

## Martha Isabel Pati Ruiz Corzo



6 October 2014, Salt Lake City, USA – The Mexican environmental campaigner Martha Isabel ‘Pati’ Ruiz Corzo has won the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) Wangari Maathai Award 2014 for her pioneering work to preserve forests and alleviate rural poverty in her native country.

One of the most prestigious forest accolades, the Wangari Maathai Award recognizes extraordinary efforts by an individual to improve and sustain forests and the people who depend on them. The award was established by the CPF to honour the memory of Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai, a champion of forest issues worldwide and the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Ruiz Corzo is recognized for making conservation profitable for rural communities in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, one of the most ecologically diverse areas of Mexico and home to threatened species such as jaguars and green macaws as well as 800 types of butterfly. Through her Sierra Gorda Ecological Group, Ruiz Corzo successfully lobbied the government for the creation of the reserve in 1997 and instituted an intensive programme of conservation education and training for local communities, turning the reserve into a flagship for public-private ecosystem management.

Hundreds of local families who live in the reserve benefit from a ‘payment for ecosystem services’ programme, receiving financial compensation for conserving and replanting trees on their land, which in turn helps preserve local watersheds and reduce soil erosion. Ruiz Corzo’s organisation also works to protect forests by promoting alternatives to subsistence farming, helping rural communities earn a living through sustainable small enterprises such as beekeeping and eco-tourism