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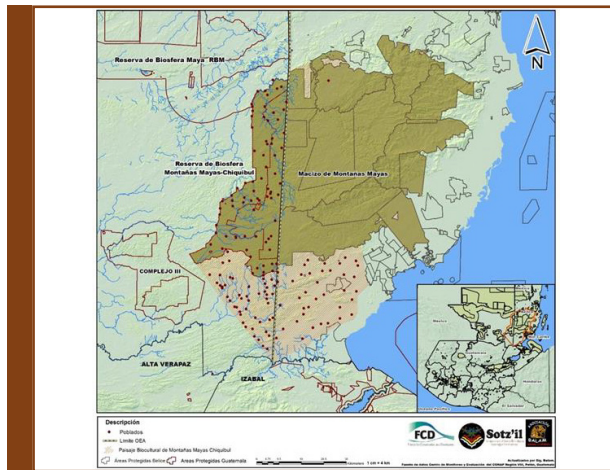
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CICA Project Concludes



The Consejo Indígena de Centro America, Asociación Balam and FCD collaborated on a project to reduce the degradation of the biocultural Chiquibul Maya Mountains landscape through a binational collaboration mechanism including civil society organizations and indigenous and local communities.

The project concluded successfully in May. Primary outputs of the project included: 1,383 persons from 11 communities were

targeted on methods to protect the shared watershed in Belize, while dozens of people participated on clean up campaigns and reforestation schemes of the Mopan River in both Belize and Guatemala. The Binational Watershed Alliance was strengthened and capacity building sessions were held for the membership of the Alliance. Eight communities adjacent to the Columbia River Forest Reserve in the Toledo District were also targeted, totalling 573 persons on the importance of indigenous lands. Eight indigenous communities in Guatemala, were assisted on alternative livelihood initiatives, primarily with the objective of establishing community nurseries and permanent nurseries for the production of high quality cacao, while in Belize extension services were provided to farmers in the Vaca Forest Reserve and to the Arenal women's group. In addition, two exchange programs with indigenous peoples from Belize and Guatemala were held to develop a document describing the Biocultural Landscape of Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala and Belize which consists of approximately 634,015 hectares located in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains. Finally, a strategy that harmonizes the actions of 17 civil society groups of Belize and Guatemala in areas of environmental protection that form part of the Good Intentions agreement was developed.

Funds for this project were made possible through the German KfW, CICA/SOTZ'IL partnership.

Fires in The Vaca Forest Reserve

During the month of April a sequence of forest fires in the Vaca Forest Reserve made national news for several days, as the fires consumed thousands of acres and the smoke encircled several towns and villages. Health authorities were concerned that the emissions would create pulmonary infections upon the already impending threats of the COVID 19 pandemic.

The Ministry responsible for Forests and Protected Areas, came to the rescue through their Forest Department staff and heavy machinery with the aim of controlling the fires and preventing it from entering into the Chiquibul Forest. For a week, the fire-fighting teams, along with FCD field technicians, struggled in opening fire lines. The wildfires were eventually suffocated with the rains that dowsed the fumes and any log still burning. But by then the impact caused was



tremendous not only on biodiversity but also in property owned by farmers near the reserve. A preliminary census of damages shows that 13 farmers lost well over Bz\$100,000.00 in crops, plants, pastures and fences.

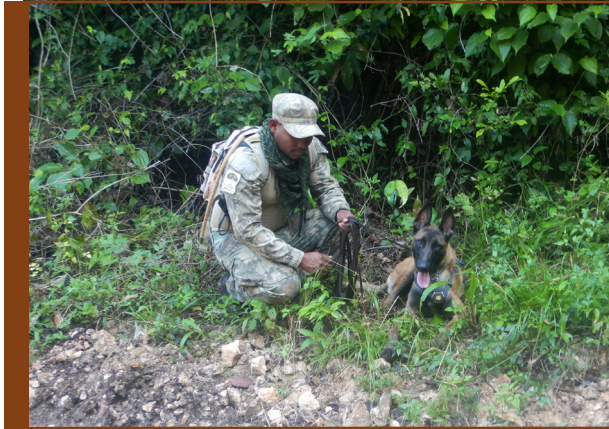
Anti-Poaching Unit Launched

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.



Last year FCD got information from Guatemalan counterparts that at least 25 scarlet macaws had been trafficked from Belize by Guatemalan poachers. Given the

state of the macaw population it was certain that with that level of illegal extraction we could lose the macaw population in the relatively medium term.

