

FCD Tracks

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32 Years of Core Conservation

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Fire Season 2022



The forest fires of this season were not as dramatic in the Chiquibul or Vaca compared to those of 2020; however, in the Baldy Beacon area, of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, where FCD Rangers are now based, the impacts of forest fires were high.

The strategic plan for FCD was originally established for the period 2016-2020. The planning process strengthened FCD's identity, built team spirit, and energized the organization. This resulted in the formulation of the organization's core attributes and an articulated plan, intended to lay out the medium-term strategic direction for FCD and provided the foundations for the future stage of fundraising efforts and the preparation of work plans and grant proposals. A review conducted by the FCD Board last year, showed that there was a need to further analyze the results and decide whether a full strategic plan was necessary to be developed or whether to concentrate efforts on areas yet unfinished.

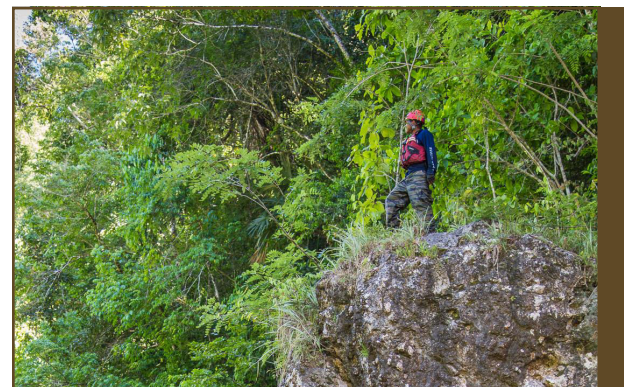
An assessment, facilitated by Zoe Walker of Wildtracks in March has resulted in the recommendation of not developing a new plan but instead to meet the outstanding activities over the next phase of the plan.

This other phase will see an improvement in the FCD human resources management program, including a thorough

During the month of May small fires were suppressed in the Vaca Forest Reserve with the help of local farmers. In the Chiquibul, fires were monitored and suppressed with the forest humidity preventing them from becoming large forest fires. While these efforts and that of sensitizing locals through site visits by FCD's educator proved successful, in the Baldy Beacon the fires flared off and eventually caused the destruction of over 11,000 acres of the sensitive ecosystem, and imperiled human property.

This time it was recognized that it was not a natural caused fire but in fact it was the military practicing in those elevated areas that caused the fire and the resulting destruction. With this in mind, the Forest Department, FCD and other stakeholders such as BullRun Farms have recognized the importance of developing more stringent protocols and monitoring of military activities more closely. In addition, it will be necessary to have fire fighting tools more readily available and have local stakeholders trained.

Strategic Plan Revisited



review of the compensation / rewards framework for staff Also identified was the need for a structured Professional Development Strategy linked to a succession plan for leadership roles within the organization, from the Head Rangers to the Executive Director, and providing planned skills training towards advancement for specific posts.

NICH Partnership Stronger



In 2008, FCD and the Institute of Archaeology signed a co-management agreement for on ground management and administration of the Chiquibul Caverns. These caves are

impressive due to their sheer size and length. With over 65 km of passageways documented it is known as the longest cave system in Central America.

During the month of May, a meeting was conducted with the interim President of NICH, Mrs. Marilyn Young to appraise her of the effort that has been undertaken by FCD's Karst Management Unit. FCD's Executive Director reported on the inventory underway and the discoveries made. He stressed the uniqueness and singularity of the cave and reasons why it would be critical to advance discussions and efforts towards a World Heritage status. By the end of the meeting, it was agreed of the need to review the co-management agreement and expand collaborations between FCD, Institute of Archaeology and the National Institute for Culture and History.

Best Practices Promoted in Vaca

With water being a precious commodity in the Vaca Forest Reserve, FCD's Extension Technician has been promoting a water efficient irrigation system as an alternative agro-ecological best practice for farmers in irrigating their crops. To do this, five farmers were identified as beneficiaries. These farmers were selected since they directly depend on Cacao Creek to extract water for vegetable production. So far three farmers have been engaged and assisted. The technician acquired water tanks, drip tape, poly pipe, valve and pipe fittings and together with the beneficiary farmers installed the irrigation system which is currently used to irrigate their cabbage and tomato crops.

