



Promoting Core Conservation

## A Call for Help



Belize is blessed with water resources that appear to be abundant. This resource has primarily been safe for human use, despite the multiple debris, sediments and particles that are thrown into it. The human impacts on the rivers and streams can be seen obviously where human settlements occur. FCD is concerned of the stability of the water resources and as a result has put much interest in building the capacities of the bi-national watershed alliance. However, one dramatic and

atrocious activity occurring on the main headwaters of the Greater Belize Watershed, namely on the highest peaks of the Chiquibul is the illegal gold panning conducted by Guatemalans.

FCD over the years have put into action several interventions including aggressive patrols, construction of a conservation post, and sharing information with Guatemalan counterparts. But none has been able to contain the wave of Guatemalans doing gold panning.

Pictures cannot clearly depict the impacts. To understand the magnitude of the problem, one has to be on the ground to see it. The incessant activities are having a major impact on the integrity of the Chiquibul headwaters. At this point gold panners operate at night, in remote and rugged areas making it difficult to reach ground zero.

FCD is desperate to explore new ways of controlling this problem. If you have any key recommendation or bright idea to share please write us at [fcd@btlnet](mailto:fcd@btlnet)

## Field Work Starts in Vaca

The Vaca Forest Reserve consisting of some 40,303 acres in the Cayo District is the northernmost protected area located in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountain Massif. With financial support from the GEF Small Grants Programme and the Government's Chiquibul Forest Investment Initiative (CFII), FCD hired a Landscape Manager and two field assistants specifically to work in this reserve. The aim is to document, monitor and galvanize interest from the local people to safeguard the resources of the reserve under landscape and sustainable practices.

However, to do this, the first task of the three-person staff for the Vaca F.R has been to compile a database of who is presently farming and occupying the reserve and the surrounding areas. By the end of February, a total of 73 farmers were documented. 28 farms were found to be occurring within the reserve while a total of 43 farm parcels are documented outside of the reserve.



This information will ultimately help the Forest Department to define protocols and guidelines as to who can be granted official sanction to remain in the area and under what conditions they can remain in the reserve. FCD has also created the Vaca Forest Reserve Working Group comprised of key institutions including the Forest Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperatives and BECOL who can help guide management.

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# Monitoring Farming Activities



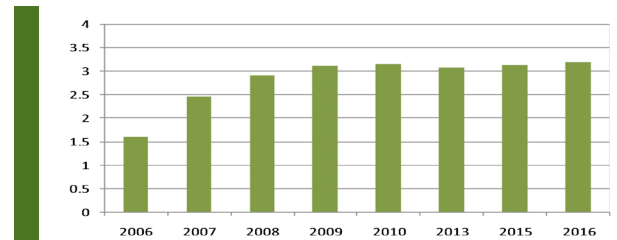
to April 2016, an accumulative area of 4,111.36 ha. had been deforested. This represented 338 hectares more than in 2015. Our report to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), who financed our first-year intervention, recommended the need to conduct aerial reconnaissance early in the year which could serve as a deterrent. With this in mind, FCD undertook 3 flights starting in December with the purpose of documenting any illegal farming activity inside the borders of the protected areas.

As the dry weather arrives, so does the danger of forest fires in the Chiquibul National Park, Caracol Archaeological Reserve and the Vaca Forest Reserve augment. These three protected areas total over 55 kilometers along the western border, where the expansion of the Guatemalan human footprint is ever present. Last year, we closed the dry weather with a sober reality - based on satellite imagery analysis and interpretation, up

From the visuals made it appeared that Guatemalan farmers were active in the northern part of Caracol known as the Caballo region and then south in the area of Cebada. These two areas have been proposed by FCD for the installation of conservation posts in order to have a full-time presence. With support from the Government of Belize, it is expected that a road will be opened to access these two points and put a presence of security agents as well as forest officers and park rangers in those locations.

