Panama 2025 Trip Report (Feb 10 – Feb 19)

Executive Summary:

The post-construction follow-up program of Water Engineers for the Americas and Africa (WEFTA) is a critical component in ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of community water systems. Through ongoing engagement with local water committees and community members, WEFTA provides essential technical support, guidance, and resources that empower communities to manage, maintain, and expand their water infrastructure.

During the 2025 WEFTA trip to Panama, our team witnessed firsthand the profound impact of this follow-up approach. By revisiting communities where WEFTA has previously worked, we strengthened relationships, assessed the functionality of existing systems, and identified new and growing needs. A recurring theme in community discussions was the increasing demand for potable water due to population growth. Many water systems, originally designed for smaller populations, now require upgrades and expansions to accommodate these changes. The majority of these communities are Indigenous within the Comarca Ngäbe-Bugle and the Bocas del Toro province. The government support for water and sanitation in these remote rural areas is non-existent.

The importance of well-organized and active water committees cannot be overstated. Communities with structured committees, such as those in Alto Guayabo, Cerro Brujo, Quebrada Pastor and Llano Culebra, demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness by implementing local financial contributions for maintenance and improvements. In contrast, communities struggling with governance and legal challenges, such as Tijeras, highlighted the necessity of continued support from WEFTA and its partners.

Collaboration with institutions such as the Panama Technological University (UTP), Peace Corps, and Engineers Without Borders NE Ohio Chapter has further enhanced WEFTA's ability to provide technical assistance and training. These partnerships bridge knowledge gaps and help local engineers and volunteers gain practical field experience, ensuring the sustainability of projects beyond WEFTA's direct involvement.

Beyond technical support, WEFTA's commitment is driven by a heartfelt dedication to improving lives. A community member's statement that "WEFTA is here to help from their hearts" encapsulates the essence of our work. This commitment extends to filling gaps left by government programs, as seen in Valle Sarón, where a high school with 20 installed flush toilets had no water system to support them until WEFTA steps in.

Success stories, such as the completed water system in San Martín and the newly built additional water tank in Cerro Brujo, reinforce the tangible benefits of WEFTA's post-construction follow-up efforts. Celebrating these achievements alongside the communities we serve not only strengthens bonds but also fuels our collective motivation to continue addressing the critical need for clean, reliable water access.

As we reflect on this journey, the overarching message is clear: sustained engagement with communities and water committees is essential for the long-term success of water projects and ultimately the long-term success of the communities we serve. WEFTA remains committed to standing with these communities, ensuring that every drop of effort translates into lasting change for generations to come.

Trip Narrative provided by WEFTA Volunteer, Greg Branch (GB)
Water System Details provided by WEFTA.

Introduction:
I was eagerly awaiting the 2025 WEFTA Panama trip, months before it would happen. This was to be my third WEFTA trip. I was looking forward to seeing Tim Wellman and first time WEFTA volunteer Tess De Los Rios, along with our in-country project managers, Nicolás Arcia, and José Molina. I've embraced Panama and its communities for many years. I first met volunteer Father Robert on a Waterlines (now WEFTA) trip in 2001. I was working as a water/sanitation program manager for Peace Corps. I had people on the ground but few resources for funding projects. Waterlines (WEFTA) had financial resources but were limited in their ground support. We established an effective working partnership 24 years ago. This year, Tim Wellman's itinerary showed that I would be tracing some old footprints to Peace Corps supported communities and making new footprints.

Day 1:
I flew to Panama on February 10th, catching an early flight and arriving without delays in the afternoon. On the taxi ride from the airport, I checked my phone for the weather. 92 degrees, 'real feel' temperature - 99 degrees. A shock to the system, coming from a long, relatively chilly winter in the Washington D.C. area. It was going to be sweaty 10 days in Panama. I would later learn that I averaged 14,000 steps per day during the duration of the 10-day trip, coupled with more than 20 hours riding in our rented truck.

Checking into the Hotel California for $35 a night is a terrific way to prepare for the rustic accommodations to come. I stretched out my air travel weary body for an hour and then the knock came at my door. Tim was here! We hugged and went out for a walk around the ever growing and changing Panama City. Tess joined us for dinner and later the three of us chatted under the moon on the rooftop of the hotel. The 2025 team was ready and overjoyed to begin.

Day 2:
Our Panama city day was spent riding around in taxis for our meetings with partners. After a breakfast of fried chicken, fried bread and bananas, we went to visit the Panama Technological University (UTP). We were met by Edgar Cedeno, who I met last year, heading the evolving Panamanian NGO ARAGUAS. We met with UTP Director Grey and talked about how we can collaborate with Professor David Watkins at Michigan Tech engineering school, also a potential liaison for Engineers Without Borders. A Venn diagram should be drawn between Engineers Without Borders, WEFTA and UTP. There is an opportunity to collaborate on improving access to WASH resources and increasing university student work in the WASH sector. We toured the school, visited with professors, and saw the UTP water quality testing lab. My biggest takeaway was how enthusiastically they talked about taking their student engineers out in the field last year to the province of Colon and how great it was for everyone. Getting young aspiring engineers from the city people out to the field has promise.

