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## FCD Elects New Board members



Every year FCD conducts its Annual General Meeting just prior to the Christmas celebrations. Our financial year ends in October and by November we are onto a new year of conservation effort. The general meeting is a time to provide an end of year technical and financial report to

FCD's members as well as to elect new Board members. Following the Board Manual, Officers of the Board can serve a total of two terms of two years each while Directors can serve for a maximum of three terms although all Board members must stand for re-election every two years. At this AGM, therefore, two new Board members were elected to join the team.

FCD thanks Mr. Jose Awe who served as the President, and Mr. David Gibson who served as Acting President for the latter part of the year. These two members placed FCD at a stronger governance position and solidified a way forward in areas of advocacy and staff compensations. The two new elected Board members are Mrs. Valerie Woods Smith and Mrs. Tanya Santos Neal. These two new members bring much expertise in the fields of forest management, field research, tourism enterprise development, and project delivery. The FCD Board is a strong seven-person team.

## 30 Years of Service Celebrated

In 1989, there were less inhabitants in Belize, more forests, cleaner rivers and much to discover. It was under this condition that the Youth Environmental Action Group (YEAG) was formed in San Jose Succotz. Youth from San Jose Succotz, Benque Viejo, San Ignacio and as far as Belmopan were the active members. Weekends were busy days for the members who were indulged in tree planting, clean up campaigns, community outreach and outdoor exploration.

After ten years, the YEAG changed its name to Friends for Conservation and Development (FCD), and thus began a new chapter for the organization. To commemorate its 30 years of core conservation efforts, on the 30th of November, FCD celebrated the occasion. The event was celebrated at the Log Cabins with special guests, members and friends. The Protected Areas Conservation Trust was presented with a plaque for its many years of support to FCD and a 15-minute video was aired with multiple voices expressing their congratulations to the organization.



The event was followed with a cocktail made possible through the kind sponsorship of BullRidge Company Limited, Log Cabins Lodge, Chaa Creek Lodge, Recinos Wine House, Bowen and Bowen Limited, and Travellers Distillery Company.

## CHEST Test Concludes



**C**HEST which stands for the Canyon of Heroes Endurance and Survival Training is a screening test given to candidates aspiring to become a Park Ranger.

During the first week of February, 7 young candidates attended the test. Led by two FCD Ranger Instructors and 2 assistants, the test extended for four days and nights. During this time, their physical and character traits were tested. By the end of the week, four candidates successfully passed the test and were invited to join the Park Ranger family. Once the four persons join FCD, they will be placed on a probationary period of 3 months before being contracted for a full one year.

The majority of persons who apply for a Park Ranger post, do not have a sound idea of what the job entails. The test, therefore, enables the candidates to taste what life of a Ranger really is. FCD expects to put more boots on the ground to protect wildlife including macaws and jaguars that are being poached and trafficked across borders.

### 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.

**F**or more than ten years FCD has been advocating for cleaner rivers and intact watersheds. The work has not been easy, given that populations have been increasing and various development schemes have further compromised the natural environment. Water over the years has gained much interest, and so has FCD's involvement in water conservation. The formulation of a bi-national effort to protect the Chiquibul, Mopan, Macal and Belize Rivers, obviously would mean inclusion of Guatemalan stakeholders. To do this FCD led the creation of a Bi-National Watershed Alliance in 2013. The work of the Belize and Guatemalan chapters is guided by an annual work plan. These chapters meet frequently either for training or conducting performance assessments.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 2020 the Guatemalan chapter was legally registered as an Association. The registration of ASIPROM (Integrated Association for the Protection,

## ASIPROM Comes to Life



Conservation and Management of the Chiquibul and Mopan Rivers) is a huge leap for this chapter which is represented by leaders from 9 communities of Peten, Guatemala. As an Association, they have a more solid foundation for long term community initiatives. FCD commits to continue maintaining its assistance program to the Bi-National Alliance.

## Panthera Partners with FCD



**P**anthera is the only organization in the world that is devoted exclusively to the conservation of the world's 40 wild cat species and their landscapes. Dr. Alan Rabinowitz, known as the "Indiana Jones of

Wildlife Conservation" published his book **Jaguar** in the 80's, raising consciousness for the protection of jaguars. Although he passed away in 2018, his spirit remains among the avid *Panthera* staff who continue the protection of wild cats globally. In Belize, *Panthera* has been working with the Belize Audubon Society for years, but it was until 2019 that FCD partnered with them on the installation of wildlife camera traps.

