

# Friends *for* Conservation and Development

*Promoting Core Conservation*

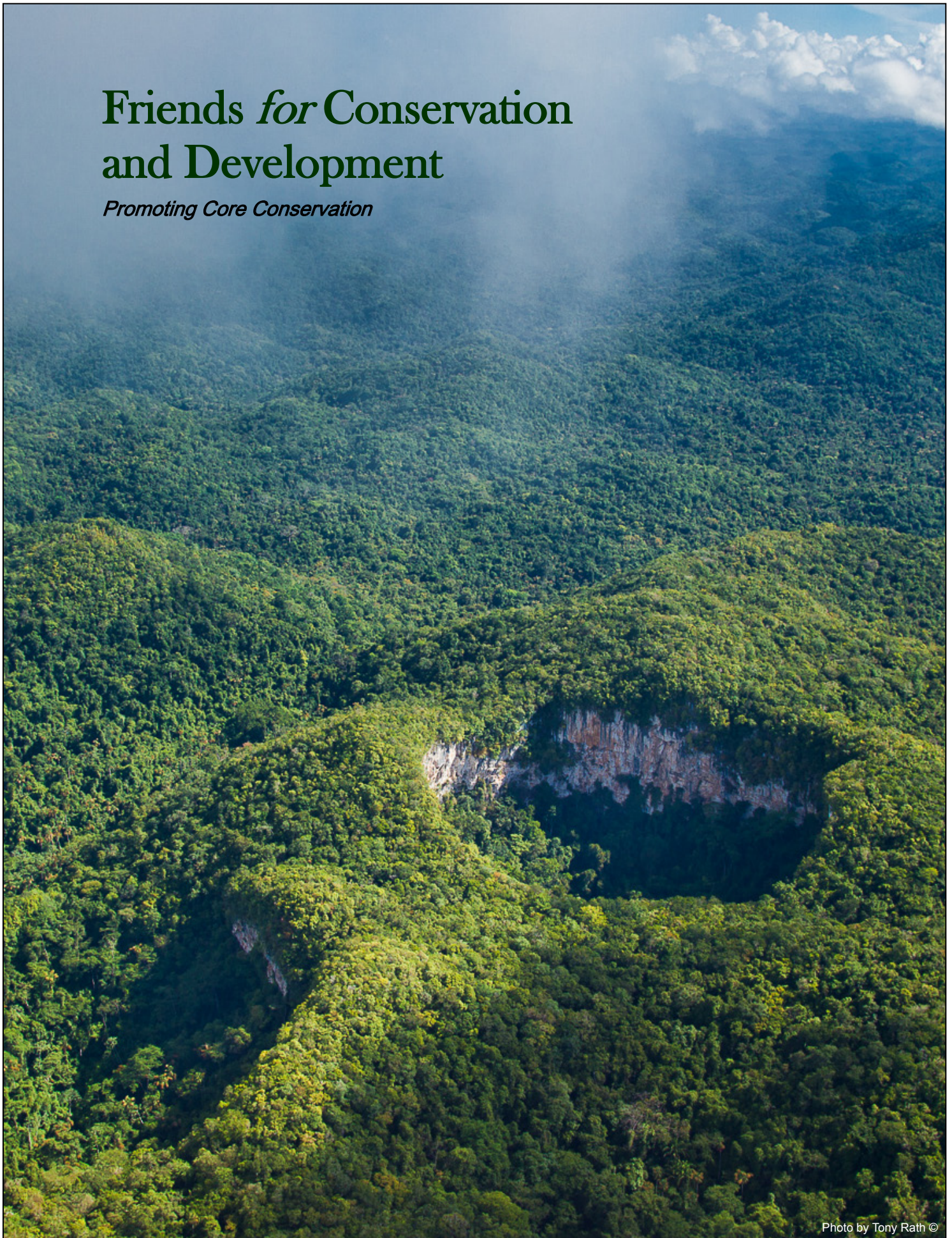


Photo by Tony Rath ©

**ANNUAL REPORT 2014**





The 15th Annual General Meeting of Friends for Conservation and Development is  
made possible through the full sponsorship of  
San Ignacio Resort Hotel



## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**There** are moments in history that changes the way we see and do things, and this year has been one of many challenges with a moment that have made us revisit our strategies and interventions. The fatal incident that occurred in Caracol has marked, particularly for FCD, that optimum point that we had seen coming for some time. Unfortunately, it had to reach at this point in order for mobilization to occur and we are hoping that as a result an integrated security program will be defined and put into operation for the short, medium and long term. The incident at Caracol is close to us because the stem of the Chiquibul problem is due to the ongoing incursions and extraction of natural and cultural resources that have kept this forest under pressure.