In the afternoon, we went to the Peace Corps office. As was the case last year, it was a pleasure to see past co-workers talk about water and the excellent work Peace Corps completes, keeping the Peace Corps flame a lit with hopes of working together more in the future.

Day 3:
A predawn taxi to the national airport, to the rental car in David, we arrived at the home of Nicolás in Tole well before noon. I always enjoy revisiting his home and giving warm welcomes to his ever-growing family. After a cup of coffee, we put our rental truck in four-wheel drive and went up the mountain. We parked on a grassy hill and began the 90-minute decent down the dirt trail to **Quebrada Macho**. We

were met by a couple of dozen community members and discussed the need for a new system to provide water for the 60 houses that reside here. The water committee president is a woman, which is always nice to see. This system requires a spring capture, a new water storage tank and water distribution. They mentioned how the community was growing; more people meant more water was needed. More water would turn out to be the main theme of the community meetings on this trip.

We were able to fit another visit to a community named **Bajo Horcón** with 40+ community members present. The initial water study is complete, and Nicolás is tasked to follow up. Word had gotten out that WEFTA was coming, and a man had hiked from another community to solicit assistance. The need for water systems is vast.

Location: Quebrada Macho, CNB
Population: 300 people/60+ homes
Project Detail: WEFTA has worked in the area for over 10 years. Qbda Macho is perhaps the hardest community to work with because of the remote location. Getting materials on site for the spring capture, storage tank and distribution will require serious community input. Thankfully, they are surprisingly organized and prepared to get water flowing from taps in the community.

Quebrada Macho Project Data:	
Spring source	One good spring source to be captured – dry season 20 gallons/person/day, wet season 40 gpcd
Transmission line	3,500 feet
Storage Tank	New block storage tank
Distribution	4,500 feet of total pipe serving 60+ homes
Project Cost	
WEFTA contribution (2025)	$7,500
Community contribution	$2,500 (labor & meals)
TOTAL	**$10,000 (2025)**

Location: Bajo Horcón, CNB
Population: 230 people/25+ homes
Project Detail: Nicolás has already collaborated with the community to capture and improve the spring source. The next phase of the project will complete the necessary upgrades to the elevated water storage tank and distribution to the community. Nicolás will also work with the water committee on their governmental JAAR status and overall water committee training.

Bajo Horcón Project Data:	
Spring source	One existing spring source already captured – dry season 25 gallons/person/day, wet season 45 gpcd
Transmission line	1,500 feet (completed in 2024)
Storage Tank	New elevated plastic tanks
Distribution	2,400 feet of total pipe serving 25+ homes
Project Cost	
WEFTA contribution (2025)	$3,500
Community contribution	$1,000 (labor & meals)
TOTAL	**$4,500 (2025)**

Day 4:
On the road by 7:00 am we met up with Nicolás and went up into the mountains once again. We had a great meeting with the water committee president in **Alto Guayabo**. It is extremely positive to hear of a water committee that is working well. They are collecting $0.25 a month from households and have been using those funds to replace water pipes and maintain the system. We discussed what makes a community work and how others struggle. It is clear to me that it is a lot to ask community members to manage a water system, collect money from their neighbors, and do routine water system work as volunteers. I think even in the United States; it would take a lot for a community of 400 people to work together without getting into conflicts.

We hiked down to the water spring boxes that Nicolás had built for Alto Guayabo more than 15 years ago. They were still running well. The jungle overcomes construction quickly and the maintenance of clearing the vegetation periodically is arduous.

We then met with a sector of the community of **Alto Algarrobo.** Through the Peace Corps volunteer working in the community on youth and health WEFTA learned of the water challenges of this area. For the time that WEFTA and Waterlines have worked in multiple communities along the road to Llano Nopo we have seen the communities grow and the access to water decrease. We were able to meet with the community and had a good turnout due to coordination by the Peace Corps volunteer living there. The community needs a big expansion project, and some government assistance is in progress.

Location: Alto Guayabo, Chiriqui
Population: 640 people/120+ homes
Project Detail: This is potentially the first community that Nicolás worked with back in 1997. The water committee and community remain strong and dedicated to the water system. They have worked out the overall water delivery schedule by cutting the community into sectors to receive water 2 times per week. In the dry season the frequency drops to once per week. Our conversation with the water committee president was fulfilling. They are making do with what they have, and the community is well organized to only use the water they need.

Alto Guayabo Project Data:	
Spring source	One existing spring capture area with five springs already captured – dry season 20 gallons/person/day, wet season 48 gpcd
Transmission line	2.5 miles (existing)
Storage Tank	Block storage tank (existing)
Distribution	1.5 miles of total pipe serving 120+ homes (existing)
Project Cost	
No project planned for this community to date.	

Location: Alto Algarrobo (sub-sector on north end of community), Chiriqui
Population: 75 people/17 homes
Project Detail: This project came to WEFTA by way of the Peace Corps volunteer working in the community on youth development and health. This sub-sector of the community and their ad-hoc water committee have been collaborating with the local political representative to solicit funding for a solar-powered pump from a spring source located below the beneficiary houses. WEFTA participated in the meeting to provide technical assistance.

