

## **Project Description – The Mountain Institute, Huaraz, Peru**

For six months I will be volunteering with [The Mountain Institute](#) (TMI), an international non-profit organization dedicated to conservation, sustainable community development, and cultural preservation in the Andes, Appalachians, Himalayas, and other mountain ranges of the world. I will be working at The Mountain Institute's Andean site in Huaraz, Peru.

My role as a volunteer will focus on providing support for TMI's "Water Forever" program, working together with Peruvian professional counterparts based in Huaraz. This program, initiated in 2009, seeks to support Quechua-speaking communities in the area that are looking for ways to improve their native grasslands and the quality of the water they use for irrigation and human consumption. These are rural families dedicated to animal husbandry in high altitude grasslands between 12,000 and 15,000 feet above sea level. Almost all of them live under conditions of extreme poverty.

The Water Forever program, set against the backdrop of climate change and the risks it presents to the agricultural systems of the Andes, seeks to address three specific, interrelated issues:

- (1) the lack of an appropriate methodology for the sustainable management of native rangelands (Wet Puna ecosystems) that allows them to maintain the capacity to retain and regulate water
- (2) the lack of information for key decision-makers, with regards to the relationships that exist between the sustainable management of rangelands, the water cycle, the sustainability of agriculture, and the necessity to generate economic incentives to encourage families and communities to protect these ecosystems
- (3) an insufficient public conscience at the local, regional and national levels, of the strategic value of these ecosystems to the sustainability of agriculture in the Andes.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- (1) To improve practices and knowledge about:
  - o The sustainable management of both pasture and cattle farming
  - o The relationship between rural communities and agriculture, through exploratory studies carried out collaboratively with organizations from participating areas
- (2) To empower local actors through the implementation of a participative monitoring system, and to allow them to understand the changes in quantity and quality of water that comes from the Wet Puna
- (3) To increase awareness among the local population/authorities/universities of the importance of the Puna ecosystem, and to maintain the sustainability of agriculture and face increasing climate-change related risks

These three objectives will, in the medium and long term, help increase the water security of the agricultural systems of the high Andes, and mitigate the risks associated with global warming.

The first and second objectives of the project seek to generate specific information about the potential water output of the Wet Puna, and about duly tested grassland management techniques for the local population. In the long term, this information will work as a powerful instrument to help change the

attitudes of producers and decision-makers, and to develop proactive policies to help protect the highland ecosystems. The third objective utilizes the results and outputs from the previous objectives to initiate a social communication process of education of the local population as a whole. This includes local and national authorities, which will help rediscover the importance and appreciation for the Wet Puna, and foster communication between stakeholders to find new resources for local development.

I will spend my service time living in the communities participating in the Water Forever project and visiting the city of Huaraz to coordinate with TMI and other partner organizations. While I will be providing general support for TMI wherever I might be needed, my primary responsibility and contribution to the project will be serving as a liaison between The Mountain Institute, local authorities in municipal government involved in project implementation, and the participant communities. Living in these communities, I will be working hand-in-hand with the local Peruvian project coordinator to explore the use of internet, printed bulletins, or other means to improve the extent and quality of communication between the local population, their elected officials, and TMI – with the end goal of making the Water Forever project as effective and beneficial to the locals as possible.