In 1987 a group of intrepid young boys started to visit the Chiquibul Forest - they were members of the Youth Environmental Action Group (YEAG). Their purpose was to learn what Belize had as unspoiled areas. Over the years we have maintained the philosophy that we can authentically love this country only if we learn what it has and what is at risk of being lost. YEAG evolved into FCD and we want to encourage you to visit these wilderness areas and learn what is at risk. For the typical Belizean the Chiquibul is felt to be a dangerous area but that is not entirely true. The Chiquibul Forest comprised of the Chiquibul National Park, Chiquibul Forest Reserve, Caracol Reserve and Vaca Forest Reserve is a large area covering 8% of Belize's landmass, so there are large wilderness areas that are unspoiled, safe, can be visited and enjoyed.

Saving the Chiquibul Forest and the Greater Maya Mountains will require presence and governance, but this does not alone mean insertion of security forces. There are many ways to create a presence and this can imply the promotion of activities aimed at tourism, education and research. We are confident that the diversification of users and stakeholders, will in fact give more value to this forest and help generate further support for its protection. Nature has its own intrinsic value and just by the nature that God created it – then it needs to be respected and cared; however, we can muster more values from it for the development of the human spirit and dimension. We feel confident that it can be done. The 2003 Chiquibul Symposium and this year's Telethon has energized us and moved us unto another level of greater enthusiasm and optimism. The outpour of support has been phenomenal and the common denominator shows that Belizeans and friends from abroad care and want to safeguard Belize's Chiquibul Forest. We are humbled with the support and now more than ever we have more responsibilities to undertake with due diligence.

FCD's Board and staff, understand the role they play and the heavy responsibilities on our shoulder. I thank these committed individuals and also thank all the Funders, Corporations, Media houses, friends and collaborators that have answered our call. We hope to see you in the Chiquibul Forest soon.

**Rafael Manzanero**

# Partnerships

FCD is honored to have worked with more than 70 partner institutions from Belize and abroad. From the private sector and community based organizations to government and international organizations, they have made our work more effective and result oriented.



## Governmental Agencies

- The Forest Department
- The Belize Defence Force
- The Police Department
- Immigration Department
- Institute of Archaeology
- Agriculture Department
- Department of Cooperatives
- Department of the Environment
- The Mining Unit
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of National Security



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

- National Protected Areas Secretariat
- Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and SD
- U.S Department of the Interior
- European Union
- British Embassy
- Ministry of the Environment (Guatemala)
- Municipality of Melchor de Mencos
- National Protected Areas Council (Guatemala)
- Commonwealth of Municipalities of Southern Peten (ManMuniSurP)
- MAGA (Guatemala)



## Community Based Organizations



- Cayo Quality Honey Producers Cooperative
- CMMB Watershed Alliance (Belize)
- Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve
- Grupo Integral para Conservación de las Cuencas
- San Jose Succutz Village Council
- FCD Youth Environmental Group
- Toledo Partners for Conservation & Development
- Caracol



## Non-Governmental Organizations



- Institute for Sustainable International Studies
- Creation Care Studies Program (CCSP)
- Wildlife Rescue and Referral Center
- The Belize Zoo and TEC
- Scarlet 6



- Protected Areas Conservation Trust
- Belize Nature Conservation Foundation
- Cayo Tour Guide Association
- Centre for Strategic Studies, Policy Analysis and Research
- Asociación Balam
- Global Humanitaria
- XMET



- United Nations Development Program
- Food and Agriculture Organization
  - Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh
  - Wildlife Conservation Society
  - American Adventure Sport
  - GEF-Small Grants Program
  - Survival Wisdom
  - Restoring Eden
  - Lighthawk
  - GIZ Selva Maya
    - IUCN