Thanks to Harvest Caye Conservation Foundation (HCCF), funds were obtained to install an anti-poaching unit whose tasking would be to intercept and detain poachers. The call for candidates started early in the year and by March the Unit became functional, with the assistance from other Park Rangers. As the macaw season begins, the Unit also has jumpstarted its activities. The Unit is supported with an anti-poaching canine, that was obtained from the organization, *Animals saving Animals* (ASA). ASA presently provides continued conservation support to five countries in Africa, and has recently expanded further to include the United States, Malta, India and Belize. ASA provides recognised handler training and specialist canines individually tailored to the individual needs of the employing agency or local government.

Amidst The Pandemic . . .

Despite the pandemic creating havoc worldwide, illegal activities are not on hold and in fact FCD has documented an increase of poaching on the adjacent areas of the Chiquibul and in the Park itself the level of incursions have not stopped.

Monitoring and enforcement activities in the Chiquibul National Park and the Vaca Forest Reserve, where FCD maintains a presence, have been necessary and we extend a grateful appreciation to all the supporters and donors who have kept their commitment for conservation in these difficult times. FCD has taken several precautions, in preventing any COVID-19 infections among the field staff, while conducting field operations. During this period over 50 illegal farmers were prevented from deforesting a block of 278 acres and four persons were handed to the



Police Department involved in illegal entry and defacing the national park.

WWF Agroforestry Project Begins



The small village of Arenal, which straddles the Belize-Guatemala border is the center of two interesting agroforestry activities launched in March. The first activity is the development of a nursery by the Arenal Women's Conservation Group. The idea for the creation of a nursery with over 10,000 seedlings came about due

to the forest cover being lost along the river banks and the women's enthusiasm to provide a service to the community. The nursery consists of mahogany, maya nut and cedar species; these are located on two yards, and are tended by members of the group on a rotational basis. The seedlings are expected to be planted before the end of the year in ten communities including Arenal, Benque, Succotz and San Ignacio. To do this, the group will partner with the Cayo Watershed Conservation Alliance, which consists of 10 communities in Belize, whose main mission is to help protect the rivers in the Cayo District.

In addition, three men from the community are engaged on an agroforestry program which incorporates cacao, avocado, mahogany, cedar, lime, plantain, corn and beans in three plots of land consisting of 32 acres. The community nursery is being supported by the World Wildlife Fund – MesoAmerica as part of their objective to restore forest cover.

Macaw Season Starts



The scarlet macaw breeding season has started with a high nesting activity in the Chiquibul. This has meant the development and activation of the annual biomonitoring effort by the FCD Research Unit. For the next seven months, the

four-person team will be documenting the nests and watchful in protecting the eggs and macaw chicks. These birds are at danger of being stolen for the illegal pet trade and the threat is always there of losing these birds quite rapidly. FCD's last survey count registered a minimum of 334 individual parrots known to occur in Belize, and because it is locally endangered, then it becomes critically important to put the resources for their protection. The Belize Electric Company (BECOL) has been a primary funder for this program annually.

For the last five years, the biomonitoring program has been successful in preventing the loss of chicks at the main biomonitoring site, which proves the importance of dedicating man-power to monitor the nesting area. But other areas have been targeted by poachers, urging us to identify other resources so that the work can be expanded.

Vision:

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

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Fires in The Chiquibul Forest

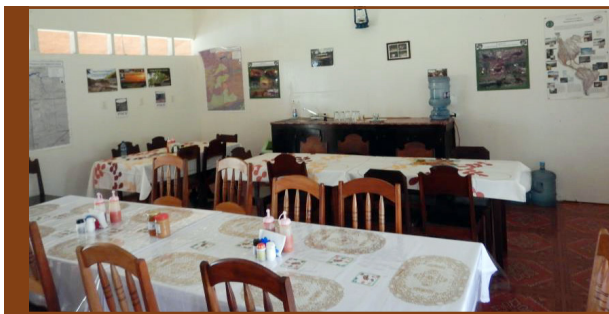
The fires in the Chiquibul Forest were also dramatic and a cause of high concern for FCD as co-managers of the park. The high temperatures and accumulation of fuel from fallen trees from the last hurricane created the right environment for the explosion of wild fires across the tropical forest. Although tropical broadleaf forests tend to burn slow and fires normally do not consume much virgin forests due to the humidity in trees, this time it was different.