The Technician has conducted an evaluation of the effectiveness of these water systems. One farmer noted that using the irrigation system has reduced the extraction and use of water by 40% from Cacao Creek. Previously this farmer extracted 2,500 gallons of water from the Creek. Presently with the use of the irrigation systems, these farmers are seeing a reduction of one thousand gallons of water used for



vegetable production. Farmers also mentioned that they have seen a significant reduction in the time spent irrigating their crops and it is obvious that using the irrigation systems has greatly minimized soil erosion and water contamination.

Farmers, beneficiaries on this program have signed a Community Conservation Agreement with FCD where they commit themselves to support conservation initiatives in the reserve and to be better stewards of the resources.

Youth Groups Come Together



The spikes in Covid-19 had prevented the opportunity for multiple engagements with counterparts from Belize and Guatemala to meet face to face. But once the restrictions were lifted FCD have had several meetings and planning sessions with Guatemalans.

During the month of May, FCD organized and facilitated a planning session with the participation of Executive

members of the FCD Environmental Youth Group (FCDEYG) and Todos Por Un Mundo Verde (TPUMV) from Guatemala. This first planning session took place at Log Cabins with the aim of reviewing and formalizing a two-year agreement and jump-starting river conservation activities. The session allowed members of both groups to brainstorm, plan and identify public participation interventions at a local and binational community level.

At the local level the following activities were identified: Children Summer Camps, River Clean-Up campaigns in 5 communities; Eco-fair during World Environment Day, Poem Competition, Recycling bag projects, bicycle Competition, Bio-guards, Outreach Campaign in primary and secondary schools, Adopt a Tree project for children and Art Recycle Competition. At the Binational level the following activities were identified: Radio Talk Show with members of both groups, Facebook Live Talk Shows, Recycling Summer Camp in Arenal, Binational Cleanup and Environmental Mentorship Program for Youths.

Water Quality Assessment in Ceibo Chico



Gold mining and gold panning are two major threats to the stability of the Belize River headwater located

in southern Chiquibul National Park. A first assessment conducted by FCD in the Ceibo Chico Sub-Watershed earlier this year showed that up to 74 acres is being impacted at a high level, while 118 acres is being impacted at medium level. The buffer analysis also indicates that the overall acreage being negatively impacted by illegal gold panning activities is 169.10 acres in southern Chiquibul.

As a follow up to this assessment, an expedition aimed at taking further water quality testing was executed in the area of the Rio-Ceibo sub-watershed during the month of May. Although the water quality data collection was a success, it was sadly noted that the Ceibo Chico Creek is massively degraded to a point where about 2.5 Kms of the creek's drainage has been shifted. It is evident that the area is highly impacted and specific, targeted patrols will be necessary.

Vision:

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

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Upper Macal Working Group

The headwater of the Macal River is located largely in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve (MPRFR). With the presence of FCD Forest Rangers now in this reserve with the role of monitoring headwaters, it has become more practical the strengthening of a support group that can advocate for a clean and abundant freshwater resource. This action began last year with the support from the GEF-Small Grants Programme.

The fifth meeting of the Upper Macal River Conservation Group was held this June at the Cooma Cairn Ranger Outpost with the participation of 16 stakeholders including Blancaneaux Lodge, BCSL, Bull Run Overseas Ltd, Forest Department, Love FM, Itzamna Society, San Antonio Waterboard, Pacific Heights and FCD. Mrs. Cynthia Perera from the U.S Department of the Interior-ITAP as well attended. At this meeting a project plan for instituting a freshwater macro-invertebrate and water quality program was presented. The aim is to establish a baseline and continuously monitor the state of the water resources at



the headwaters with the intent of expanding it eventually. Both the Forest Department and the Department of the Environment who have been consulted agree that this study is important. Water monitoring is a highly recommended activity to be met in the MPRFR Management Plan.

Promoters Training Conducted



From the 20th to 24th of June, FCD's Environmental Educator, Justin Pook undertook an Indigenous Promoters Seminar at Chaab'il Be Lodge, Jacintoville, in Southern Belize. The aim of the seminar was to impart lessons and expose 4 young indigenous promoters to land and forest best practices. The teaching methods used were based on an instructor-led,

hands-on learning, project base learning and cooperative learning. This training on landscape and forest protection was conducted with the support and coordination of the Maya Leaders Alliance / Julian Cho Society Indigenous Educator, Mr. Elodio Rash.