Alto Algarrobo Project Data:	
Spring source	One existing spring source, solar pump to be installed. No flow data.
Transmission line	2,100 feet
Storage Tank	Block tank
Distribution	1,400 feet of total pipe serving 17 homes
Project Cost	
No project planned in this community.	

Day 5:
Valentine's Day. A Panamanian community member stood up and told everyone seated for a meeting that WEFTA doesn't live in the community. WEFTA doesn't have any invested interest in personal benefit from building a water system. He said, "WEFTA is here to help from their hearts." That made my trip. It is truly why I do these trips and explains my efforts during all my years in Panama. It isn't rational, logical, or profitable for me to put my time, energy, and money to help strangers in need. It's emotional. It gives me joy.

We went to **Llano Culebra** which is on top of a small plateau. All the springs are located below the community. They have to use electric water pumps. A Peace Corps volunteer helped coordinate the meeting. They have 130 houses connected to the current system and need to expand to reach more houses. The water committee president currently has to shut off water to half the houses at mid-day to

provide water for the other houses. This water committee charges households $4.00 a month to help pay for pump electricity. Tim requested a formal letter for assistance from WEFTA and Nicolás will conduct a water system assessment.

Location: Llano Culebra, Chiriqui
Population: 660 people connected /130 homes connected – (370 homes not connected)
Project Detail: Another project that came to WEFTA by way of the Peace Corps volunteer working in the community on youth development and health. The community is divided into two sectors with one sector receiving water from two springs that are located below the community and thus pumped by an electrical pump to the main storage tank. The other sector receives water from a groundwater well that is connected to an elevated water storage tank. There are 370 homes that are not connected to either of the supply sources.

Llano Culebra Project Data: TBD – Nicolás will assess the system in 2025

We then went to **Tijeras** where Nicolás had set up a meeting. The best community turnout of the trip. Dozens and dozens of people. The main issue is that their spring source that supplies the community has been taken over by a family living on the same property as the spring. Despite having their spring donation letter from the previous landowner, this new landowner is not allowing the community to use the water. We talked about other alternatives. The water committee is working with the government's environmental department to ensure legal access to their water right.

Location: Tijeras, CNB
Population: 410 people/78 homes
Project Detail: Tijeras is where Nicolás grew up as a kid. Peace Corps has also had a long legacy of collaborating with the community on WASH as well as agriculture and forestry. The community, as noted in the trip narrative, is suffering from the 'taking' of their spring source. WEFTA will work with Nicolás to ensure the water committee is able to attain legal access to the spring and restore water service to the community. With legal status of the spring, WEFTA will be able to support overall water system renovation and repair.

Tijeras Project Data:	
Spring source	Two existing spring captures (legal status in question) – dry season 25 gallons/person/day, wet season 41 gpcd
Transmission line	1.2 miles (existing)
Storage Tank	New block storage tank (TBD)
Distribution	4,800 feet of total pipe serving 78 homes (existing in need of repair)
Project Cost: TBD for 2025	

We somehow squeezed in another visit with the communities of **Cerro Name and Bajo Casicón/Quebrada Plata.** We had more than 25 people at the meeting. Both communities mentioned that their water supply is decreasing, and the community populations are growing.

Location: Cerro Ñame, CNB
Population: 160 people/28 homes
Project Detail: The community is divided into two sectors with separate spring boxes, water storage and distribution. Nicolás has worked with both sectors in the past and the water committee that covers both sectors has been diligent for system operation and maintenance. The key issues are dwindling water supply and the addition of new homes. A common thread for the Chiriqui side of the Comarca. Nicolás will survey the systems and provide scope and fee to improve the spring captures and renovate the block tank, and if necessary, improve the water distribution piping.

Cerro Ñame Project Data:	
Spring sources	Two existing spring captures serving 2 sectors of the community
Transmission line	Sector 1: 1000 feet, Sector 2: 2400 feet
Storage Tank	Sector 1: 1000-gallon plastic tank, Sector 2: 4000 - gallon block tank
Distribution	2,500 feet of total pipe serving 28 homes (existing in need of repair)
Project Cost: TBD for 2025	

Location: Bajo Casicón/Quebrada Plata, CNB
Population: 320 people/60 homes
Project Detail: This project was completed in 2010 by partnership with Waterlines and the Peace Corps volunteer living and working in the community. Nicolás assisted in the construction of the spring capture and the PC volunteer in coordination with the water committee completed the water storage tank, transmission line, and distribution to the 60 homes. In our meeting the water committee members presented the challenges that have occurred that include the complete collapse of the spring capture due to a landslide and the ageing storage tank with multiple leaks. The community has come together keep water flowing, but they are in dire need of additional support.

Bajo Casicón Project Data:	
Spring source	One spring capture (now destroyed by landslide)
Transmission line	3,200 feet (existing)
Storage Tank	Block storage tank (existing but in need of repair)
Distribution	4,100 feet of total pipe serving 60 homes (existing in need of repair)
Project Cost: **TBD for 2025**	

Day 6:
We had another dawn departure to drive from the Pacific coast to the Caribbean coast. We finally parked at **Valle Sarón** and were met by WEFTA in-country project manager José Molina. A Peace Corps Volunteer lives there and helped get the community present for our meeting. Along with overall water system repair, they need water supply for the high school. It is the only high school in the region and the kids go to school without water. 20 flush toilets were installed, but there was no water system to go with it! So many times, WEFTA has helped out when the government has fallen short.

