

FCD Tracks

The Official E-Bulletin of Friends for Conservation and Development
September 2024, Issue #52



Photo by Kyle Voyles

Forging Connections in a Living Landscape

In This Issue

UB-ERI/FCD Partnership

Page 2

Courtesy Visit with MFA

Page 2

Macaw Educator Hired

Page 2

Outreach in Rural Belize

Page 3

Tree Planting on National Service Day

Page 3

Scarlet Macaw 2024 Results

Page 3

Chiquibul Water Healthy

Page 4

GFI Support Highlighted

Page 4

FCD Awarded

Page 4

Cultural Heritage in Park



The FCD Karst Management Unit (KMU) has an ongoing exciting program of findings and discoveries in the Chiquibul National Park. Walking through the jungle, it is thrilling as Maya mounds and ancient water reservoirs appear. Signs of looting are obvious, however, the remnants

of the ancient Maya civilization sets anyone on a quest for discovery at every corner.

The KMU focuses on monitoring and inventorying natural and cultural features in the Chiquibul National Park to help in defining management strategies. The monitoring efforts specifically target hotspot areas prone to looting with the aim of reducing human impacts on the cultural history.

By the end of August, thirty blocks north of the Chiquibul National Park were identified and documented, revealing 112 cultural features. The raw data recovered, and photos were sent to the Institute of Archaeology who is the national agency responsible for cultural heritage. FCD has also maintained communication with the National Biodiversity Office. The accumulation of data over the years by the KMU has helped deepen our understanding of the past cultural heritage and validate the richness of the Chiquibul National Park. No doubt that the features in the park are singular and of global importance.

Addressing Cattle Ranching

Cattle ranching is a primary driver of deforestation in tropical countries. In the Chiquibul National Park and Caracol Archaeological Reserve, approximately 814 hectares have been converted into pasture lands by Guatemalan ranchers using local, poor peasants from communities located along the western border. These local villagers originally were involved mainly in crop production but over the years a change in land use practice has become evident.

To address the impacts of cattle ranching, FCD through a joint force effort has been documenting and advocating for an effective strategy that can ultimately contain the advancement of this anthropogenic activity. The Rio Blanco, Cebada, Valentin and Caballo Conservation Posts, located on hotspot areas along the 35 km of border frontier have become the main frontline for this effort. Constant patrols, serve as a deterrence, while direct interventions help recover the territory.



During the month of September, two operations targeted the removal of fences in central and southern Chiquibul. A cattle corral of approximately 100 meters long with an area of some 625 square meters was destroyed. The area targeted is both rugged and distant even for military troops and park rangers, whose task is to reclaim areas of the park that have been converted into pastureland.

UB-ERI/FCD Partnership



One of the activities described in the UNDP GEF6 Project titled, “Integrated Management of Production Landscapes to deliver multiple Global Environmental Benefits”, is the development of a capacity development gap analysis which will essentially assess capacity needs of public, communities, and private agencies to improve

monitoring and enforcement and in addressing land use conflicts.

At a working session held in August, Dr. Jake Snaddon, Director of the University of Belize - Environmental Research Institute (UB-ERI) agreed to partner with FCD in developing this assessment. UB-ERI in their capacity will develop a methodology and workplan to meet the assignment. The workplan will have specific goals to be achieved, assessment methodologies, timetable, and projected budget.

The culmination of the final assessment document will among other components, identify Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) of importance to the targeted communities in the Belize River, identify capacity gaps and challenges among the targeted communities in conducting monitoring of the GEBs identified and make recommendations and specific actions for community involvement.

Courtesy Visit with MFA



On the 2nd of September FCD’s Executive Director and the Chiquibul National Park Manager visited Honorable Mr. Francis Fonseca, Minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade at his office in the capital city of Belmopan. The purpose of the visit was to highlight the status of the Chiquibul National Park which is under recovery after a steady and persistent effort. Reclamation of the ecosystem has been documented since 2015; however, there are still environmental threats registered, namely cattle ranching, gold panning and illegal wildlife trade.

Minister Fonseca, who is also the Minister responsible for the Institute of Archaeology (IA) was presented with a framed image of the majestic and unique Chiquibul Caverns. FCD has been managing the Chiquibul Caverns since 2008 under a co-management agreement and is seeking to expand the collaboration with the Institute of Archaeology as it further advances exploring and conducting inventorying of cultural heritage across the expanse of the Chiquibul National Park.

