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Water Expo 2023



For the first time World Water Day was celebrated by FCD on the 22nd of March under the theme, “Be the Change You Want to See in The World”. The primary goal for this year’s event was to increase awareness on the importance of the water resources and how citizens could participate in the proper care of this resource for future generations through innovation, activism, and governance. Additionally, the event highlighted the binational efforts

underway for the care and protection of the Mopan River which is a shared precious resource.

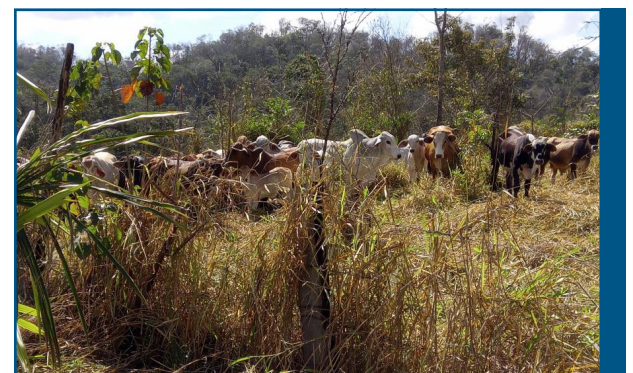
FCD has been conducting river conservation activities since its early beginnings in the late 1980s. In 2013 it solidified a binational river conservation alliance between Belizean and Guatemalan community leaders located near the Mopan River. This continues today, particularly supported within the FCD Advocacy Strategy which encourages for community-based organizations to rally behind river conservation at a local level.

Over 300 primary school students and teachers from Benque Viejo Town and San Jose Succotz Village visited the expo fair which was held at the Marshalleck Cancha in Benque Viejo Town. Eight institutions and groups participated including FCD, FCD Environmental Youth Group, Rotaract Club of Benque, Benque Child Advisory Body, Wildlife Conservation Society, Forest Department and Todos Por Un Mundo Verde and ASIPROM from Guatemala. This event was made possible with the financial support from the US Department of the Interior and the GIZ Selva Maya Program.

Cattle Ranching Strategy Revisited

Cattle ranching has been identified as the primary threat to the degradation of land in the Chiquibul National Park. This has been ongoing for more than 5 years, and it does not appear to be abating. In 2019 a strategy was devised to counter this growing problem together with the Belize Defence Force. In essence the strategy was aimed at eradicating cattle ranching activities within the limits of the national park employing a four-pronged approach. But in assessing the results, the realization is that the strategy has been moderately effective.

A meeting with Belize Defence Force personnel served to outline the problem once more and to identify a way forward. It has become apparent that the issue is more complicated now and grappling with the matter will take significant resources and effort. The approach today will have to be more inclusive of other institutions including the Agriculture Department, national cattle association and the Belize Agricultural Health Authority.



Presently, approximately 2,298 acres of pastures is being occupied in the Caracol Archaeological Monument and Chiquibul National Park by Guatemalan ranchers. On the ground this is evident with the appearance of fences, water troughs, ponds and grasslands.

Binational Wildfire Taskforce Launched



Wildfires are becoming more apparent even in broadleaf forests where FCD operates. During the development of the first Chiquibul National Park Management Plan of 2009, forest fires were not identified as a primary threat to the natural ecosystem but today the new plan does speak at length of climate change and the effects this brings upon natural ecosystems with incidences of fires.

In 2021 after the heavy impacts caused by fires in the Chiquibul, Vaca and Caracol, FCD started a training program for staff and acquired fire-fighting equipment. The outreach and education program was also lifted to new levels aimed at reaching to the local farmers both in Belize and Guatemala. This year, during the month of February, a coordination mechanism was instituted among Guatemalan and Belizean authorities and civil society groups through the creation of a Binational Taskforce to address forest fires. This taskforce is comprised of those stakeholders that have management roles along Belize's western border including the Belize Forest Department, Agriculture Department, Programme for Belize, Belize Maya Forest Trust, Exploring Solutions Past ~ The Maya Forest Alliance and FCD. From the Guatemalan side, those included are el Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas (CONAP), Asociacion Balam, Foro de Justicia Ambiental, el Sistema Nacional de Prevención y Control de Incendios Forestales (SIPECIF) and the Municipality of Melchor de Mencos.

A binational action plan defines the specific activities to prevent and counter forest fires and a Whatsapp group platform has been created to maintain a close communication.