We then went to **San Martin** to celebrate. WEFTA and José Molina successfully built a water system for this community. We were received by many community members full of praise and gratitude. After days of meetings with people pleading for water, it was refreshing to be a part of a success story. We all hiked up to the newly built water tank and smiles were abound for pictures.

Location: Valle Sarón (Bocas del Toro)
Population: 1400 people/300 homes/700 students
Project Details: The project for Valle Sarón came to WEFTA from the PC Volunteer working in the community. The existing water system built by MINSA is ageing and failing. Water does not reach many of the households and does not reach the regional high school. In addition, the Ministry of Education invested in building flush toilets for the high school. But the current water system does not support the water demand at the high school. The PC volunteer has launched a campaign for funding the water system improvements.

Valle Sarón Project Data:	
Spring source	Existing and failing water source in need of renovation – dry season 12 gallons/person/day, wet season 36 gpcd
Transmission line	3,300 feet (will be repaired in 2025)
Storage Tank	Reconstruction on the new 6,000-gallon tank
Distribution	6,265 feet of total pipe serving 300 homes and direct line to the high school.
Project Cost:	
WEFTA contribution (2025)	$6,000
Community contribution	$2,000
TOTAL	**$8,000 (2025 funds secured)**

Location: San Martin (Bocas del Toro)
Population: 290 people/50 homes
Project Details: San Martin is a suburb of the municipality of Valle Risco. WEFTA worked the community water committee in 2023 to capture a new spring and connect it to the existing transmission line. It became evident that the existing transmission line and storage tank were beyond repair. WEFTA, through Jose Molina, worked with the water committee to renovate the transmission line, storage tank and distribution in 2024. The project will be completed in early 2025.

San Martin Project Data:	
Spring source	One renovated spring capture. Jose and community captured a spring that provides – dry season 32 gallons/person/day, wet season 76 gpcd
Transmission line	1,800 feet (repaired in 2024)
Storage Tank	New 5,000-gallon tank (2024)
Distribution	6,265 feet of total pipe serving 50 homes
Project Cost:	
WEFTA contribution (2023, 2024)	$6,500
Community contribution	$3,125
TOTAL	**$9,625 (2024 funds still in motion)**

Day 7:
Cerro Brujo, an island community. Boat rides were a welcome change to the trip, beating up the body in a unique way. This was another celebration meeting; the community had successfully built a new water tank to service a part of the community that was down by the water's edge. They mentioned how much effort the women had put in, mixing concrete by hand. We walked through the mud for an hour, to reach the water intake and assess the quality. Like a trail of ants, we had a good turnout of people with us. One person lost his boot in the mud when he stepped off the wooden planks that made the mud passable. We stopped at Bocatorito, another small fishing village on the coast of Tierra Oscura, on the way back from Cerro Brujo. The water committee president wanted to show the team their water source and storage tank to see if we could assist with some small improvements.

Location: Cerro Brujo, Bocas del Toro
Service Population: 300+ people/28 homes.
Project Details: The community of Cerro Brujo is a coastal community on the Tierra Obscura peninsula of Bocas del Toro. Waterlines and WEFTA both have collaborated with the community since 2008. The new renovation project initiated in 2024 and is still in progress. With this 2025 meeting with the water committee and community members, we are glad to see the progress and community initiative. Nicolás and Jose will work on the elaboration of this project in 2024-2025. This project is ongoing.

Cerro Brujo Project Data:	
Stream source	2 small streams in a protected watershed – flow exceeds demand – to be renovated in 2025.
Transmission line	5,000 feet with multiple bridge crossings across streams and pastureland
Storage Tank	5,000-gallon hexagonal block tank (existing). 5,000-gallon new storage tank completed in 2024.
Distribution	1,000 feet with multiple small family branch lines
Project Cost:	
WEFTA contribution (projected 2024)	$8,140
Community contribution	$2,040 (labor & meals)
TOTAL	**$10,180 (2024 funds still in motion)**

Day 8:
We got a boat to the mainland and went straight to Quebrada Pastor. Water committee president Angel is very impressive and was wearing his WEFTA hat that was gifted to him last year. Engineers Without Borders, NE Ohio Chapter is also helping with the design of this project.

We then went to Valle Risco to discuss another water project for a regional school. This is a good collaboration project in regard to the community fundraising 2-3 dollars a student to help match community funding with WEFTA funding. They need to get a few formal tasks done with the Ministry of Health and they will be ready for construction.

We all exhaled and drove the 5 hours back over to the Pacific side of Panama. We dropped Nicolás off at his daughter's house in David and found ourselves a hotel room and a shower.