In 2008, with activation of the co-management agreement of the caverns, which are known to be the longest in Central America with 65 km of known passageways, Dr. Jaime Awe, the then Director of IA, advocated for this system to be nominated as a World Heritage Site. Minister Fonseca agreed that this nomination should further be pursued together with the IA.

Macaw Educator Hired



During the month of August, Ms. Ornella Cadle from the community of Independence was hired as a Community Outreach Technician with the important task of reaching out to five communities and key stakeholders in the Eastern Maya Mountains with the objective of advocating for the protection of scarlet macaws that spend five months in the communities of Red Bank and adjacent areas feeding on threatened forest stands such as Polewood and Coffee tree.

The slogan of the campaign is, “Together We Soar, Together We Thrive.”

In this part of the country, macaws that travel from the Chiquibul annually, find themselves with limited habitat to feed. Yet they take the route annually, as they have done for decades. With the expansion of communities and mechanized agriculture, several remaining blocks of feeding trees are at the mercy of being removed. This reality spiraled the creation of the Southern Mo’h Working Group with representatives from the Government and community leaders with the objective of advocating for the protection of this species.

The Working Group recommended the need for reaching out and sensitizing local villagers about the delicate status of macaws among the children, youth and adults as well as to investigate the possibility of designating a wildlife sanctuary for these birds.

Since joining FCD, Ms. Cadle has developed a workplan, developed educational materials, visited community leaders and is organizing school visits.

Outreach in Rural Belize



FCD's Environmental Educator has been busy visiting communities in the lower Belize River Valley as part of the UNDP Global Environmental Facility Project. This multi-year project has the purpose of supporting the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation and

sustainable land/water management into production landscapes in Belize, with FCD centering its effort in promoting community outreach and participation among 13 communities.

By the end of September, an overall total of 1,035 children, over 200 youths and 150 adults have been sensitized in 12 of the 13 communities. Through a 45-minute presentation, titled, "Healthy River, Healthy Environment, Healthy People," the children have been made aware of the importance of the Belize River, the threats the water resource faces and ways to protect it. These school visits have been possible through the continued support from the Belize District Education Center. Meanwhile to reach out to the adult population, a house-to-house approach has been taken with support from staff of the Community Baboon Sanctuary. The communities visited included St. Paul's/Willow's Bank, Double Head Cabbage, Bermudian Landing, Isabella Bank and Flower's Bank.

Vision:

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

Board of Directors

President:

Mrs. Susana Vanzie

Vice-President:

Dr. Elma Kay

Treasurer:

Mrs. Tanya Santos-Neal

Secretary:

Mrs. Valerie Woods-Smith

Director:

Mr. Mick Fleming

Director:

Mr. Mark Wilkins

Tree Planting on National Service Day

During the month of September, the Environmental Club from Valley of Peace SDA Academy celebrated and commemorated National Service Day 2024 in the village of Valley of Peace, honoring the legacy of the Father of the Nation, Right Honorable George Cadle Price, by planting 10 Inga seedlings at two primary schools.

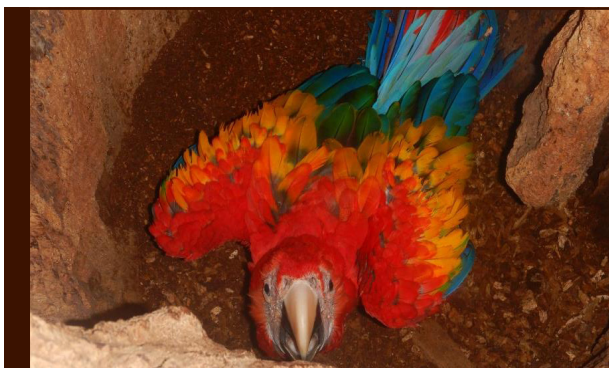
FCD supported this initiative through the donation of the seedlings from the community forest nursery located at Valley of Peace. This restoration exercise was organized and guided by the Academy's faculty and staff. Through this initiative students showed a tremendous civic pride, demonstrating the importance of National Service Day and the value of giving back to their community.

The nursery is being funded by the UNDP GEF Project led by the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Climate Change. Through a partnership agreement the Academy is



responsible for the day-to-day care of the seedlings. FCD's Extension Technician, on the other hand, provides capacity building, guidance and oversight.

