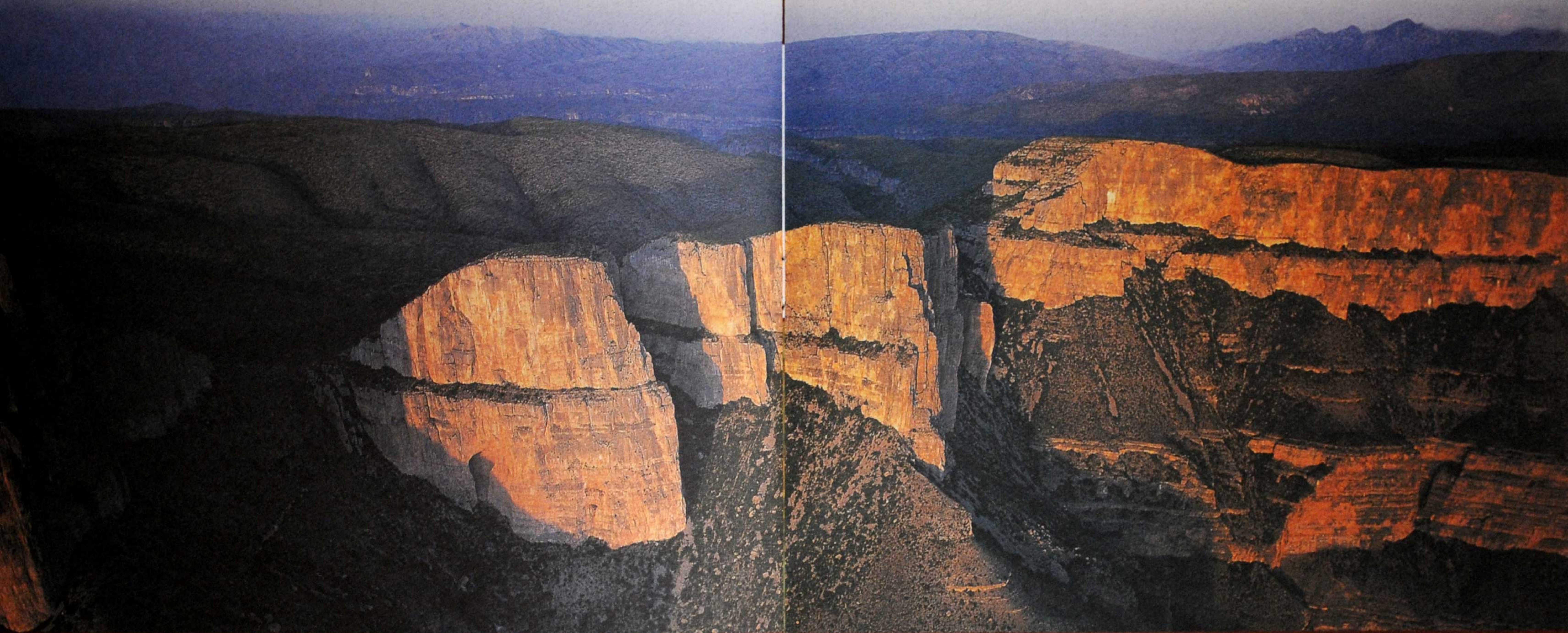
Camen and the historical Rancho Santo Domingo, for an additional 60 000 acres, resulting in less land fragmentation with a clear commitment to long-term conservation.

The El Carmen-Big Bend Conservation Corridor Initiative was born of a unique partnership with Agrupación Sierra Madre and CEMEX. Today, the advisory board of El Carmen comprises leading NGOs, respected conservationists and local ranchers.

Great advances have been made since CEMEX became involved in the region six years ago. Of key significance has been the development of a comprehensive baseline inventory of flora and fauna, removal of domestic livestock, including miles of barbed wire fences, bringing down from the mountain tons of waste from past mining and logging operations, and the historical significance of re-wilding the area by reintroducing certain flagship species like the desert bighorn sheep, which had been extinct in the region for over 60 years.

