

FCD *Tracks*

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32 Years of Core Conservation

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Cooma Cairn Outpost Expanded



The Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve was declared a protected area in 1944 for the purpose of managing and protecting Belize's tropical evergreen seasonal needle-leaved lowland hill pine forests for timber extraction, soil, watershed and wildlife conservation. The reserve is managed by the Forest Department; however, in 2021 FCD entered into an agreement with the Department to assist them in monitoring for bark beetle, forest fires and water quality on

the north-eastern region of the reserve, namely known as the Baldy Beacon.

In July, with the financial support from Bull Run Overseas Limited the operation of Rangers located in the Baldy Beacon at the Cooma Cairn Ranger Outpost was improved with the inauguration of an upgraded building. The building, which was originally abandoned by the British Army, and transferred to the Forest Department would now accommodate the two rangers posted for up to 14 days at a time.

The inauguration event had the participation of the Forest Department, Bull Run Overseas Limited, British Army Training Support Unit Belize (BATSUB) and other invited guests. The Deputy Chief Forest Officer, John Pinelo explained the work of FCD in the area, while Jim Bevis, Manager of Bull Run in Belize described the partnership undergoing with FCD, as well as the importance of monitoring, primarily as there is an increase in number of people who are visiting the remote areas of the reserve.

Journalist Training with MIC

Earlier this year FCD partnered with the NGO, Global Financial Integrity on a three-year project titled, "Increasing Domestic Resource Mobilization by Promoting Corporate, Natural Resource and Professional Integrity," funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. A component of the project has included a journalist training led by the Media Institute of the Caribbean which was held during the months of August and September. In this 6-part virtual series, journalists, members of civil society organization and other key stakeholders, had the opportunity to hear from experts and professionals from various economic sectors in Belize.

FCD's Executive Director made three presentations highlighting the exploitation of natural resources and the role that FCD undertakes as a co-manager in addressing cattle ranching and gold panning in the Chiquibul National Park. To explain the complexities of these subjects, FCD also facilitated an overflight and a ground patrol which included Channel 5 journalist, Hipolito Novelo.



The presentations made on cattle ranching and gold panning arose much attention from journalists, who recommended that FCD should maintain the media houses informed and that press releases should be shared to all media houses in a timely manner.

New Rangers Join



Rangers are at the frontline in protecting the biodiversity of the Chiquibul National Park. Ideally, 24 Rangers is a desirable number for monitoring and conducting law enforcement but hiring the right individuals with the necessary commitment to endure the rigors of the work has been a challenging task. During the month of August, three new Rangers joined the Park Ranger Unit. These Rangers

come as far as the Toledo District, while others are from the Cayo District.

After conducting the physical test, interviews, vetting and field assessment, these three new Rangers have qualified and been contracted on a three-month probationary period. During this time, they are to get familiarized with the work, be further tested on their physicals and observe their character traits. Rangers operate for 14 days in the jungle with minimal means of communication. Financing for the Ranger services is made possible from a grant obtained from the Protected Areas Conservation Trust.

Conservation Posts, strategically located on the western flank of the Chiquibul National Park are the key hotspot areas where the Ranger effort is concentrated. Working closely with elements of the Belize Defence Force their daily task is to patrol and document for any illicit activity. The main threats to the Chiquibul ecosystem include cattle ranching, illegal wildlife trade and gold panning.

USFWS Country Visit

Ginger Deason, PhD Program Officer for Central America, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) visited the Chiquibul during the month of September with the intent of having a first-hand look at the results of the financing provided by the USFWS.

For more than 5 years, the USFWS has been supporting FCD in areas of macaw conservation, sustainable livelihoods, education and wildlife monitoring. The recent project, that is on its final stage has focused in "Conserving key Species and Habitats of the Chiquibul-Maya Mountain Landscape in Belize." As a result of the financial support, FCD has been able to systematically document cattle ranching activity along a 90 km extension of the Maya Mountain Massif through aerial reconnaissance and ground patrols; protect scarlet macaws nesting areas through biological monitoring and mobilization of an Anti-Poaching Unit to reduce poaching and trade of scarlet macaws; and supported a public outreach campaign that fosters indigenous forest



stewardship in the eastern Maya Mountains through the Maya Leader's Alliance.