The partnership entailed the installation of cameras in the Vaca Forest Reserve and the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. FCD staff were trained by FCD's Biologist with the support of Dr. Bart Harmsen. The project had a duration of 7 months, enabling FCD field staff to learn how to care and maintain the field equipment and to recover vital information. A total of 50 cameras were set up on 25 stations. The data collected were handed to *Panthera*, where analysis is to be made on the richness of wild cat species and prey.

## A New Maya Forest Plan on the Works

### Vision:

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



Five distinct consultation sessions have been held by USAID in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico with the participation of key conservation organizations that operate in the Maya Forest. The consultations were started

since early 2019 while the fifth was held in Guatemala City during the month of January. Representatives from Belize included the US Embassy in Belize, El Pilar and FCD.

It is expected that USAID will develop a strategy to protect the Maya Forest before the year 2020 is over. This initiative is to complement the ongoing German led GIZ Selva Maya Project. Cattle ranching is one of the most serious threats affecting the destruction and disappearance of the Maya Forest; however, it was felt that interventions to improve forest cover and maintain viability of the Selva Maya will signify the promotion of local economies, build local pride among inhabitants and develop a common regional label as a marketing tool. The Chiquibul Forest forms part of the Maya Forest, which stands as part of the five great forests of MesoAmerica that requires substantial financial inputs to keep it viable.

## Youth Group Gains Strength

Not only has FCD maintained a youth arm in Belize, but it has also influenced and supported the creation of a youth group in Melchor de Mencos, Peten, Guatemala. The group called, *Todos Por Un Mundo Verde* is comprised of more than 20 youth members. The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives has primarily given life to this youth group and enabled it to implement conservation activities. This year the Canada Funds have specifically assisted in the construction of a nursery, reforestation of the Mopan River, public outreach activities by youth in rural communities and facilitated exchange programs among children and youth from both Belize and Guatemala.

FCD encourages youth participation since they will be the decision makers of the future and are on a formative period where they can make a difference for society and for



themselves. The youth movement continues the tradition of FCD's early days when it was launched as the Youth Environmental Action Group in 1989.

## Women in Arenal Get Help



Gender issues are becoming more prominent even on environmental matters, therefore FCD has established

guidelines that includes women in the planning and execution of conservation activities. To this end, FCD's Agroecological Extension Technician has identified 21 women from the village of Arenal in the Cayo District as beneficiaries of alternative livelihood support programs.

The women in the village have formed 4 groups in order to implement the most recent project, which consists of chicken husbandry. With the financial support of CICA/Sotz'il, 350 chicks have been provided to the women. In addition, three chicken coops were constructed, concentrated feed has been provided as well as vaccines for proper growth of the chicks. The aim of the project is to enable the formalization of a food security program in the community.

## Discoveries under the Jungle



Using LIDAR imagery Dr. Holley Moyes from the University of California MERCED, has made several cave discoveries in the Chiquibul Forest. Following

her guidance and technical expertise, the FCD Karst Management Unit has further explored and conducted inventory of the recent discoveries. One of those cave discoveries is Actun Woh. The site has a small opening which then transforms into a major cave. The cave contains several Maya relics including tombs, shoe pots, skeletal remains and altars.

But the cave, similar to the natural wealth of the Chiquibul is under threat. Signs of looting is observed and broken pots and tombs provides the evidence that looters have recently been in the cave and are actively digging for Maya jade and other jewellery. The race is on for protecting this relic. FCD's aspiration is to elevate the status of the Chiquibul with its natural and cultural richness as a World Heritage Site.

Board of Directors

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Mr. Mick Fleming

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Mrs. Hannah

St Luce Martinez

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Mr. Jorge de Leon

Secretary:

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Director:

Mrs. Valerie

Woods Smith

Director:

Mrs. Tanya

Santos Neal

Director:

Mr. Tony Rath

Through a collaborative effort with the Maya Leaders Alliance (MLA) and the Toledo Alcaldes Association (TAA), FCD's Environmental Educator conducted a community outreach campaign in the Toledo District from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2019. The outreach campaign was implemented in 8 Q'eqchi and Mopan Mayan communities, namely San Miguel, San Pedro Columbia, Crique Jute, San Jose, San Vicente, Jalacte, Na Luum Ca and Santa Elena. These communities were selected due to their close proximity to the Columbia River Forest Reserve.