Goal:

FCD aims to conserve the natural and cultural resources of the western Chiquibul-Maya Mountains for the sustainable development of Belize.

Mission:

FCD pioneers adaptive management of the Chiquibul Forest to improve the ecological and cultural integrity of the western Chiquibul-Maya Mountains.

Two of FCD's Senior staff, namely Esther Sanchez Sho and Luceli Itza successfully undertook courses, enabling them to be better prepared in conducting project management.

Esther who is FCD's Programs Director completed the *Project Management for Wildlife Conservation (PMWC)* course which was a 6-week online training course delivered by WildTeam based in the United Kingdom. During the course, participants improved their knowledge on the principles of maintaining high standards of effectiveness, understood the use of clearly defined roles in project management and decision making; and understood the control and administrative processes related to project management.

Subsequently Esther and the Finance Manager, Luceli Itza participated on a 3-day workshop on Conservation Finance for Protected Areas Management. This workshop was organized by the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) geared for individuals who are actively involved in protected

Senior Staff Get Training



area management and natural resource conservation in Belize. The topics included: general principles of conservation financing (theory and practice), types of costs of protected areas, local and international sources of funding for Belize PA's, expansion of conservation funding in Belize and innovative funding mechanisms being used in Belize and abroad.

One Health Education Begins



As a result of the pandemic there has been an increase in interest on One Health whose main goal is to promote human and animal health by maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Through a GIZ Selva Maya financial support, a project to reduce transmissible diseases in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountain biocultural landscape through public awareness, best practices

and amplification of risk reduction mechanisms was started in 2022. The educational component is aimed at targeting 15 communities in Belize and another 15 in Guatemala on the risks of zoonosis, how to reduce these risks and the importance of caring for the Chiquibul/Maya Mountains as part of Selva Maya.

In Belize, FCD's environmental educator, Justin Pook Jr. has reached out to 1,018 students in 13 communities including Benque Viejo, San Ignacio and Santa Elena Towns while in Guatemala, Ninian Menendez has met with 84 students and Guatemalan Armed Forces elements in Poptun. During these visits, posters, booklets, pencils and t-shirts have been distributed. The importance of protecting the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains from forest fires, deforestation and land degradation is presented through a power-point and lively interactions with the various audiences. The goal is to reach out to 10,000 residents in both Belize and Guatemala through direct visits and use of social media.

New Park Rangers hired



To become a Park Ranger, recruits are tested in the Chiquibul, through the Canon of Heroes for Endurance and Survival Test. This training sets the tone for what will be

the intensity of protecting the Chiquibul biodiversity at the frontline. Those who pass the training are then contracted for 3 months during which time they have an opportunity to test their abilities and are evaluated for a longer stay in the organization.

During the month of March five recruits were tested and passed the first stage of the Program. Four were consequently hired as Park Rangers, while the fifth one became an Eco-Guard. These new Rangers are now being accompanied by a more seasoned Ranger and deployed to the various conservation posts where they are patrolling together with other regulatory agency personnel. The task of these Park Rangers is to ultimately contain the advancement of the human footprint into the park and prevent the exploitation of the natural and cultural resources from the Chiquibul.

Vision:

FCD envisions healthy terrestrial ecosystems that are sustainably managed for Belize and the region.

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Binational IWT Action Plan Developed

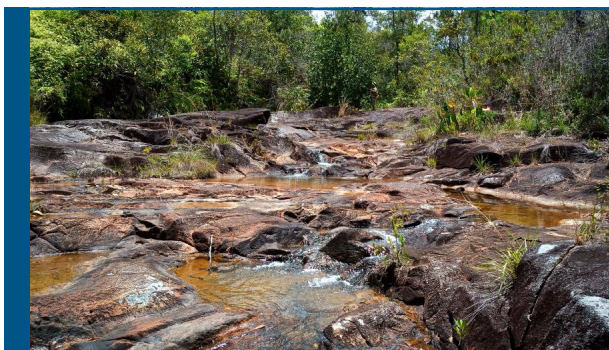
Trafficking of parrots particularly macaws across borders has been an annual challenge, which has led FCD to reach out to Guatemalan counterparts for assistance. In 2017 through a DEFRA-UK Project, the Wildlife Conservation Society office based in Guatemala established a binational taskforce to tackle illegal wildlife trafficking. The taskforce had several success stories; however, by the of the project, the communication was not maintained, and coordination lessened.