## International Organizations



## Private Sector



- Mountain Equestrian Trails
- Belize Magnificent Tour
- Via Venture Foundation
- Lions Adventure Tour
- Pine Lumber Company
- Bull Ridge Company
- Blancaneaux Lodge
- Idealab Studios
- BECOL
- BCSL



## Other Sectors

- Organization of American States
- Godfrey and Valerie Smith
- University of Florida
- ERI-University of Belize
- Virginia Tech
- Channel 5 OYE
- Krem WUB
- Channel 7





# A 2014 Snapshot

## Ahead with Country Support

**During** the 2013 Chiquibul Symposium FCD outlined 11 recommendations for implementation that would help safeguard the Chiquibul Forest. Several of these are now in effect. Construction of conservation posts is underway, reinforcements are on the ground, bi-national relations is being consolidated and our ranger force has increased. This has been possible due to the Government of Belize's direct involvement, and by people from different parts of Belize and friends abroad who not only made their voices be heard but also provided financial support.

Our rangers continued monitoring and detaining poachers whilst putting in place other measures of enforcement. However; cross border illegal gold panning, pet trade of macaws, milpa farming along the western flank of the park and surveying for eventual sale of land is still prominent in the Chiquibul.

In the Vaca Forest Reserve the landscape management effort continued with the support of GIZ Selva Maya where members of the Vaca Forest Reserve expanded their land use capabilities; are better organized and are seeking to work closer with the Forest Department.

The Las Cuevas Research Station infrastructure was improved this year and we are promoting the facility for both students and tourists. FCD signed a partnership with Las Guacamayas Research Station from Peten, Guatemala to expand visitation. Likewise we improved our Chiquibul Visitor Center to cater for visitors in the area and have created our karst management unit who will focus in researching and protecting the Chiquibul Cave System.

The scarlet macaw population was monitored and protected for a period of 7 months and a proposal for in situ conservation of the species has been approved.

Our public awareness program raised to new heights with the consolidation of a permanent education program with Guatemalan counterparts in Peten, and hundreds of Belizeans and friends abroad are now "Champions of the Chiquibul."

