

FCD Tracks

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32 Years of Core Conservation

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23rd AGM Celebrated



FCD celebrated its 23rd Annual General Meeting on the 4th of December at San Ignacio Resort Hotel. This symbolized a return to a norm in terms of venue and participation of FCD members at the end of the year. Over 75 participants made it to the event, including the Minister responsible for protected areas, Honourable Orlando Habet. The event was also aired on zoom.

Guest speaker, High Commissioner of Belize to the United Kingdom, Mrs. Therese Rath explained how she had gotten engaged with FCD and related her experience being part of the Nohoch Chen sinkhole expedition. She encouraged the FCD staff to continue the conservation effort and highlighted the importance of the work particularly at a time when climate change is creating a havoc across the globe.

The FCD Programs Director, Esther Sanchez, gave an overview of the FCD Program accomplishments while Ms. Diana Garcia presented the financial report as well as the 2022-2023 budget. Awards were given to staff Justin Pook, Richard Harris and Simon Lotiff for their exemplary work. Second Lt. Choc and FCD champions, H.C Therese Rath, San Ignacio Hotel Resort, Cayo Cargo and Dr. Edward Boles were also awarded for their support in meeting the conservation goals. Then was the time to select two new board members, who were endorsed by FCD members as Mrs. Susana Vanzie and Mr. Mark Wilkins.

Co-Management Agreement Signed

On the 1st of December, FCD and a group of other co-managers including the Belize Audubon Society finally had the opportunity to sign a new co-management agreement with the Government of Belize. On behalf of the Government, Honorable Orlando Habet signed while for FCD, the Executive Director, Rafael Manzanero signed with Park Manager, Derric Chan as the witness. With this agreement, FCD now has a legal binding for on ground management and administration of the Chiquibul National Park for a period of five years. The agreement provides for an extension period after the 5-year phase comes to completion; however, unlike other past agreements, this time there is a robust system of evaluation of performance based on the roles and responsibilities defined for each of the two parties.

Specific to FCD, the agreement supports for FCD to coordinate and execute patrols with other regulatory agencies, provides way of access for staff to traverse the Chiquibul Forest Reserve, and empowers FCD staff as representatives of the Government.



The Chiquibul National Park with 285,937 acres is the largest terrestrial protected area in Belize, harboring healthy populations of wildlife species and protecting key headwaters. FCD signed its first co-management agreement for the CNP in 2007. Since taking over a co-management role the management effectiveness score has improved from 39.3% in 2007 to 76% in 2022.

New Management Plan



With the signing of the co-management agreement, FCD is now better positioned to execute a revised management plan for the Chiquibul National Park. The National Biodiversity Office has provided its endorsement to the plan which was presented to them earlier in 2022.

The Plan sets out the strategic framework for CNP site management over the next five-years, from 2022-2027, focusing on maintaining and enhancing the values of the protected area, providing guidance for both broad management strategies as well as more specific natural resource management strategic actions, monitoring, and outreach activities. The revision of the management plan also takes into account the location

of the National Park within the wider Chiquibul landscape and recognizes the importance of connectivity across both protected area boundaries and in the transboundary context.

The CNP Management Goal for the next five years reads as follows: *The CNP is a core area of biological diversity protection within the Chiquibul Forest with high ecological integrity, and intrinsic natural and cultural value, and provides vital environmental services in support of Belize's national development, climate resilience, and regional security and cooperation.*

The CNP management plan is divided into two Volumes: Volume One provides the information on which management is based: the national and regional management context, physical, biological, and cultural characteristics as well as the Conservation Plan (including the Climate Change Assessment). At the heart of the plan are the seven Conservation Targets that have been identified for the CNP: Tropical Broadleaved Forest, Aquatic Systems, Scarlet Macaw, White-lipped Peccary, Jaguar and Karst System. Volume Two presents the management planning aspects, and defines essential strategies for management of the CNP through six overarching and interrelated management programs.

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.

PACT Extraordinary Grant Approved

One of the long-standing financial supporters to FCD has been the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT). The many successes and achievements have been largely due to the financial assistance obtained from PACT for more than 15 years. The PACT Challenge of 2005 was an assertive strategy to bring home the true challenges faced in the Chiquibul Forest. At that time a group of friends of the Chiquibul embarked on an expedition to record the illegal deforestation and hunting occurring in the area, financed by PACT. The output was a video aired nationally, highlighting the beauty and sensitivity of the Chiquibul; and so began an effort to save the Chiquibul with FCD as one of the biggest champions.