The most important aspect of this Initiative is to guarantee the permanence of the Maderas del Carmen ecological corridor and its vital role of interconnecting different protected areas and mountain ranges. CEMEX, having commercial interests in both countries and by working to have El Carmen span the international border, has become a stakeholder that can help trigger regional conservation, and its long-term commitment should serve as model for other private corporations to follow in the protection of wild places around the world. 





EL CARMEN: THE FIRST WILDERNESS

Mexico is the fourth richest country in diversity of species and the second richest in ecosystems worldwide. Thanks to this biological wealth, some of the most interesting and diverse cultures on the planet have been able to flourish. After thousands of years of constant use of natural resources, very few places have remained unmarked by the human footprint: only the deep canyons of the sierras have been left in pristine condition.

In the last 10 years, the Mexican government has taken a significant step forward towards the conservation of this extraordinary diversity: the creation of the CONANP, charged with increasing the coverage of the protected area system to international levels and, more importantly, of ensuring that the system protects a representative sample of all of Mexico's ecosystems.

A limited number of parcels of federal land are al-

ready included within existing protected areas as core zones. In some cases, these areas are quite pristine, a criteria that is more biological than the human-nature relationship. Since public land is a very scarce resource in Mexico, the designation of future Mexican wilderness needs to be a strictly voluntary process where responsible landowners commit their land to the wilderness concept and corresponding practices.

Mexico is thus embracing the designation of wilderness in two ways. First, the existing legal private and social "conservation land certification" system is being used whereby CONANP recognizes land conservation efforts by legally protecting these lands from "idle land legislation", and also by providing priority access to economic incentives to landowners such as payment for the ecosystem services that these lands provide to Mexican society. Cur-

DESIGNATION IN LATIN AMERICA

rently, ecosystem services payment programs related to water-based forest conservation, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and landscape protection have been implemented. Thus, a number of conservation groups and the private sector have approached CONANP with the idea of a new level of certification, one that will seek to promote the highest possible level of ecological integrity of the land and that will help those that have kept their land free of negative or excessive human impacts. Wilderness Zones will embrace wilderness within this certification framework. It is understood that, in order to provide incentives to more individuals and to include more areas in this category, undeveloped lands that have already suffered mild human impact could be included within this framework in the near future after a re-wilding process of the land.

Second, and from the private sector, a coalition of

national and international conservation organizations and academic institutions will create a private wilderness certification scheme thereby providing solid, verifiable, moral, prestige-based backing either to landowners who have already certified their lands through CONANP or to those who are simply not willing to deal with governmental certification processes.

The northern end of the Sierra del Carmen is a spectacular, pristine environment with deep canyons and great walls that connect it to the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River and the Big Bend National Park.

CEMEX, which owns and manages this land, is committed to transforming it into the first private wilderness area in Mexico certified by the private wilderness coalition, in addition to being the first area to be certified as a Wilderness Zone by CONANP. 🐾



SERRANÍAS DEL BURRO CONSERVATION FUND

There is a saying that you can rent a man fertile land and in his lifetime he will transform it into a desert; but, on the other hand, if you give a man a desert as property, it will be transformed into a flower garden in the course of his life.

Without any doubt, there are no better conservationists than those individuals that have a deep understanding and appreciation of their own land.

In the eastern corner of this great ecoregion, deep inside the Serranías del Burro in Mexico, there is a group of private ranchers who have protected almost 500 000 acres. These mountains enclose some of the most beautiful grassland and pine-oak forest valleys in the entire region. As a result of its size, diversity and impressive state of conservation, this area is playing an important role in the conservation agenda of the whole region.

The biggest threat in the past was the landowners' constant fear of losing their ranches to agrarian reform. Ranchers, men and women who have lived their whole lives in harmony and cooperation with each other, have the same criteria regarding grassland and livestock management and share the same deep commitment to wildlife protection. This way of life is what has kept them together and contented.