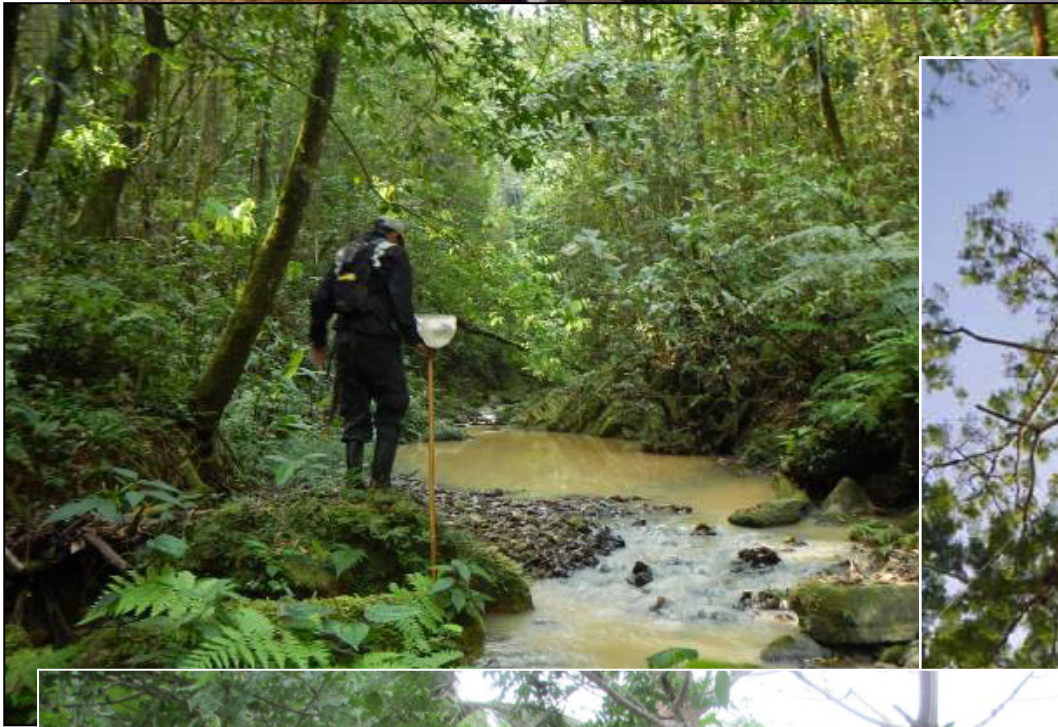
# FCD's Purpose

Conserving **Biodiversity** and Promoting  
**Human** Development



Photo by University of Florida/PTECS ©

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# Protecting Chiquibul



**This** year commenced with a suspicion that more agricultural incursions would occur inside the Chiquibul Forest due to dry, harsh conditions that prevailed in parts of Guatemala. With funding from PACT, aerial reces and ground patrols were conducted. Likewise BDF undertook operations to destroy plantations and drugs. Illegal logging was also a major threat causing degradation of the Chiquibul Forest. With funds from the EU FAO/FLEGT Programme, FCD partnered with Asociacion Balam in Peten to understand the routes of

extraction and the way these clandestine groups operate. Major busts were made in Southern Peten of illegal timber that appeared to have originated from Belize. A national TV crew from Guatemala was also brought into Chiquibul in order to record and publicize the magnitude of the problem. By September of 2014 we recorded extraction of mahogany and cedar up to 12 km inside Belize. Together with the Forest Department and Bull Ridge Company a strategy was employed to control the advancement. This has shown some success but we must remain determined in controlling the expansion.

The illegal extraction of scarlet macaw chicks from their nests continued this year. For the 2014 breeding season a total of 10 nesting attempts were monitored together with Scarlet 6 (a partner in conservation) of which 31 eggs were laid. Of the total number of eggs laid 13 hatched but only 8 chicks fledged. Poachers managed to rob 4 chicks from the nests and their activity remained persistent in the study area throughout the season.

Gold panning in the mountains also persisted and it has become so elusive that FCD ended the year not knowing clearly where the panners are operating. Observations were made in September but the concentration of Guatemalan panners are unknown. Boiton Minerals, a Belizean company abandoned the area this year, therefore, the only prevailing impact is of a trans-boundary origin. With an increase of pollutant resistant organisms documented in south Chiquibul, we can conclude that gold panning is already having impacts in the Chiquibul River and the Greater Belize Watershed.



Photo by Tony Rath ©

FCD was able to maintain a presence at the conservation posts of Rio Blanco, Ceibo Chico and Tapir Camp thanks to PACT, CARSI, US Department of the Interior and Wildlife Conservation Society. In November a new Conservation Post was opened in Caracol area and FCD has been engaged with the Ministry of National Security for the installation of another 2 conservation posts. These are being funded by the Government.

# Karst Management



Photo: Tony Rath ©

**Since** 2008 FCD signed a co-management agreement with the Institute of Archaeology for on ground management of Central America's longest cave system, the Chiquibul Caverns. The Chiquibul Caverns are largely unknown and this year thanks to the finances obtained from the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT), FCD has activated a karst management unit. The intent of the program is to understand better the system by compiling data on the biodiversity, geology, paleontology and archaeology of this karst region.



Photo by Tony Rath ©

This year began with a vigorous effort to identify potential supporters of the karst program and to identify the funds necessary. Meetings with prominent authorities in karst management from Western Kentucky University and East Tennessee State University were held and further bridging of collaboration was made with the Belize Institute of Archaeology and Mammoth Cave authorities in Kentucky.

Exploration of the cave will eventually take Belize to better justify the nomination of this site, together with the Caracol temples, as a World Heritage Site. Scientists understand that the system is yet unexplored and that major discoveries can occur. Dr. Blaine Schubert from the Center of Excellence in Paleontology from Tennessee is expected to study the extinct bear remains and local explorers including Jim Bevis and Tony Rath have conducted recesses to the largest sinkhole in the region in preparation for a major scientific expedition. Access to the area is extremely limited and are hopeful that with an improved road network the Chiquibul Forest will be better visited and appreciated.