The fires were started by farmers from Guatemala through slash and burn method of cultivation. Farmlands and pasture lands have been used over the years by rural Guatemalan communities, many of them even within the park limits. These fires eventually became wild fires and started to consume not only secondary forest but virgin forests of the Caracol Archaeological Reserve and Chiquibul National Park. Due to the remoteness of these fires, coupled with steep areas and FCD's lack of fire-fighting skills and tools, these fires went on devouring the forest for many days. FCD Park Rangers battled the fires by opening fire lines in more accessible areas, but by then the fires had passed through any possible buffer of containment. A



recent FCD study titled, *A Remote Sensing Damage Analysis of the Chiquibul Forest Impacted by the 2020 Forest Fires*, shows that a total of 8,216.46 acres were impacted in the Chiquibul Forest, which represents 3,284.42 acres in the Caracol Archaeological Reserve and another 4,932.04 acres in the Chiquibul National Park. The results of this study reveal that the 2020 forest fires were devastating and there is an urgent need for an increased intervention to reduce agricultural incursions and cattle ranching that prevents further degradation of the forest.

Las Cuevas – Ready For You!!



Las Cuevas Research Station (LCRS) has been operating for more than 20 years, catering for student groups and researchers who come with a quest of learning and investigating the intricacies of tropical ecosystems. This time around, FCD is promoting the station for persons

interested in having a wilderness experience. So, if you have been restless over the last few weeks, dreaming of a new experience in Belize where you can be close to nature – then the place is LCRS.

The sounds of birds during the day and the strange creatures at night, gives you a first-hand account of the true wilderness location which is embedded in the heart of the Chiquibul jungles. The cozy 2-bed rooms and the dining area will remind you of the comfort nowhere else to be found in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains. Nearby is a cave, Maya monuments, the tower lookout and several nature trails. Less than an hour's drive away is Caracol Archaeological Reserve with its majestic temples, and on the dry weather the Natural Arch is accessible from LCRS. To learn more and to make your bookings write us at fcd.lcrs@gmail.com

Grace Kennedy Supports Rangers

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability



During the state of emergency that began in March, FCD had to take several precautions and adaptive strategies to prevent exposure of our staff kicked in. This included, working from home for administrative staff, and recall of park rangers from the Conservation Posts. However,

the work continued both in town and in the forest. The support staff made certain that facemasks, detergents and sanitizers were secured and issued out to staff. In terms of food items, the concern rose of shopping in multiple shops and to find ways to reduce this activity. GraceKennedy (Belize) Limited, who imports and distributes an array of goods, was the perfect partner to assist. This was not the first time GraceKennedy had supported our cause and in fact, as much as they can, the assistance has been scheduled to occur at least twice a year.

This time, we found it highly convenient and timely to obtain canned foods, and groceries amounting to over Bz\$1,000.00. These were packaged and handed to each field staff. These packages included coffee, potted meat, corn beef, luncheon meat, sardine, soap, paper tissues, and other field supplies. FCD is thankful to GraceKennedy for the support provided to the park rangers and other field technicians.

Cayo Watershed Group Enters New Age

For more than 10 years FCD has been working with the Binational Watershed Alliance – Belize/Guatemala in building their capacity and organizational skills. Last year the Guatemalan chapter became an independent association - ASIPROM, and earlier this year the Belizean chapter also moved towards becoming an independent organization. To do this an Executive Committee session was held in February which resulted in the submission of *Cayo Watershed Conservation Alliance (CWCA)* as the official name for the organization. Thereafter on March 14, the name was confirmed and a new executive body was selected. Prior to this the group was known as the *Chiquibul-Mopan-Macal-Belize Watershed Alliance*.

FCD reaffirms its commitment to support CWCA as it enters a new age and congratulates the new Executive Committee which is comprised of:

President – Garfield Murillo of Benque Viejo del Carmen Town
Vice President – Dennis Smith of Duck Run I village
Secretary – Jorge Ramos of Calla Creek village
Assistance Secretary – Franklyn Cordova of Bullet Tree Falls village



Interim Treasurer – Marie Lu Rancharan of Duck Run I village

Interim Assistance Treasurer – Perta Coffman of Bullet Tree Falls Town

Councilor – Lucio Sanchez of Arenal village

Councilor – Juan Polanco of San Ignacio Town

Councilor – Esther Pacheco of Santa Elena Town

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