Location: Quebrada Pastor, Bocas del Toro
Population: 400+ people/70+ homes/1 school with more than 500 students and staff
Project Detail: The community of Quebrada Pastor lies on the main road from Chiriquí Grande and Almirante, both in the Bocas del Toro Province. Like many of the communities in Bocas del Toro, Quebrada Pastor has had a rich legacy working with Peace Corps. Waterlines and WEFTA have both supported small scale water systems in the 'neighborhoods,' as well as providing support for the principal water system that serves the central part of Quebrada Pastor and the School (500 students and staff). Jose is actively working with the water committee and WEFTA's partners at EWB to find effective solutions for increasing water supply to the main community, school, and neighborhoods.

Quebrada Pastor Project Data:	
Spring source	1 spring – dry season 22 gallons/person/day, wet season 43 gpcd
Transmission line	3,500 feet with 3 waterline bridge crossings
Storage Tank	7,500-gallon block water tank.
Distribution	3,700 feet with multiple branches to the community and the school.
Project Cost:	
WEFTA contribution (2023 & 2024)	$10,500
Community contribution	$3,500
TOTAL	**$14,000 (2024 funds still in motion)**

Location: Centro Educativo Bilingue, Valle Risco, Bocas de Toro
Service Population: 1500 students, staff, and admin personnel.
Project Details: The bilingual school in Valle Risco serves the majority of the population for education grades K-12. Jose is active in the community and will continue to collaborate with the school officials and water committee to assess the overall water needs for the school.

Centro Educativo Project Date: Project Assessment TBD for 2025.

Day 9:
We made the long trip back to Panama City without a hitch. I was full of reflection. I should never take running water throughout my house for granted. It is a basic human need and many of the people we meet have to go through so much effort to get a limited supply. Every single community we visited mentioned how much their community is growing, that their need for potable water is growing.

***"*WEFTA is there where nobody else is. People are so thankful, and I hope I can communicate their gratitude to all the WEFTA team and the kind people who donate. Know that you are making a significant difference in people's lives. For the better. It should bring you joy." - GB**

WEFTA Project Priorities for 2025-2026

Overall:

- Development of the NGO Araguas : legal certification costs: $2,500 (2025 funding request from donors)

Nicolás Arcia:

- Cerro Brujo: finish spring capture project : $3k (2024 donor funds in motion)
- Kwite (2023 project): new spring capture and storage tank restoration: $3k (2024 donor funds in motion)
- Quebrada Macho: project scope and fee, new water system: $12k (2025 funding request from donors)
- Bajo Horcón water system upgrade: $4k (2025 funding request from donors)
- Bajo Mira (2022 study): Increase water supply through spring capture improvement and storage tank renovation: $3,500 (2025 fund funding request from donors)
- Tijeras: new system study after resolving the spring issues: $300 (2025 fund funding request from donors)
- Cerro Ñame: toma repair: $1k (2025 funding request from donors)
- Bajo Casicón/Quebrada Plata: system study: $300 (2025 fund funding request from donors)
- Llano Culebra: system study: $300 (2025 funding request from donors)

José Molina:

- San Martin: system construction finalization: funding complete
- Cerro Brujo: water line bridges, final distribution: funding complete
- Quebrada Pastor: Phase 3 to connect additional spring sources to bolster supply to school and community overall: $6k (2025 funding request from donors)
- Valle Risco Bilingual School: Work with parents' association to secure at least $3k towards the overall new water system cost of $8k: $5k (2025 funding request from donors)
- Quebrada Cacao: spring capture repair: $600 (2025 funding request from donors)
- Valle Sarón: Spring capture, new storage tank, improved distribution, direct line to local high school: $8k (2025 funding request from donors)

PANAMA

WEFTA Community Assessment Trip

FEBRUARY 2025

WEFTA Community Water System Assessment of:

Quebrada Macho, Bajo Horcón, Alto Guayabal, Alto Algarrobo, Llano Culebra, Tijeras, Cerro Ñame, Cerro Casicón, Valle Sarón, San Martin, Cerro Brujo, Quebrada Pastor, & Valle Risco-Escuela Bilingüe

Special thanks to those who made this trip a success:

WEFTA Volunteers:
Greg Branch & Tess De Los Rios

Water Committees in Chiriqui:

- Quebrada Macho
- Bajo Horcon
- Alto Guayabal
- Alto Algarrobo
- Llano Culebra
- Cerro Tijeras
- Cerro Ñame
- Bajo Casicón