## Discoveries

**Eco Quest** Expeditions came about as an idea to provide an opportunity for Belizeans and others to explore the very same wilderness experiences that FCD rangers have discovered. This year Eco-Quest as a tour operator was able to take hikers to Belize's highest point, located in the Chiquibul, and hoisted the Belize flag on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September!! Eco-Quest also visited several lodges and conducted a familiarization trip on the Upper Macal and Raspaculo Branch with Cayo tour operators.





# Landscape Management

**The** landscape management work in the Vaca Forest Reserve continued this year thanks to the funds obtained from the GIZ Selva Maya Project. The Vaca is part of the Maya Forest and as a result the German based organization targeted this region for appropriate management, using capacity building as a pillar for community involvement in the utilization and protection of the area.

FCD's Extension Technician, Arnaldo Melendez supervised and provided technical support to the 22 farmers and cattle ranchers in the area with the aim of providing alternative methods to better protect the land. A series of training modules were imparted to the farmers who are now members of the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve. The training ranged from multi-nutritional block production, organizational governance, bee-keeping to livestock disease and management, bio-fertilizer and use of pesticide.

This year also saw the improvement of the road and farmers can now more easily and efficiently take out their products from the Vaca. But this has also created a threat by hunters and others who may be speculating for land. To address the challenges, FCD converged a reunion for the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve in November where the Forest Department informed about the provision of 4 timber concessions inside Vaca, which by all accounts it not good news since it is known that the area does not possess good stocks of timber. GIZ Selva Maya, the National Protected Areas Secretariat from the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development as well as the Global Environmental Facility were also present and committed to work in Vaca, but it leaves the Forest Department and FCD to determine a way forward that can safeguard the Vaca Forest through a well-designed plan of action.



The results of the Landscape Management program demonstrates this year, once more, that the utilization of the reserve through community involvement is a practical strategy. This year we can attest to the fact that no new land clearing has occurred and farmers are complying with the verbal agreement reached with the Forest Department; the promotion and adoption of agro-ecological methods and principles has contributed to the reduction by 50% on the use of agrochemicals by farmers doing vegetable production; the adoption of the silvo-pastoral system has helped farmers in pasture division, establishment of a forage bank with leucaena, maralfalfa and cane; the establishment of five cover structures and the production of organically grown sweet pepper for the local market has contributed in reducing pesticides and the increase in organically grown vegetables; no illegal logging is being done by farmers who are members of Friends of Vaca Forest Reserve; less land clearing and burning has led to less carbon emissions; and farmers are more environmentally conscious.



# Biodiversity Data



Photo by Chris Minty ©

**This** year the 11th of July, marked 20 years since Las Cuevas Research Station (LCRS) was officially opened by the then Prime Minister of Belize, Right Honorable Manuel Esquivel. The station was opened in the heart of the Chiquibul Forest in order to document and make known the biodiversity of the Chiquibul Forest and contribute practical knowledge to its sustainable development and conservation. To date as a result of the research undertaken we know that the Chiquibul has over 1,352 vascular plants, 318 species of trees, 246 species of shrubs, 452 species of herbs, 109 orchid species, 182 species of vines, 20 palms, 4 cacti, 2 cycads, 107 species of ferns, 14 woody parasites and 10 lycopods. Endangered species, such as jaguars, tapirs, morelet's crocodiles are all found in this immense jungle.

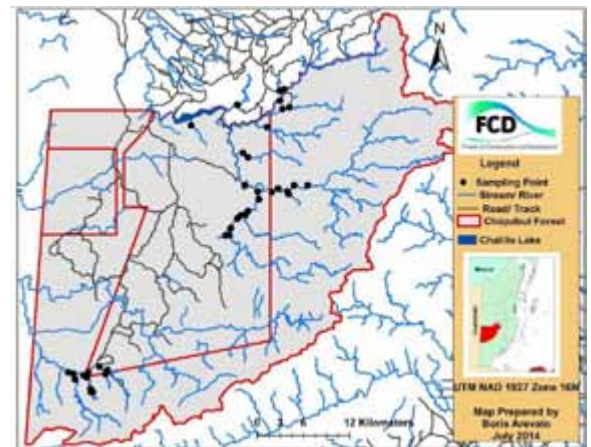


Photo by Chris Minty ©

Continuing with the mission of LCRS, FCD has actively engaged Universities to contribute in research and applied science. This year a total of 191 students visited the area and another 35 visitors stayed at the station. Three partnerships were also signed this year with the intention of diversifying the use of the station for recreation opportunities. Partnership agreements were made with two tour operators, namely Lions Adventure Tours and Belize Magnificent Tours. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of September FCD also signed a partnership agreement with Asociacion Balam who similarly administrates Las Guacamayas Biological Station located at Laguna del Tigre National Park in northern Peten.