During the two-day visit, Ginger visited the Chalillo Lake which is known as the primary nesting area for macaws and met rangers at Tapir Camp where they explained their challenges and their motivations for working in the Chiquibul jungles.

FCD Presents to Ambassadors



Photo by Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Due to the transboundary threats faced on a daily basis along the western flank of the Chiquibul National Park, it is incumbent on FCD to maintain close communication with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This Ministry has been supportive of FCD's activities with Guatemalan counterparts who share the same goals for biodiversity protection. With the signing of an MoU between both governments of Belize and Guatemala for the protection of natural resources and the environment in 2014, the transboundary work of FCD has become more established.

This year, during the Independence celebrations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration invited FCD to provide an overview of the challenges, threats and conditions prevalent in the Chiquibul for resident and non-resident Ambassadors. Conducted by FCD's Executive Director, the one-hour presentation described the trends of forest fragmentation occurring along Belize's adjacency line with Guatemala. An evolving trend from agricultural farming to cattle ranching and drug cultivation, demonstrates that the actors involved on the landscape is rapidly changing from poor peasants to more organized and affluent groups. The threats appear to be more contained and restricted to particular zones, therefore, the human footprint of degradation is more limited. This has consequently provided an environment and 'feeling' of security. It was explained that with a more attractive area to visit and explore, new challenges will come to occur – this time not from Guatemala, but from Belize.

The event held at the capital city, which included more than 45 delegates was facilitated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration, Hon Eamon Courtenay.

Karst Unit Gets Trained



The work of the Karst Management Unit takes the three-person team to explore and document cultural features in areas that can be distant and risky. To reduce the risks, the Unit undergo frequent training. During the month of September, the Unit underwent a three-day training session

on First Aid and Rappelling. The training was offered by the Belize Institute of Search and Rescue Training, who provided the team with Technical Theory, Technical Practical, Medical Theory, and Medical Practical.

Day one consisted of technical training on ropes and knots. Ties for chest harness, leg harness and webbing ties were also taught. The second session of the day consisted of fix anchor points using different methods and equipment. Day two consisted of creating fix anchor points and hauling system, which is used in cases of emergency and rescue for raising and bringing down an individual. The use of a three-rope system with pulleys were used to rappel the Las Cuevas Cave which provides added safety when rappelling. The last day focused on First Aid responder. A power point presentation on snake bites, bleeding control, CPR and dressing wounds was presented and later a practical session was conducted. The importance of immediate and adequate care was highlighted.

The three-day training was made possible through the financial support from Forecastle Foundation.

Vision:

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

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CFLI Support Guatemalans

More recently with a spike of temperatures and long dry months, the incidences of forest fires are more acute. On the western flank of the Chiquibul, we have seen this more dramatic as Guatemalan communities ignite the forest to do their agricultural farming and ranching activities. These fires may either start from within their communities in Guatemala or may occur inside Belizean territory, within the Chiquibul National Park, where cattle ranching has become more pervasive.

In 2020, the fires started by Guatemalans destroyed more than 8,200 acres in both the Chiquibul National Park and Caracol Archaeological Reserve. This was a huge loss, since the recovery of the forest was already progressively taking place in those regions. With this loss, FCD rapidly sought to get support from Guatemalan authorities.

A year later, FCD instituted a binational taskforce and devised a binational action plan to reduce and combat forest fires. The plan was clear that community training and equipment to combat fires were essential. Through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), these two essentials are being addressed and it is expected that prior



to the fire season 2024, three Guatemalan communities will be in a better position to reduce the risks of fires occurring inside Belize's Chiquibul forests.

The CFLI has additionally, provided an opportunity to open dialogue with key Guatemalan communities who will be recipients of the assistance. In that regard, two community meetings have been undertaken with leaders and members of La Rejoya and San Jose Las Flores. These meetings have been cordial and those present have expressed a high degree of cooperation.