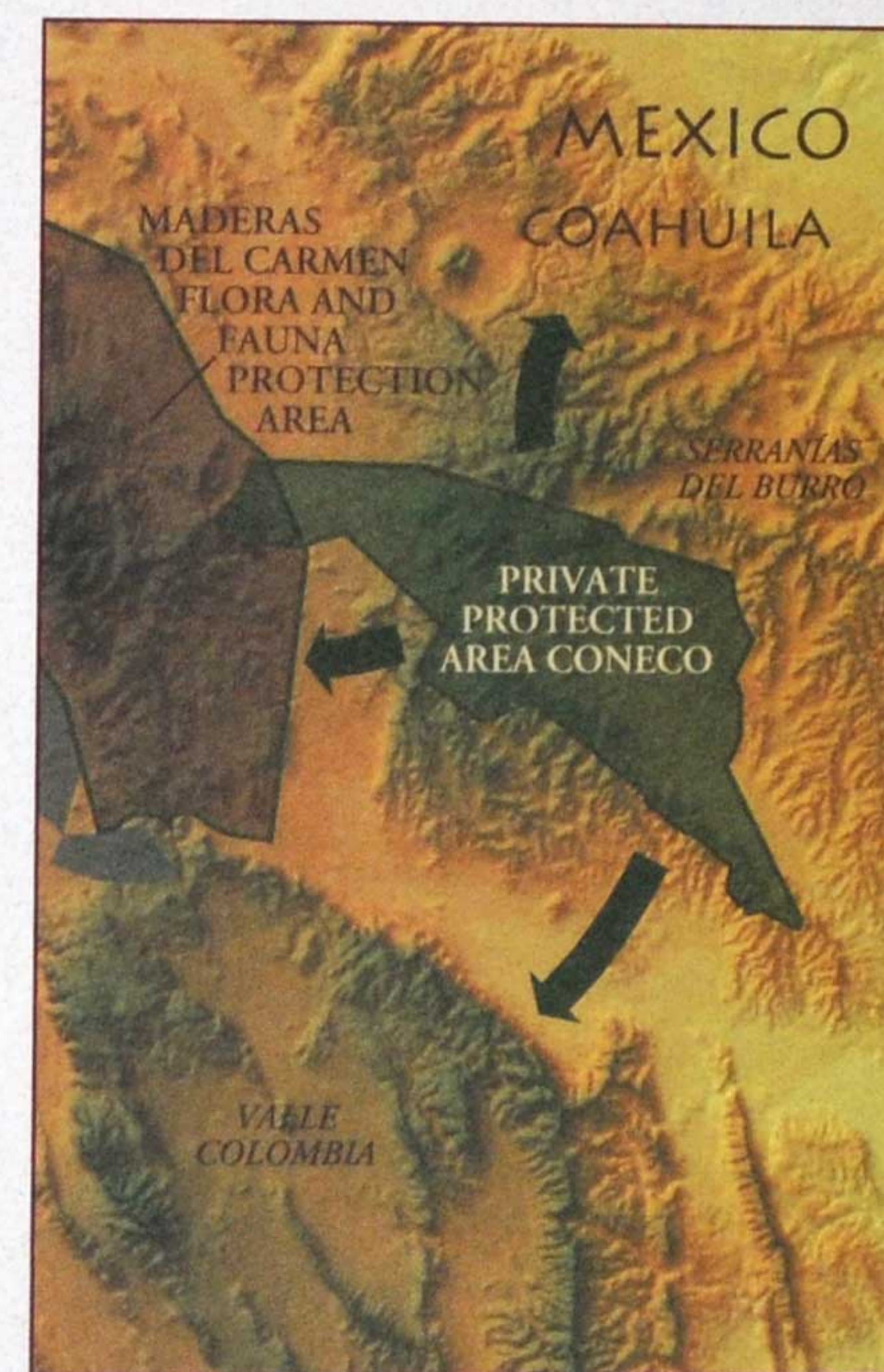
Twenty years ago, in response to this fear, the landowners formed an association, CONECO, confident that this union would help them fend off many of the constant threats from outside. Today, the biggest threat is land fragmentation. How can they pass this land down

to their children and grandchildren without causing further division of this great ecosystem? Outsiders have already surrounded the area, some without a clear and caring vision of land use, affecting the diversity of flora and fauna and the wild spirit of the region.