By the end of the seminar the 4 promoters, namely, Ernesto Pau, Eduardo Teck, Josella Mes and Jenna Pop who live in three communities adjacent to the Columbia River Forest Reserve (CRFR). became more confident in reaching out to their communities promoting best practices. Inga alley cropping as an alternative practice will be promoted among the 3 communities under the slogan, "Healthy Forest, Healthy People". The seminar culminated with the presentation of certificates of completion to the Indigenous Promoters. This training was made possible with the financial support of the US Department of Interior-ITAP, while the Promoters programme and Inga demonstration plots are financed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

U.S Cave Experts Train Staff



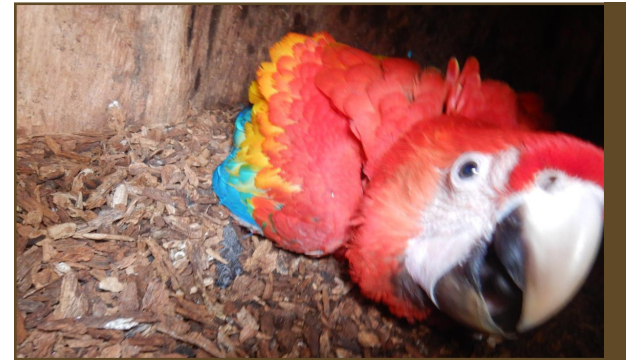
FCD's Karst Team have not only been busy conducting inventory of cultural remains, but also have been actively learning mapping techniques and karst management systems. The most recent training was held in June with the

assistance of three experts coordinated through the Office of USDOJ-ITAP based in Washington D.C. Jim Goodbar, Gretchen Baker and Kyle Rybacki.

Specifically, the training objective was to provide the Karst Management Unit with technical support in areas of cave mapping and inventory, and to provide technical guidance in cave management and cave tourism using Actun Kabal as the target of study.

Based on the training exercise the experts have recommended the need for further training for staff in areas of tourism management and an increase in knowledge of cave management. Survey and inventory, water quality monitoring, photo monitoring and Camera trap monitoring were identified as areas to improve the management portfolio.

Scarlet Macaws Lost



Annually, during the breeding season, scarlet macaws are at risk of being stolen. Such has been the case for this year. In preparation to this threat, FCD activates an anti-poaching Unit for a short period of time when poachers tend to become more active. This year, however, despite activating the Unit, our efforts were futile given that the Park Rangers were not able to intercept poachers and from evidence observed, it is estimated that at least a dozen parrots were illegally trafficked into Guatemala. These chicks would have been about 6 weeks old robbed from their nests.

Illegal wildlife trafficking of parrots has been documented for many years in the Chiquibul. Over the last three years, the Unit has successfully apprehended poachers but not this time. These poachers are becoming more agile and FCD will need to adopt new strategies. Last year a binational taskforce was activated for addressing illegal wildlife trafficking with the intent of generating support from Guatemalan authorities once the parrots or other wildlife have been trafficked. Surely,

at this point, the counterparts in Guatemala are our only option for tracking the parrots lost. The odds of successfully finding the parrots are slim but any information recovered on how these parrots are trafficked will be important for future planning.

Las Cuevas Back On Track



Located in the heart of the Chiquibul Forest, Las Cuevas Research Station caters for researchers and nature lovers alike. Now that Covid restrictions have been lifted, this time of the year has seen a buzzing human activity at the station. From the Sylvia researchers whose study is aimed at assessing the

accuracy of airborne LiDAR at estimating the total carbon in a forested area to the study of tardigrades by Lamar University; and from Dr. Scott Solomon's students from Rice University who came to undertake their short ecology course to Dr. Hanna Laako from the University of Eastern Finland researching on the Maya Forest and Ms. Jane Champion from Crocodile Research Coalition studying crocodiles and monkeys, the diverse set of research interests has shown the pool of possibilities at this remote research station.

For the nature lover, the rooms and other services provided at Las Cuevas have also catered for birders and other tourists. Seeing over 50 scarlet macaws in flight or perched on a quamwood at Las Cuevas Road or observing a silently walking tapir across the road is a must see on a naturalist's checklist.

How can you book your stay? Simply contact the FCD Office at 0501-823-2657 or write fcd@btl.net

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