Restoring The Vaca Forest



With a permit to reside and camp in the Vaca Forest Reserve, FCD's Extension Technician and Rangers based in the reserve have been busy developing the demonstration plots and restoring the area that was destroyed by forest fires earlier this year.

Since its early engagement in the Vaca Forest Reserve, FCD's vision has been to develop a model where community stewardship becomes a focal point in the protection of the reserve. The demonstration plots are to serve as part of that model where farmers in the area can learn best practices in the use of the forest, land and water resources. No doubt it is a challenging endeavor; however, there is much optimism with the practices being employed by a few farmers who have undergone training and exposure.

After the fire season the area was entirely scorched but the FCD staff along with local farmers in the area have spent many weeks to recover the area through the planting of 1,500 madre cacao, 1,400 spineless yuca, jack beans, canavalia and cleaning the stream that is the main source of water. The transition from a completely denuded land to one with life is admirable.

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

Belize River Leaders Visited



The UNDP GEF6 project, titled “Integrated management of production landscapes to deliver multiple global environmental benefits”, is moving steam ahead through the efforts of Justin Pook, FCD’s Environmental Educator. As planned, the first phase of the community outreach has been to meet community leaders from the 13 communities that are located along the banks of the Belize River.

Having met with leaders from Valley of Peace, Esperanza, More Tomorrow, Bermudian Landing, St Paul’s Bank, Willows Bank, Double Head Cabbage, Burrell Boom, Isabella Bank, Teakettle, Unitedville and Roaring Creek there is much anticipation from these communities. Apart from the community outreach aspect of the project, other agencies of Government will be looking at improving legislation that protects the water resources, providing community grants for alternative sustainable livelihood practices, building a citizen science for public participation and promoting restoration practices.

FCD’s educator has also met with personnel from the National Biodiversity Office who will also conduct outreach and education on legislation and offences related to the water resources. The objective is to jointly develop a workplan in order to prevent duplication of efforts and instead complement each other during the community visits which will start in January.

Communication Strategy Finalized

Without a doubt, effective communication is a subject that all organizations contend with. At FCD, with more staff and more programs expanding, the communication channels are getting obscure. Added to that, as FCD expands its approach of management at a landscape level, the stakeholders rapidly multiply. How best to communicate and involve stakeholders is a complex matter. This has poised FCD to explore and develop a Landscape Communications Strategy.

Through planning sessions with staff and key stakeholders, the strategy has been devised. The strategy identifies primary and secondary stakeholders, methods to reach out and keep the various tiers involved and a clearer narrative of FCD’s work has been identified.

Internal communication was also found out to have various limitations and the strategy recommends a proactive effort from the Landscape Communications Technician to incorporate more dialogue and understanding between the programs.



FCD envisions in this phase of its communication agenda working towards two main communication outcomes:

- The impact of FCD on achieving the successful transition to the landscape approach is illustrated and partners understand that FCD is efficient and optimizes the value of their efforts and investments.
- FCD is widely recognized, cited and referenced due to its consistent dissemination of evidence-based information practices, activities and results to relevant audiences.

Staff Retreat



For more than 4 years, FCD had been unable to conduct its staff retreat. And given that new staff had joined the team, it became imperative to bring in the staff together. This time, a committee was created to plan the two-day event.

With the kind support from Godfrey Smith and Mick Fleming families, and the kind reception provided by Harvest Caye, Pelican Beach Resort, Belize Audubon Society and Mayflower

Bocawina Management, the retreat was a very successful event which brought staff in an environment of camaraderie, heightened friendships and triggered a true sense of belonging to an organization

At Harvest Caye, thanks to Tony Garel and his team the staff had an exceptional experience at the Caye, from hang gliding to canoeing. At Cockscomb Basin the staff enjoyed a late dinner under the cool moonlight and early morning walked on the legendary trails of Alan Rabinowitz. At Pelican Beach, the lunch was exquisite, and staff had the opportunity to play in the sand. Finally, at Bocawina staff enjoyed the pool and met with Rangers.

The most important element of the retreat was the relaxing atmosphere of friendship and camaraderie that radiated. A feeling that remains.

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