Concerned about these issues, and taking stock of everything happening around them, the landowners are now moving forward and inviting other neighbors to discuss a larger union so as to take advantage of opportunities and face up to new threats. In this process, national and international NGOs are advising them on their alternatives and describing how the

union and its alliances might help them on a larger scale.

To this end, Agrupación Sierra Madre, Unidos para la Conservación, PRONATURA, Conservation International, and Fondo Mexicano para la Conservación de la Naturaleza are helping CONECO set up an endowment fund so that this initiative may be transformed into a private land conservation model in Mexico. ■



Diversity is what makes life possible. A variety of preservation models is one of this bi-national corridor's most important strengths. Committed locals, conservationist groups, private corporations and government agencies on both sides of the border are involved, affording us the renewed opportunity to dream of a protected bi-national ecoregion.

The dream started 70 years ago, before the decision to establish the Big Bend National Park was made: a decision to secure land in the United States long in the coming. Now, four different models—including the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River—protect over 1.3 million acres of wild lands.

In Mexico, the same process was set in motion in the 1950s by local ranchers who still protect their land. The growing demand modern society is making on natural resources represents a new threat and obligates us to concentrate our efforts on long-term legal protection for Mexican wilderness areas. Mexican models of protection may not seem to be the best option to the eyes of outsiders but they will provide protection from future threats and bring important resources to work in the conservation field.

The mountain ranges are definitely still interconnected by biological corridors: a perfect example of this is the successful story of the black bear that re-colonized the Chisos Mountains and the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area by crossing over from the Mexican side of the border.

This good news, together with recent events in Mexico, namely the proposal to close the gap between the Cañón de Santa Elena and Maderas del Carmen reserves, the Serranías del Burro ranchers' wish to join the initiative, CEMEX's long-term conservation commitment to protect land on both sides of the Rio Grande together with alliances between Mexican and American conservationist groups bring Mexico to the negotiations table as a partner interested in the long-term conservation of almost 2.5 million acres of wild land.

The El Carmen-Big Bend Conservation Corridor Initiative gives Mexico a more active role and, by means of this document, all the interested groups manifest their shared intention to look for a common agenda promoting the conservation of the wilderness values and the biodiversity of this international, transboundary megacorridor between Mexico and United States. We hope that this initiative will bring future benefits and become a source of pride for the people of these two great nations. 🐻

EL CARMEN-BIG BEND CONSERVATION CORRIDOR INITIATIVE



TRANSBOUNDARY MEGACORRIDOR OF TEN MILLION ACRES

With the valuable participation of:

AGRUPACIÓN SIERRA MADRE: A Mexican NGO with 13 years of working experience in the region, including activities such as helping ranchers to create a regional fund involving and advising CEMEX in El Carmen, re-wilding the region through the reintroduction of pronghorn and desert bighorn sheep and promoting the wilderness designation with the Mexican Government through books and documentaries.

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL: A global conservation federation with a worldwide network of partners that seek to protect the world's biological diversity through the conservation of all of the bird species on Earth and their habitat. As it is one of the 208 Endemic Bird Areas, El Carmen is a priority for biodiversity conservation.

CEMEX: A global cement producer with operations in 30 countries. Its commitment to this region is part of its corporate social responsibility. CEMEX has acquired lands on both sides of the Rio Grande with the purpose of conservation. Its initiatives during the last six years have been the rewilding of over 70 000 hectares and the establishment of alliances with government agencies, local and international NGOs and ranchers.