The outreach community effort was intended to bring awareness and increase knowledge amongst children, youths and adults on the importance of conserving the natural resources, particularly the forest and wildlife that forms part of the biocultural landscape of the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains. The title of the campaign was "Our Ancient Maya Forest" with the accompanying slogan "Aj Ralch'ooch (Children of the land), We Protect" in Q'eqchi and "U ch'I sah Lu'um (Children of the land), We Protect" in Mopan Maya.

## Outreach in Toledo



By the end of the tour, a total of 329 students and 18 teachers were imparted with knowledge on the Columbia River Forest Reserve. In addition, 118 youths were explained the traditional way of life and practices amongst the 5 Maya communities and 126 adults were imparted with knowledge on the forest reserve.

## Macaw Season Ends with Losses



Every year FCD expends 7 months of biomonitoring efforts at the Chalillo Lake with the primary aim of documenting and protecting the young chicks that are always at risk of being stolen and smuggled into Guatemala.

The last breeding period that culminated in September of 2019, was a bad year for the macaw population. A total of 10 nesting trees were monitored, 26 eggs were laid, 13 chicks hatched and by the end of the year, 10 birds flew out into the wild. This is what we documented but the story for macaws doesn't end here. Guatemalan environmentalists fear that more than 40 parrots were stolen from their nests and moved into Guatemalan rural communities. Parrots are known to be sold from \$1,500 Quetzales to as much as \$12,000 Quetzales (US\$208.00 to US\$1,666). This has been an annual occurrence but never had we understood that so many parrots were being targeted for illegal wildlife trafficking. With so many parrots leaving the country, it is certain that the population can crash. A national census conducted in 2019 documented 334 individual scarlet macaws for Belize.

## 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

## Wildlife Cameras Return to Chiquibul



For more than eight years, research using wildlife cameras were abruptly stopped in the Chiquibul Forest due to the losses incurred at the hands of poachers. Dr. Marcella Kelly, who had been studying jaguars was forced to abandon her study and instead moved her cameras to the Mountain

Pine Ridge and other safer areas. By late 2010 the Chiquibul Forest was under siege by Guatemalans who searched for *chamaedorean* leaves and additionally targeted timber and wildlife species.

With constant patrols and application of the law, coupled with a strong binational effort, the forest started to recover. With the recovery, wildlife has started to return and the forest is safer. Given this condition, FCD together with PhD candidate Celso Poot, ventured to install wildlife camera traps to document tapirs, and nocturnal animals to complement the data collected from line transects. The data collected proved that wildlife species including white lipped peccaries are reappearing. Further research on game communities; however, is necessary to establish trends and help develop more effective management strategies that protects wildlife species. FCD's draft management plan identifies the Jaguar, Tapir, White lipped peccary, Scarlet macaws and the Morelet tree frog as conservation targets.

## Chief Justice and Chief Magistrate are FCD Champions

Last year Las Cuevas Research Station (LCRS) had the pleasure of hosting the Honourable Chief Justice, Mr. Kenneth Benjamin, and Chief Magistrate Ms. Sharon Frazer, together with two judges of the Supreme Court and ten magistrates from throughout the country. The purpose of the visit was to sensitize the Judiciary of the environmental threats and challenges faced in the Chiquibul Forest.

In 2007 the key threat was xate extraction. This evolved into illegal logging, poaching and agricultural farming. Today the key threats facing the integrity of the Chiquibul Forest are gold panning, cattle ranching and illegal wildlife trafficking. Every person detained in the Chiquibul conducting illegal extraction, are presented in court where their cases are attended by a Magistrate. The site visit, therefore, gave them a better understanding of the realities.

The itinerary was comprised of site visits to the Rio Frio Caves, Chiquibul Visitor Center, Caracol temples and trekking to the Tower Lookout, Las Cuevas Maya temples and illegal logging area on the A10 Road as well as a night



walk on San Pastor Road. FCD also presented a plaque to both the Chief Justice and the Chief Magistrate naming them as FCD Champions.

The visit by the Judiciary was made possible with the financial assistance from the US Department of the Interior - International Technical Assistance Program.

## Be a Part of the Legacy

After 30 years of its existence, FCD has launched a fundraising drive for the construction of its headquarters in the community of San Jose Succotz. You or someone you know can be a part of the legacy. Contact us. Visit us.

E-Bulletin Funded by:

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### For more information contact:

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