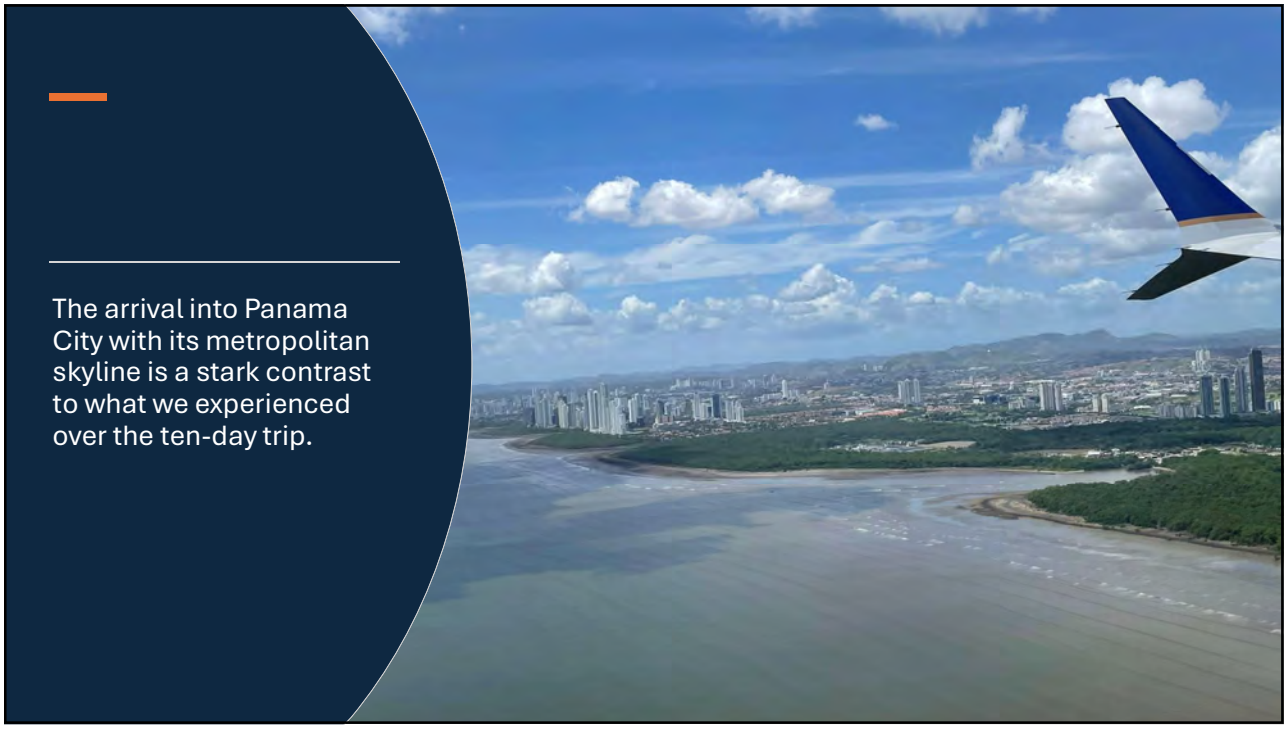
Country Project Managers:
Nicolas Arcia & José Molina

Water Committees in Bocas del Toro:

- Valle Sarón
- San Martin
- Cerro Brujo
- Quebrada Pastor
- Valle Risco – Escuela Bilingüe

Donations from the Wardle Family Fund, Wellman Family Fund, Waterlines Sunset Fund, and private donors. The wonderful people of Panama. Tim Wellman, Executive Director, WEFTA and WEFTA volunteer

Panama: Trip Report Photo Summary



The arrival into Panama City with its metropolitan skyline is a stark contrast to what we experienced over the ten-day trip.

WEFTA Director, Tim, Panama's Technological University (UTP) Director of Engineering Investigation, Dr. Ariel Grey and WEFTA volunteer Tess converse about the connection between WEFTA's work in the field and the opportunity to develop relationships with UTP, Michigan Tech (MTU) and ARAGUAS.

WEFTA Director Tim and ARAGUAS staff Edgar Cedeño discuss next steps for ARAGUAS while meeting at UTP. WEFTA continues work with ARAGAUS in their certified status as a non-governmental organization (NGO).

WEFTA Director Tim, WEFTA volunteers Greg and Tess meet with one of the professors who teaches Panamanian university students how to take and test water samples.

The entrance to Tolé where we stopped at Nicolas' house for coffee and conversation before heading up into the hills for our first community visit in Quebrada Macho.

A ‘new’ road from Tolé to the entrance of Quebrada Macho in CNB/Chiriqui.

Led by a community member and Nicolas, we hiked for a good hour and a half down into the valley to reach the community.

WEFTA volunteers Greg Branch, Tess De Los Rios, Quebrada Macho guide and Nico.

The only flat part of the trail to Quebrada Macho, the rest was literally downhill.

Quebrada Macho's community meeting was rewarding due to the numerous participants and because several of the water committee board members were women. Here the president thanked WEFTA for their willingness to make the hike and especially for listening to their water needs.

In-country Project Manager for the Chiriqui and Comara communities, Nico Arcia, shares his thoughts with the water committee and community members of Quebrada Macho on the potential for bringing water to their houses.

Four “merichi” in their traditional Ngäbe dresses called naguas. They sat and listened to the community meeting.

WEFTA volunteers Tess and Greg enjoying lunch of rice, pigeon peas and chicken…all raised in the community.