Thanks to the support of Viaventures Foundation and PACT this year also saw the refurbishing of the main building, upgrade for the tower lookout, and completion of two quarters that were originally constructed by Dr. Marcella Kelly of Virginia Tech.

FCD also continued its own research program through its Biologist, Boris Arevalo and the field research team. An assessment of the freshwater macro-invertebrates in the headwaters of the Belize River Watershed was conducted on a total of 38 sample sites. The study showed a higher abundance of very tolerant to pollution organisms that may be attributed to perturbations in the waterways caused by illegal gold extraction. Thus FCD will coordinate reinforcements to prevent further illegal gold panning on the headwaters. In addition, this year the research team were contracted by BECOL to conduct a macro-invertebrate assessment near the Vaca Dam as well as a wildlife monitoring assessment.



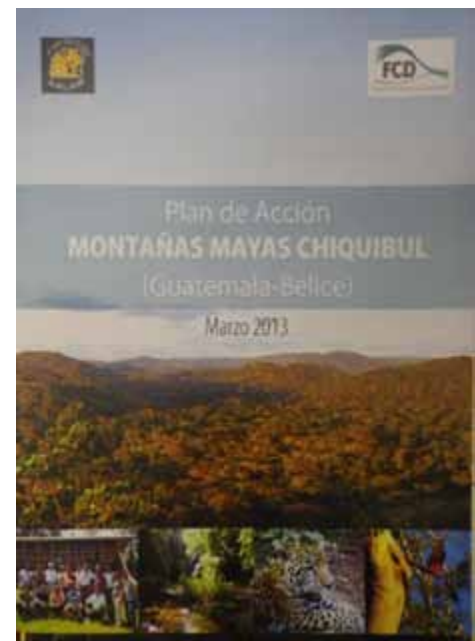
# Bi-National Linkages



**Since** taking over co-management responsibilities of the Chiquibul National Park, it became clear to us that forging working relationships with Guatemalan counterparts would be essential since the stem of the incursions emanated from Guatemala.

The Chiquibul National Park shares a border with Guatemala of 43 kilometers and is directly connected to the Maya Mountains-Chiquibul Biosphere Reserve in Southern Peten. Thanks to the support from institutions such as the US Department of the Interior, the British Embassy and EU FAO-FLEGT this year we moved together with Asociacion Balam and the Commonwealth of Communities of Southern Peten to establish a set of new interventions based on the bi-national action plan developed together with partner institutions in 2013. The action plan recommends activities directed at sustainable livelihoods, environmental security and environmental education as a manner to prevent further deterioration of the shared Chiquibul ecosystem.

This year a permanent commission on environmental education was established and a set of four educators were identified and trained. Subsequently a full-fledged education campaign was started in Southern Peten amongst 18 communities. The multi-sectorial roundtable created in 2012 by Asociacion Balam in Southern Peten, which brings over 31 institutions of Government, civil society and the private sector met several times this year to raise visibility of the plight of the communities in conflict near Belize's border. As a result several initiatives were activated including xate plantations in the community of Monte Los Olivos – a practice that may be expanded in other hotspot communities. High level delegations including personnel from Guatemala and Belize also traveled to these hotspot communities in order to understand the reality on the ground. Likewise in Belize high level diplomats, including the now Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, Mr. Carlos Raul Morales together with Parliamentarians visited the Chiquibul Forest where FCD was able to demonstrate the impacts on the ground and the urgent need for further collaborations. In addition, FCD's educator in Guatemala continued to communicate with local leaders and organize clean up campaigns for the protection of the shared watersheds.