## How Well is Chiquibul Managed?

Management Effectiveness assessment is an annual activity conducted by FCD in order to gauge how well we are undertaking co-management responsibilities of the Chiquibul National Park. Scores (maximum of 4.0) are given on a set of indicators including Resource Information, Management Planning, Human Resources, Participation, Governance and Financial Management. During the month of November 2016, the results were produced by Wildtracks. The report notes that, "A comparison between the baseline assessment in 2006, the assessments from 2007 - 2015, and the current 2016 assessment shows a steady increase in the overall management effectiveness score, indicating the continuing success of this co-management partnership. Friends for Conservation and Development took on the role of provisional co-management in 2007, with the 2007 management effectiveness results reflecting their youth as a co-management organization.



Results demonstrate that over the 2007 - 2016 period, FCD has grown from strength to strength, indicating the continuing success of this co-management partnership."

Average assessment scores have shown an increasing trend in the management effectiveness rating from 2006 to 2016, from 1.61 (40.3%) to 3.19 (79.8%), demonstrating that Chiquibul National Park has benefitted significantly from the Forest Department/FCD co-management partnership.

## FCD Rangers are Certified



Chief Ranger and Instructor Wendy Garcia, Park Manager Deric Chan and Board Member, Dr. Isabelle Durand Pacquet imparted several modules including Navigation, Patrolling, Protected Areas, Wildlife Conservation and Basic First Aid. A preliminary assessment was done at the beginning of the training to evaluate at what level each Park Ranger was ranking. By the end of the modules a final test was done, where all park rangers passed with the exception of one. First overall score went to Park Ranger Mr. Robin Magana with an overall average of 88.6%; followed by Mr. Kenny Pech with an overall grade of 86%, and the most improved Park Ranger score went to Mr. Ryan Thompson.

Ranger training is an important management component that enables FCD's field staff to be better prepared on how to handle the strenuous conditions of the terrain and the tasks given to them. During the first week of December,

Certificates were handed over to the Park Rangers who passed the course and their scores helped define their increment percentage increase as well as any promotions. This training program was made possible with the financial support from the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service.

## AGM 2016 Brings New Board

### Board of Directors

#### President:

Mr. Jose Awe

#### Vice President:

Dr. Isabelle Durand

#### Secretary:

Mr. Joop Hendrixx

#### Treasurer:

Mr. Jorge de Leon

#### Director:

Mr. Lenney Gentle

#### Director:

Dr. Filiberto Penados

#### Director:

Major Oscar Mira  
(Ret'd)



FCD's 16th AGM took place this time on the 26th of November at the San Ignacio Resort Hotel. Our Guest Speaker was the Tourism Director, Mr. Abil Castaneda who presented on the opportunities and challenges that tourism may bring to the area of Chiquibul. His presentation was timely, given that FCD has recently developed its Tourism Enterprise Development Plan (TEDP) and is slowly advancing on this program. The 2016 Annual Report was presented by FCD's Executive Director together with Program Managers:

Derric Chan, Justin Pook Jr and Gliss Penados, while the Financial Report was presented by Miss Luceli Itza.

On his address to the members, FCD's outgoing President, Dr. Filiberto Penados posed two questions and challenges for FCD to pursue in 2017: "What mechanisms can we put in place to increase the participation of the membership? FCD is a membership organization, and we cannot take that lightly. If we mean that, then we must create mechanisms for member's involvement. The second question has to do with youth. How are we to involve young people? Last year, I spoke about FCD's youth history. Sustainability is not only about finance it is about the extent to which a dream, a philosophy, a mission lives in the minds and hearts of people. One of FCD's sustainability pillars has to be the involvement of young people."

During the AGM, two new members were elected to the FCD Board of Directors, namely Mr. Joop Hendrixx and Mr. Lenney Gentle. The other Board members remaining were Dr. Filiberto Penados, Dr. Isabelle Durand, Mr. Joe Awe, Mr. Jorge de Leon and Retired Major Oscar Mira.