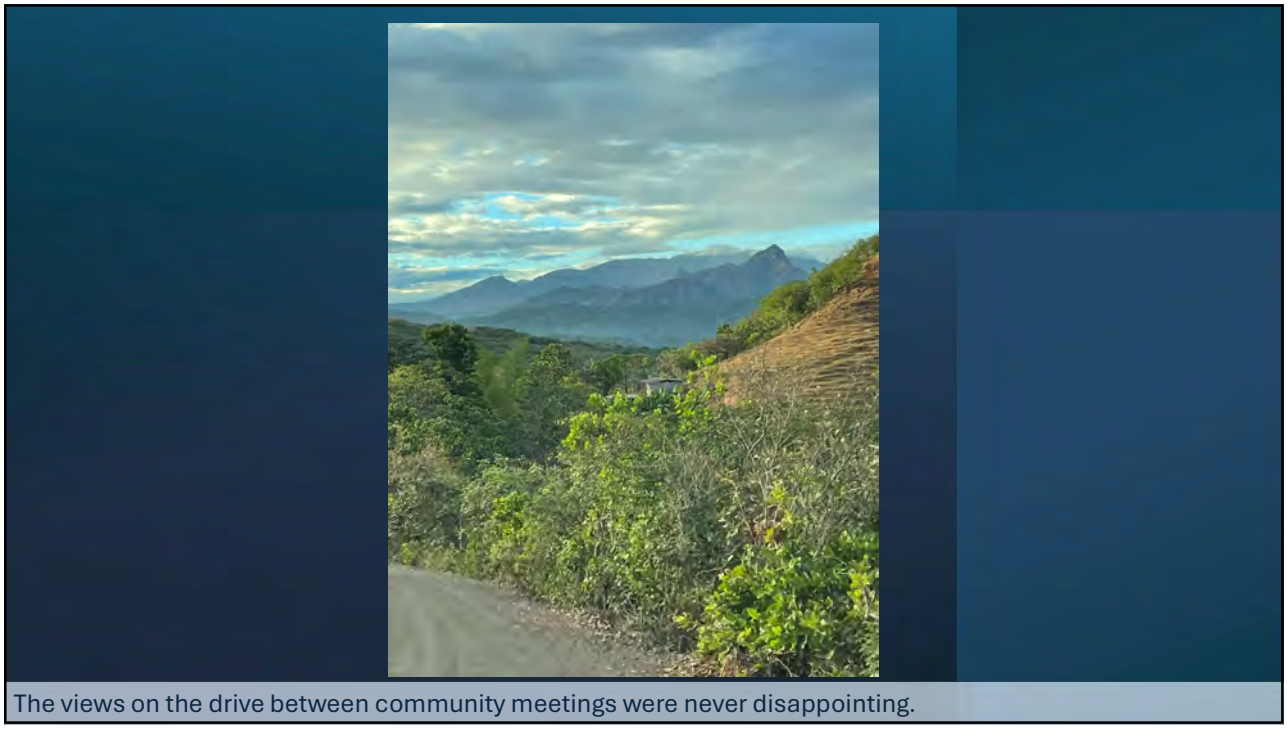
Checking out the “toma” or spring that the Quebrada Macho community members have identified as their water source.

The well-known landmark of Peña Blanca on the horizon as we headed to the second community meeting in Bajo Horcón.

WEFTA Executive Director Tim, WEFTA Volunteer Greg and In Country Project Manager Nico discuss Bajo Horcón's concerns.

A view from above the meeting with Bajo Horcón community members.

Community members of all ages participated in our conversation in Bajo Horcón.



The views on the drive between community meetings were never disappointing.

Community meeting in Alto Algarrobo with the local mayor present and ready to support the community needs.

The local mayor shared her thoughts and potential to support Alto Algarrobo's water needs.

A newly cleaned trail from town to the current Alto Guayabo spring boxes.

A well-trained eye will spot three air tubes (respideros) that show where Alto Guayabo currently receives a portion of its potable water supply from the spring sources.

A typical adobe or “quinche” house. Quinche, which is mud and dried grass, was the construction material before communities were able to receive concrete and blocks to build their homes.

In Llano Culebra, we met with three members of water committee and a Peace Corps volunteer at the health center.

Llano Culebra's water committee president has been in this position for a decade and feels an enormous sense of responsibility to support his community members' access to clean water.

Llano Culebra currently has this storage tank for the school and part of the community. They seek support to add an additional water storage tank and fence the community's second pump house in order to prevent vandalism of the system

Onward to community visit #6: Tijeras. We put the 4x4 to good use in order to visit this community.

Before arriving to the community of Tijeras, we made the quick trek to see the intake springs that are very near to a different community. This intake is far from Tijeras and will likely come under discussion soon given the nearby community's need for water as well.

Sometimes we see what we prefer not to. This clothes washing spot is connected to one of the spring boxes that should feed Tijeras. The government sanctioned use of the spring for Tijeras is in question.

Tijeras, one of the more distant communities visited, had the largest community participation.

Similar to other communities, their population has increased, and the current water system does not provide for all houses. Peace Corps/Panama has contributed considerably to this community in WASH and Agro/Forestry.

