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LightHawk's monthly update, WayPoint, was created to share some of the good news we on staff learn about daily. These success stories illustrate the critical role we play in conservation efforts throughout North and Central America through the unique perspective of flight. We hope you enjoy WayPoint and will share with others our success stories from above.

## A Maiden Voyage to Mexico



LightHawk over-flights are especially effective in spotting and tracking manatees in the water. Photo: Jeff Hughes/LightHawk

If airplanes could show emotion, LightHawk's Cessna 207 would have *una sonrisa grande* (a giant smile) right now. In January 2009, the plane returned to its second home of Latin America on its first mission for LightHawk's Mesoamerica program. To welcome the plane back, its pistons were fired up to help Mexican conservationists monitor and protect natural areas from the southern border with Guatemala and Belize, to the northern border with the U.S.

The Cessna 207 was owned by the late Greg Gund, and was donated to LightHawk by his family after Greg was tragically killed. With plenty of room and range, the 207 was practical both for Greg's spirit of adventure and LightHawk's needs for environmental over-flights.

For the Mexico missions, the plane was flown by longtime Mesoamerican program pilot, Chuck Schroll. Chuck ferried the plane from its new home in Tucson to its first mission in the state of Tabasco, halfway down Mexico's eastern coast. There, the 207 flew to gather data on manatees and their habitat in the Pantanos de Centla Biosphere Reserve. This data will be used to help regional efforts to protect manatee populations.

From there, the 207 flew almost to the border of Guatemala to support Pronatura Chiapas' work to protect watersheds and document forest cover. Greg Gund was a surfer who loved the beaches of Latin America. Like Greg, Chuck noted that his plane also preferred skirting the coasts, rather than flying in the mountainous areas of Chiapas, but that it served the group and their mission of documenting forest cover well.

After Chiapas, Chuck and the 207 traveled to Veracruz to work with researchers from Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Ecologia. For four days, the 207 flew the researchers and a photographer over the wetlands and dunes along the stunning coasts of Veracruz. As part of the Institute's "Sustainable Coast" project, the researchers mapped the vegetation of mangroves, flooding forests, and dunes. The information gathered from the air will be used to plan the future protection of Veracruz's venerable coastline.



Flying over dunes along Mexico's Veracruz region coastline. Photo: Gerardo Sanchez/LightHawk



CONANP, the Mexican National Park Service, uses LightHawk flights to quickly and effectively survey the remote and rugged mountains of the Sierra Madre. *Photo: CONANP/LightHawk*



The late Greg Gund with his Cessna 207 which now flies aerial campaigns for LightHawk partners in Mesoamerica. *Photo: Courtesy of the Gund family.*

The 207 then left the coast, making its way to the interior of Mexico. It landed in San Luis Potosi where it picked up a Mexican graduate student and conservationists from World Wildlife Federation and carried them through several states. Along the way, the team assessed the health of inland lakes and rivers, which are critical habitats for waterfowl including the statuesque sandhill crane. On their five-day trip, the group conducted survey flights in the states of San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Aguascaliente, Durango, Coahuila and Nuevo León, a feat which would have taken much, much longer using traditional ground transportation.

Before its final mission in Mexico, the 207 made a stop in Brownsville, Texas. There, a pair of mechanics recognized the plane from its numerous journeys carrying Greg to his beloved spots south of the border.

The 207's last mission during the trip was for CONANP, the Mexican National Park Service, in the Sierra Madre. Flying out to Chihuahua, the 207 soared over the rugged mountains to give the team a chance to assess how their conservation efforts with local communities were faring. As the team noted, LightHawk and the 207 accomplished a reconnaissance in two days that would have normally taken them three weeks to do on the ground.

As Chuck piloted the 207 back to Tucson to await its next mission, he reflected on the several thousand miles and series of successful flights the plane completed from Chiapas to Chihuahua. Greg Gund's 207 proved itself not only as a reliable and productive new member of LightHawk's team, but a worthy vehicle for continuing Greg's legacy of adventure and service in an area of the world he loved. Even if the plane isn't able to smile, LightHawk's pilots, staff, and partners in conservation certainly are smiling.



### *Celebrate 30 Years* On the Wings of LightHawk

Join this gathering of LightHawk Volunteer Pilots, conservation partners and friends to celebrate 30 years of flying for the environment.

Hear stories about the early days of LightHawk and a plane named, "Emily," reconnect with fellow flyers and enjoy the beauty of Santa Fe, New Mexico a city celebrating its 400th anniversary.

**October 9-11, 2009. Santa Fe, New Mexico**

Call Bev at 207-699-4145 or email [bgabe@lighthawk.org](mailto:bgabe@lighthawk.org) to reserve your spot today.



## **About LightHawk**

Founded in 1979, LightHawk is a nonprofit, volunteer pilot-based organization that flies environmental missions in collaboration with with a large network of pilots and hundreds of partner organizations throughout Central and North America. LightHawk flights provide a powerful and effective platform for research, groundtruthing, environmental awareness, and education.

## **Contact Information:**

International Headquarters

LightHawk

304 Main Street, Suite 14

PO Box 653

Lander, WY 82520

Tel.: (307) 332-3242

Fax: (888) 297-0156

Email: [info@lighthawk.org](mailto:info@lighthawk.org)

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