With the persistent threat of wildlife trade and understanding the good will and importance of cross border cooperation, FCD has once more established the taskforce. In a relatively short period two meetings have been held that has helped to define the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains as the target area of work; identified illegal routes used by poachers; highlighted the status of macaws in Belize and developed an action plan to tackle this threat. The action plan stresses the need for public outreach particularly among Guatemalan rural communities, robust patrols in critical breeding areas and bolster data gathering



efforts. Participating members from Belize includes the Belize Forest Department, Wildlife Conservation Society and FCD. In Guatemala, the players are el Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas, Wildlife Conservation Society, Asociacion Balam and Foro de Justicia Ambiental.

Upper Macal Research Concluded



The eastern section of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, generally referred to as the Bald Hills area, serves as a buffer zone for the eastern section of the Chiquibul National Park. The area occupies a ridge that defines the upper boundary of the headwaters for four main river systems. To understand the status of these rivers, the Upper Macal Working Group recommended the establishment of a baseline study, and with the financial support of the GEF

Small Grants Programme, a macro-invertebrate community structure sampling was ensued.

A total of 12 sampling sites were surveyed. At each sampling site a sequence of riffle-pool-riffle of at least 40 times greater than the width of the stream were surveyed. A total of 1,168 individual macroinvertebrates, representing 57 families, were collected from the sampled sites in the headwaters of the Macal River. Results indicate that the headwaters of the Macal River in the Bald Hills area are relatively healthy supporting a diverse macroinvertebrate community. The recommendation is now to expand the study site to include other disturbed areas due to increase accessibility and anthropogenic disturbances so that results can be compared with less disturbed streams of the Bald Hills area. Furthermore, continued assessment in the macro-invertebrate community composition is recommended to assess if changes in the benthic macroinvertebrate community structure are as a result of natural fluctuations or as a consequence of anthropogenic activities in the area of study.

Cultural Heritage Outreach

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability



FCD's mission is to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Chiquibul ecosystem. To do this, the field staff, primarily Park Rangers are at the frontline in protecting the natural resources, while the karst team leads

the monitoring and protection of the Chiquibul Caverns and the cultural features found within and surrounding areas. With the services of a Cultural Heritage (CH) Coordinator, FCD has now started to reach out to High Schools aimed at enhancing an understanding of the cultural richness of the Chiquibul forest among the students.

During the month of January and February, the CH Coordinator visited 190 students from Mopan and Alvin High Schools depicting imagery of the Chiquibul Cave System, its features and cultural remains found.

The CH Coordinator have also taken time to address FCD Units on the importance of cultural heritage and the role they play as they conduct their patrols and monitoring efforts across the Chiquibul landscape.

Combined Link-Ups Promoted

For many years, the Belize Defence Force and Guatemalan Armed Forces personnel have conducted linkups on a monthly basis along the western border. These linkups have helped build confidence among the troops and highlight the level of cooperation ongoing among the forces for communities along the western border to see.

FCD has initiated a different type of linkup which has been described as Combined Linkups, which is comprised of natural resource managers from both Belize and Guatemala, as well as inclusion of Guatemalan community leaders who together engage in dialogue on specific environmental protection matters such as cattle ranching. During the month of March, the third linkup was planned and organized. This time, the point of dialogue was nearby the Guatemalan community of San Jose Las Flores, where in 2020 the large forest fires occurred. The meeting was, therefore, strategic taking advantage of informing community leaders of the need to prevent forest fires and about the struggles faced addressing cattle ranching.



The reunion, which took place under a shade tree, was cordial and friendly. Community leaders stressed on their lack of land and environmental degradation faced in their community. The institutions represented included the Belize Forest Department, National Biodiversity Office, FCD, Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas and Asociacion Balam of Guatemala. The Belize Defence Force provided security support.

The Changing Landscape



If you ever find yourself traveling to the Caracol Archaeological Monument or Las Cuevas Research Station,

you will see major road construction, and as a result a changing landscape. The road construction is to reach as far as the Caracol Mayan temples, with the construction of a new Guacamallo Bridge and an expanded paved road. Part of the road will pass on the northernmost tip of the Chiquibul National Park.

FCD has sent correspondence to the Department of the Environment asking for a session with all major stakeholders including the Ministry of Works, CISCO Construction and the Forest Department with the aim of reviewing the Environmental Compliance Plan and what is expected from the construction company thereby preventing any unnecessary environmental damage and impact. That session is yet pending.

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