CONSERVADORES DE ECOSISTEMAS DEL PUERTO DEL PINO (CONECO): A group of 18 Mexican ranchers of the Serranías del Burro with a long tradition in cattle ranching, wildlife and land conservation. For more than 50 years, this group has protected over 200 000 hectares of human development and land fragmentation.

CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL: One of the leading global conservation organizations. Thanks to its strategies for the world's biodiversity conservation, the North-American deserts were catalogued as one of their priority sites in terms of wilderness and endemism, and the Pine-Oak Forests of northern Mexico and southern U.S. were catalogued as one of the new Hotspots in Earth's Biological Richest and Most Endangered Terrestrial Ecoregions.

CUENCA LOS OJOS FOUNDATION: A foundation that works to preserve and restore the biodiversity of the borderland region between the United States and Mexico through land protection, habitat restoration and wildlife reintroduction. This foundation seeks to support these programs through scientific research and sustainable resource management techniques.

FONDO MEXICANO PARA LA CONSERVACIÓN DE LA NATURALEZA: With over 10 years of existence, this non-profit organization has taken the lead in funding important projects all over Mexico. Thanks to its effective administration, this international fund has donated resources to national protected areas.

MUSEO MADERAS DEL CARMEN: A non-profit conservation organization, whose aim is to administer and protect 50 000 acres within the 545 000 acres of the federal protected area Maderas del Carmen. Their mission is to conserve the unique flora, fauna, watersheds and geology within the reserve, whilst collaborating with the surrounding settlers to improve their well-being.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF BIODIVERSITY OF MEXICO (CONABIO): An Inter-Ministerial Commission mainly dedicated to develop, maintain and update the National System of Biodiversity Information (SNIB), whose mission is to promote, coordinate, fund and carry out activities related to the knowledge of biological biodiversity in addition to its conservation and sustainable use for the benefit of society.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PROTECTED AREAS OF MEXICO (CONANP): A federal agency that promotes and manages conservation by means of protected areas. In the last five years, this agency has increased the

surface area of protected land by 1.8% and has promoted the conservation of private land through the payment for ecosystem services. It also promotes international cooperation.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ECOLOGY OF MEXICO: A leading agency in applied environmental research that develops and promotes scientific cooperation projects which make an effective contribution to solving Mexico's major environmental problems and support the conservation and restoration of the environment in the country as a whole.

NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION: Established in 1919, is the United States' only private, non-profit membership organization dedicated to protecting and enhancing the U.S. National Park System. The NPCA conducted an assessment of Big Bend National Park in November, 2003, in which we recommended international support for the concept of adjoining frontier parks between Texas and Mexico.

PRONATURA: A Mexican non-profit conservation organization founded in 1981 whose mission is the conservation of the flora, fauna and priority ecosystems by promoting the development of society in harmony with nature. PRONATURA works in 19 Mexican states in six different regions carrying out more than eighty conservation projects in high-priority terrestrial and marine areas and important protected areas.

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT: Its mission is to manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations by managing and protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat and acquiring and managing parklands and historic areas.

THE INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION PHOTOGRAPHERS: An international organization that promotes and supports the conservation of our planet's biodiversity by increasing global awareness of the most urgent ecological threats and the actions needed to combat them through the cooperation of world-class visual artists, leading scientists, conservation organizations, writers, publishers, media, museums, aquaria, and environmentally conscious corporations.