On the 24<sup>th</sup> of January, 2014 a roadmap for the strengthening of the bilateral relations was signed by both Belize and Guatemalan governments and as we close this year it is expected that a MOU for the protection of the environment will be signed. FCD participated on the design of this MOU and has high expectations of furthering linkages.

# Visibility to New Limits



**This** year two major events took place that mobilized many persons to understand and feel the true importance of the Chiquibul Forest. But these events could never have been possible without the dedication of volunteers and core champions of Chiquibul. The two events were a phenomenal success thanks to the American Adventure Sport in organizing the Maya Mountains Adventure Challenge and to the Friends of Chiquibul for organizing the Park Ranger Program Telethon.

After 2 years of planning, this February a three day adventure challenge took more than 50 international athletes to race across the Mountain Pine Ridge and Chiquibul Forest. The many hours of footage recorded has helped create a 45 minute promotional video of the athletes traversing the wilderness areas of the Maya Mountains as they biked, canoed, rappelled and hiked. The video also makes a call for support to FCD as it moves forward to protect the Chiquibul Forest despite all the adversaries. Doug Chrysler, owner of American Adventure Sport firmly believes that the Chiquibul Forest provides the true spirit of adventure and beauty and we expect to continue working with him with the zeal of opening Chiquibul as a destination for adventure racing. The race to take place every two years in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains will raise further visibility of this jungle and its wildlife.



Then in October the Park Ranger Program Telethon was conducted in Belize City thanks to Mrs. Valerie Woods and the Friends of the Chiquibul which included all the media houses, entire families, friends and supporters. By the end of the telethon hundreds of persons throughout Belize participated by donating funds to help FCD hire more park rangers. FCD considers this event one of the most successful activities undertaken since the life of FCD due to the outpour of public support, confidence and enthusiasm. From the little girl with her piggy bank making her donation on stage and BECOL with \$25,000.00, and all the others who gave with the aspiration of securing the Chiquibul Forest, we remain extremely grateful and humbled. As a result, as we close the year FCD has received over 105 applicants to the ranger force. Only 18 will be selected and we are ready to launch a new year with renewed energy, multiple sponsors and high expectations.

# Chiquibul Protection Program Telethon Sponsors



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FCD is extremely grateful to each one of our corporate sponsors and all the many other individuals that provided their financial support to the Park Ranger Program.

# Board and FCD Staff

## MISSION STATEMENT

*Friends for Conservation and Development is a non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to motivate the public to protect the environment through conservation awareness while enhancing the development of the human resource.*

### BOARD

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Mr. Victor Alegria – Vice President  
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Dr. Isabelle Durant – Director  
Major Oscar Mira – Director  
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Miss Nidia Panti - Director

### STAFF

Rafael Manzanero, Executive Director	Amparito Itza, Admin Assistant (Until August)
Derric Chan, CNP Manager	Boris Arevalo, Biologist/Station Manager
Arnoldo Melendez, Extension Technician	Luceli Itza, Admin Assistant
Veronica Avila, E. Educator	Nidia Panti, Accounts Clerk (From July)
Elica Chan, E. Educator (Until May)	Gliss Penados (From November)
Joseph Hendrikx, Project Manager (From Dec)	
Jose Sierra, Chief Ranger (Until May)	Marco Diaz, Chief Ranger
Sylvester Choc, CNP Ranger	Hilberto Rash, CNP Ranger (Until May)
Guillermo Chuc, CNP Ranger (Until Feb)	Marvin Puc, CNP Ranger
Carlos Cocom, Chief Ranger	Benjamin Cal, CNP Ranger
Demery Harris, CNP Ranger	Jose Valdez (From November)
Wilford Pook, CNP Ranger (From July)	Wendy Garcia, CCS Ranger (From Dec)
Heronimo Castillo, CNP Ranger (From Dec)	Ismael Williams, CCS Ranger (From Dec)
Elroy Reyes Jr., Research Assistant	Gabriel Lopez, Research Assistant (From Nov)
Francisco Galicia: Research Assistant	Roberto Tzib, Research Assistant
Pedro Bol, Research Station Caretaker	Rafael Mesh, Assistant Station Manager
Evelyn Magana, Janitor (From June)	Arturo Hernandez (Until October)

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