Fast track into the present, and we see PACT making large investments to maintain this important key biodiversity area. During the month of December, PACT's Board accepted and endorsed a 4-year extraordinary grant to FCD for a project titled, "Strengthening Landscape Management in the Western-Maya Mountains." The objective of the project is to improve protected area effectiveness in the Western Maya Mountains for the benefit of communities in Central Belize. More specifically the project will support a heightened management of key protected areas in the Western Maya Mountain landscape



through biodiversity, cultural and headwater monitoring, enforcement capacity and financial viability.

This extraordinary grant will propel FCD to meet the objective for improving management in the Chiquibul, Mountain Pine Ridge, Chiquibul Cave System and in the Vaca Forest Reserve. This goes in line with the responsibilities provided by the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management aimed at streamlining our conservation efforts in the Western Maya Mountains. We remain extremely thankful to PACT for the ongoing support.

CCS Action Plan Finalized



With a Cultural Heritage Coordinator at the helm of the Karst Management Unit, it appears more relevant and practical to have a more solid and comprehensive cultural resource preservation program. With that in mind, a two-year

action plan was developed during the month of November. The Action Plan prioritizes primary actions needed in order to organize and streamline the efforts of the Karst Management Unit, improve the management effectiveness and harmonize management plan recommendations thereby maintaining due diligence with the regulatory agency, namely the Institute of Archaeology. The multiple activities are organized in four sections: Administration, Research and Monitoring, Natural and Cultural Resource Management and Public Use.

Primary actions for the first quarter include advocacy for signing into a new co-management agreement with the Institute of Archaeology; identification of funds for review of the Chiquibul Cave System Management Plan, development of educational materials and seek training and equipment for water quality testing.

Patrol Efforts Documented



The protected areas where FCD Rangers operate are extensive and rugged. Only so much can be done on vehicle while foot patrols become more prominent particularly in the hotspot areas. Part of the strategy to be more effective, has been the installation of conservation posts in key areas where Rangers and other regulatory agencies can embed their efforts to address the biodiversity threats. On a weekly basis patrols are launched from these outposts. Using

SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) FCD can tabulate and assess patrol results.

For the period November 2021 to October 2022, the total number of patrols executed from the Conservation Posts in the Chiquibul Forest amounted to 310 patrols from the period of November 1, 2021 to October 31, 2022, amounting to 4,042 Kms patrolled on foot and 5,145 kms patrolled on vehicle. This resulted in 2,164 hours of active patrolling and/or monitoring within the CF. An average of 26 patrols per month is executed by a combination of efforts through the different CPs.

In the Cooma Cairn region of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, from April to October the team conducted a total of 123 patrols, amounting to a total of 391.5 Kms patrolled on foot and 3,991.4 Kms patrolled on motorcycle. The 123 patrols conducted by the team also resulted in 402 hours of active patrolling in the area. While in the Vaca Forest Reserve, the Ranger team conducted a total of 652 patrols which amounted to 268 hours of active patrol and 828 Kms patrolled on foot and 1,943 kms patrolled on motorcycle.

Vision:

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

Board of Directors

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Dr. Elma Kay

Treasurer:

Mrs. Susana Vanzie

Secretary:

Mrs. Valerie Woods Smith

Director:

Mrs. Tanya Santos Neal

Director:

Mr. Mark Wilkins

Director:

Mr. Tony Rath

Panthera Agreement Renewed

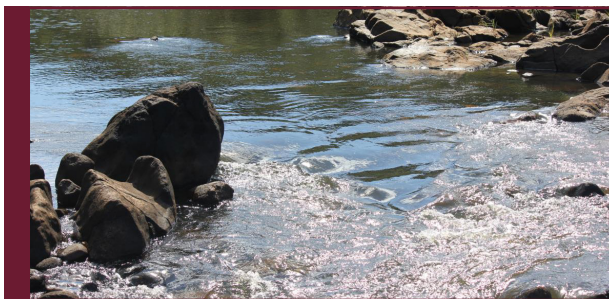
Another two-year agreement was reached with Panthera on the 7th of October, 2022. The agreement provides for the development of a collaborative and constructive working relationship for matters related to information gathering and management of jaguars and their prey species in the Chiquibul National Park, at Las Cuevas Research Station located in the Chiquibul Forest Reserve (CFR) and in the Vaca Forest Reserve.