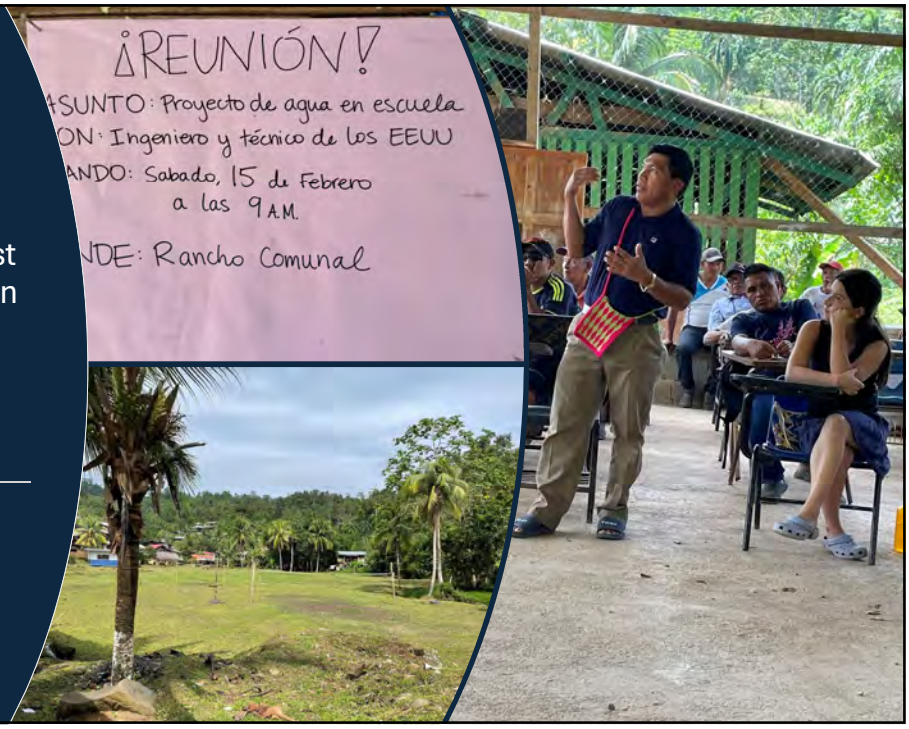
Cerro Ñame was another community with women on the water committee. During our meeting, the secretary addressed the attendees and took the board meeting minutes.

Cerro Ñame and Cerro Cacicón community members came together to express their issues with their current system and their desire to identify more springs to allow more houses to receive water.

We departed Chiriqui and crossed the continental divide into Bocas del Toro for the second half of our trip.

Along the Chiriqui-Bocas highway, one must pass over the Fortuna hydro-electric dam. The trees and intense green colors are never-ending.

Valle Sarón was the first community we visited in Bocas del Toro. José Molina, WEFTA's In Country Project Manager met us here.



Having Peace Corps Volunteers in the communities WEFTA works with is always an added bonus. Our meeting in Valle Sarón was well announced and therefore, well attended thanks to “Melita.”

The community of San Martin has made exceptional progress with the improvements and expansion of their WEFTA - funded system.

WEFTA Director and volunteer Tim inspects San Martin's new storage tank.

San Martin community members are proud of the work they have done to have potable water running in their homes.

When visiting communities in Bocas, boat travel is a given.

This time around our boat captain shuttled us about 30-45min each way from Isla Colon to the community of Cerro Brujo.

José Molina, WEFTA's In-Country Project Manager for Bocas del Toro is a proud WASH system contractor. Here he poses with the initial columns for the bridge to provide the water transmission line a safe creek crossing.

Community members, Peace Corps volunteers and WEFTA Volunteers focus on their steps as they hike to Cerro Brujo's intake spring and water tank. The meters of rain that Bocas receives annually makes water sources more abundant here than in Chiriqui.

Hiking to Cerro Brujo's intake and water tank is nothing short of an obstacle course.

Additional proof of the obstacle course on the way to the tank and intake of Cerro Brujo's water system.

In-Country Project Manager José Molina, WEFTA Director Tim and Juan, José's son and apprentice, strategize for next steps.

Once at the intake, Nicolas, Tim and community members discuss maintenance options.

Many community members who were part of the work crew that mixed the cement to build the system made the trek to the spring as well. Since most of the men work outside the community because many women were part of the actual construction of the water system.

Nicolas and Cerro Brujo's water committee president, Mateo Beker, inspect one of the water intakes. Water from the intake is treated by community members for potability.

The view from the new storage tank is as impressive as the tank itself.

Cerro Brujo's water system is something to celebrate. Under the direction of both In-Country Project Managers, Nico and José, the entire community came together to make running water a reality in their homes.

In-Country Project Manager Nicolas takes a moment to survey a water source for the community of Bocatorito.

A typical house in the small, boat-access only community of Bocatorito.

Quebrada Pastor water committee president, Angel and WEFTA's In-Country Project Managers José and Nico discuss the plan for the next steps for improving water access for the community and school.

While the population of the community of Valle Risco has grown and the access road from the main highway has been paved, traditional houses with palm leaf roofs can still be found.

Our last community visit was in Valle Risco with the president of the Parent-Teacher Committee of the new school. The school was built without a connection to a water source and the community recognizes the need and is ready to assume a portion of the financial burden.

After averaging 14,000 steps a day, with a total of 20+ hours in the rented 4x4 Toyota and over 3 hours in the Caribbean Sea, we were happy and reflective as we boarded the plane back to Panama City.

Thank you, Panama, and see you next year.

The WEFTA program is strong thanks to our donors, in-country coordinators, and beneficiary community members. WEFTA will continue to provide the technical assistance necessary to keep the water flowing to increase community health. **Making Connections. Empowering Communities. Improving Lives.**