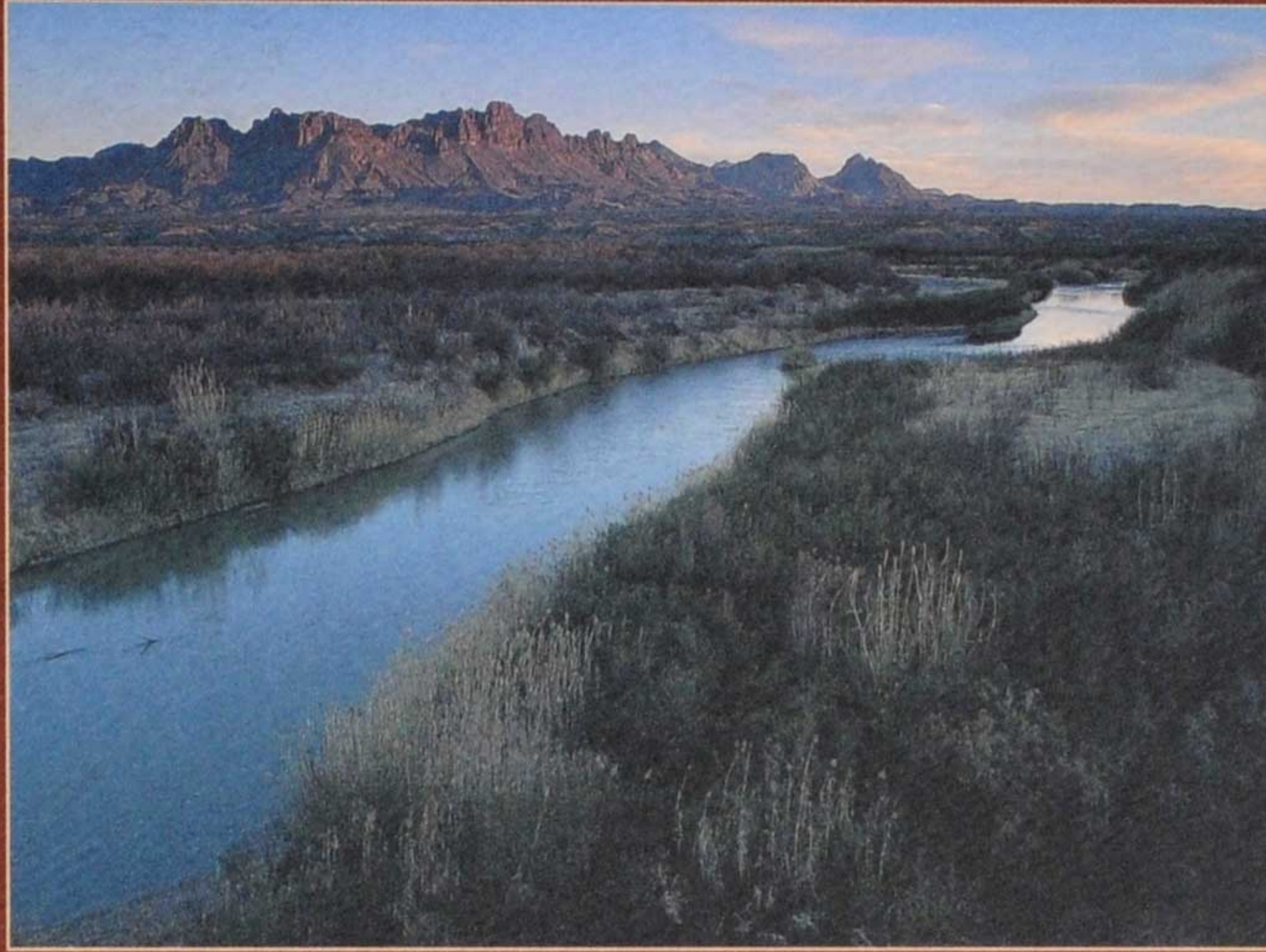
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY: A private, non-profit membership organization whose mission is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. Since 1951, TNC has been working with communities, businesses and people to protect more than 117 million acres around the world.

THE WILD FOUNDATION: Was established in 1974 and works worldwide to protect and sustain wilderness areas, promote the importance of wild-land services to human communities and provide environmental experience, education and information. Amongst many other activities, The WILD Foundation founded and manages the ongoing World Wilderness Congress.

UNIDOS PARA LA CONSERVACIÓN: A non-profit Mexican organization that promotes the wilderness concept. It has projects in three major transboundary ecoregions on the border with the U.S. and some Central-American countries. It also works with flagship species and brings sustainable alternatives to the local communities.

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CONECO