This collaborative work centers on the installation of wildlife camera traps across the targeted areas. Over the last two years, Panthera has provided the training and assisted FCD with wildlife cameras as well as batteries. The FCD Research Unit is then responsible for installing the cameras, monitoring them and collecting the SD cards. The data is stored and presented to Panthera for their analysis. The last report submitted by Panthera noted that, "Overall the Chiquibul seems to be in good state, especially compared to



2008. All distribution and capture rates seem to be equal, slightly lower, or somewhat higher compared to an equally well protected area like the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, located east of the Maya Divide."

BCSL Supports Water Quality Testing



FCD has been involved in water quality monitoring and protection for more than 15 years using several interventions that range from public outreach and research to enforcement and binational efforts. In the field, two research methodologies have been used, namely macro invertebrate studies and water quality testing.

With Rangers now posted at the Bald Hills in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve a water monitoring and research program has been ensued. This area contains four sub-watersheds, which raises the importance of understanding the state of these water resources. Earlier in 2022, FCD with support from the GEF Small Grants Programme, conducted a macro invert study that has helped to establish a baseline. The results show that the water resources are healthy, although there is a need to expand the area coverage of the research. In this regard, FCD is pleased to inform that the Belize Communications and Security Limited (BCSL) is assisting in the acquisition of field equipment that will help expand the research coverage. BCSL is a very active stakeholder, represented in the Upper Macal Working Group, who has demonstrated their vision of keeping the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve as a viable and stable protected area.

Governance Framework for Vaca



The Vaca Forest Reserve has specific challenges not seen in other protected areas. The challenges for an effective stakeholder involvement, enforcement and governance occurs primarily due to the fact that the Government of Belize has allowed farmers to operate inside the area without a proper written guideline. FCD, on the other hand, has tried to control and prevent the human expansion inside

the reserve through programs of support to community members in areas of agroecology and integrated farming systems. These have paid off but more could be achieved with the establishment of a robust governance framework.

With financing from the GIZ Selva Maya project, a consultant was contracted to develop a governance framework for the Vaca Forest Reserve. Three consultations were made with stakeholders that has helped in coining a framework that is both practical and effective. The key question of the consultations has been in identifying the proper management regime to meet the goals of the reserve. The framework recommends a more active management role of the FCD in the Vaca Forest Reserve, and counting on a technical body to assist in guiding management. With the framework finished, FCD is preparing to present the results to the Ministry responsible for this protected area.

One Health Sessions Held

At first glance, one cannot suspect that One Health is related to environmental considerations, but a more profound study surely puts the natural environment directly connected to One Health. The GIZ - Selva Maya, One Health integrated concept has opened a new opportunity in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains biocultural landscape, to promote human, animal and environmental health through an inter-disciplinary approach including capacity building, risk reduction and best practices that strengthens as a result the resiliency of the natural ecosystem. To put all of these areas into focus, FCD has partnered with GIZ Selva Maya on a project titled, "Reducing Zoonosis risks in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountain Biocultural Landscape."

Since One Health is a new concept to us, FCD staff including both Managers and field staff have undergone a training led by Dr. Percival Cho. The first training included protected area managers from five areas including Don Eljio Panti



National Park and Caracol Archaeological Reserve, while the second training was aimed at all FCD field staff. Best forest management practices and wildlife management were described and field visits were made to understand the dynamics of the forest and how forest concessions operate. The importance of fire in the natural environment was also highlighted.

Solar Paneling Las Cuevas



For a long time the recommendation has been to install solar panels at Las Cuevas Research Station which would reduce the use of a fuel generator and ferrying of fuel from town to the heart of the Chiquibul jungles. That has now been

possible thanks to the support given by the US Department of the Interior- International Technical Assistance Program. The addition of six panels and a lithium battery has now enabled for the entire main building and kitchenette to operate with solar energy.

It is expected that this system will also help FCD keep more savings that can otherwise be used for maintenance of the station and help reduce gas emissions.

Las Cuevas Research Station caters for various groups including researchers, students and tourists. Due to its location, the area is rich in wildlife and there are various destination points such as the Caracol Maya temples and Chalillo Lake that can be reached from the station. The station is open throughout the year and to visit you just need to call us at 823-2657 or write at fcd@btl.net for bookings.

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

E-Bulletin Funded by:



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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