## QCC Launched in London

During the week of the 14th of November, a trip was made to London by FCD's Executive Director at the invitation of the High Commissioner from Belize to the United Kingdom, Ms. Perla Perdomo and Executive Director of Selvana Ltd., Mr. Chris Minty. Two important events took place at this time. The first one marked the signing of a partnership agreement with Maya 2020 which is led by Mr. Minty. The agreement seeks to identify resources and services in the United Kingdom solely to:

1. Strengthen FCD's capability and capacity for Sustainable Forest Management and Conservation
2. Enhance FCD's inventory of equipment
3. Ensure the sustainability and continuation of the Maya 2020 project

The second event hosted by the Queen of England and the Prince of Wales at Buckingham Palace marked the



official launching of the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC). The QCC is a project designed to create a network of forest conservation initiatives throughout the fifty-two commonwealth nations. In the case of Belize, the Chiquibul Forest was accepted as Belize's project site. FCD expects that Maya 2020 will be the conduit for accessing the necessary funds in order to maintain the Chiquibul Forest in posterity.

## Volunteer CCS Mapping Team Created



The Chiquibul Cave System is known to comprise of some 55 kilometers of passageways. But this mapping exercise

was done in the late 1980's. With today's technology it is expected that more passageways may well be discovered and more detailed measurements can be taken. Mapping this system will not be easy and as a result the recommendation was made for the creation of a Volunteer Mapping team. This team would work closely with FCD's Karst Management Unit, in organizing expeditions and mapping the huge caverns.

The Karst Chief Ranger convened the first meeting in February, where it became notable the interest of the volunteers to assist the Karst Management Unit. However, the volunteer members will require specific training on mapping; ropes and use of specialized equipment.

## FCD Programs

Protection &amp; Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education &amp; Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research &amp; Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring &amp; Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

## Bi-national Efforts Re-invigorated



Thanks to the financial support from the British Embassy in Belize, bi-national efforts have been re-invigorated between FCD and its partners in Guatemala. Despite all the challenges that surfaced between the two countries in April, on the ground the conservation effort continues unabated.

Two major advancements have been the centre of our coordination and support across borders. The

first one relates to the financing of an agroecological pilot program in the community of El Carrizal, Guatemala. The project titled, *Agroforestry Systems to promote Governance in the Adjacency Zone – Belize-Guatemala*, was presented by Asociacion Balam to FCD. The financial support provided to the community seeks to improve the community livelihoods thereby reducing the rate of incursions into Belize by poor farmers from Guatemala. The second initiative is the expansion of environmental education among communities located on the Adjacency Zone. Ten communities have been identified and an educator has been hired to reach out to the targeted communities in Southern Peten. The educator, based in Poptun, Peten will work with children and adults to promote an understanding of the importance of maintaining forest cover and create forest gardens in the local schools as a way to instill and cultivate an environmental ethics among the young people.

## Environmental Educator Breaks Record

FCD has always maintained an environmental educator with the aim of promoting the importance of the Chiquibul Forest, its beauty, its wildlife and its features. Last year with the financial support from the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT), a campaign was begun related to the protection of the bi-national watershed.

The task was given to Mr. Justin Pook Jr. to undertake the outreach program among 42 communities, using posters, badges and lots of energy and enthusiasm. By the end of February 2017, Justin had reached out to 40 primary schools and 5 high schools, 3,380 students and 173 teachers in 26 communities and had distributed over 1,443 posters. This effort has certainly broken the record of other FCD educators and our best desire is to sustain the public outreach vibrantly.

Most impressive has been the support he has generated among the communities that are found along the Mopan and Macal River banks. Ten of the



communities visited also form part of the Bi-National Watershed Alliance and have constantly been active on clean-up campaigns and reforestation schemes. Mr. Justin, himself has expressed his amazement at the level of support forthcoming from both children and adults and is energized to continue the campaign as far as Belize City with much zeal and passion.

E-Bulletin Funded by



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