Scarlet Macaw 2024 Results



The macaw nesting season for 2024 has concluded successfully with 28 chicks successfully fledging and integrating to the wild population of Scarlet Macaws. Despite this year not being able to do the antipoaching effort, the number of fledglings into the wild was higher than other years. The report developed by FCD's Biodiversity Research,

Inventory and Monitoring (BRIM) Technician notes that a total of 21 active nests were systematically monitored. Out of the 37 eggs that hatched, only a total of 19 chicks fledged from natural cavities which is equivalent to a 51.35% fledging rate. A total of 9 chicks (21.62%) fledged from the In-Situ laboratory. The average number of fledglings per nest was 1.72. A total of 11 Scarlet Macaw nests (52.38%) produced natural fledglings while a total of 5 nests (23.81%) did not produce any naturally occurring fledging since chicks were extracted and hand reared at the In-Situ Laboratory, while 5 other nests (23.81%) had natural nest failure.

To continue the effectiveness of this research effort, FCD is recommending the development of a long-term management agreement with the Belize Forest Department for ongoing biomonitoring of macaw nests and In-situ Laboratory efforts. As well it is vital to obtain access of the Chiquibul Forest Reserve hotspot areas through the Belize Forest Department and the National Biodiversity Office in order to conduct antipoaching activities.

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

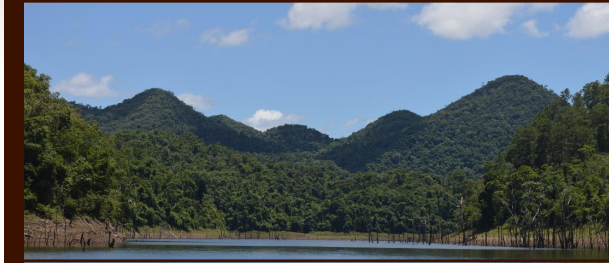
Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

Chiquibul Water Healthy



One of the seven conservation targets identified in the Chiquibul National Park Management Plan, includes Aquatic Systems, therefore, it is necessary to assess the conditions of the water resources in order to gauge the conditions of the park.

The Research Unit of FCD has the role of measuring and assessing the conservation targets based on scientific, reliable methods. For Aquatic Systems, the Unit uses macro-invertebrate studies and water quality testing. The recent study released by the

The Global Financial Integrity (GFI) is a non-governmental organization based in Washington implementing the project, "Increasing DRM by Promoting Corporate, Natural Resource and Professional Integrity." In Belize, FCD has partnered with GFI on a three-year project. The assistance from GFI provides for our technical staff to collect data and analyze the results of human encroachments in the Chiquibul National Park, including cattle ranching and illegal wildlife trade.

As a result of this assistance, and that from the US Department of the Interior- International Technical Assistance Program and the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT), FCD has been able to validate that as of October 11, 2023, approximately 1,927.38 hectares (4,762.66 acres) of tropical broadleaf were being encroached for agricultural purposes in the Chiquibul National Park and the Caracol Archaeological Reserve. Of this, approximately 813.7 hectares (2,010.69 acres) of tropical broadleaf forest was being actively encroached for cattle ranching. On average up to 83 cattle fences were documented.

FCD Awarded



FCD was honored, awarded and recognized for the category of "organization" for its contributions and dedication to protecting and advocating for Belize's water resources as part of World Water Day 2024 celebrated on March 22nd.

Research Unit titled, "An assessment of In-Situ Physiochemical Water Quality Parameters in Streams of the Chiquibul Ecosystem and the Bald Hills," shows that the measured water quality physiochemical parameters of the headwaters in the Chiquibul ecosystem were for the most part consistent with a healthy aquatic system. The Raspaculo and the Macal River, while still healthy, did present data that are consistent with environmental impacts caused by the Chalillo hydro reservoir.

Water Quality monitoring, especially in these ecologically sensitive areas, is of utmost importance to determine if conservation efforts are sufficient to address, and to determine if interventions are necessary to mitigate these impacts and protect the ecological integrity of the Raspaculo River and the surrounding Chiquibul region. Overall, the Chiquibul boasts a healthy aquatic system that maintains a balance on the water quality parameters, supporting diverse and productive ecosystems. Regular monitoring and management regimes are, however, essential to maintain these conditions and address any deviations that may indicate environmental stress or degradation.

GFI Support Highlighted



During the month of September, GFI representative in Belize, Mr. Leon Dawson led a meeting with the Ambassador of Norway to Belize, Mrs. Ragnild Imerslund, where FCD presented results of the data collection which is funded by Norway through GFI. Ambassador Imerslund was pleased to know of the assistance provided and of the important data being collected which helps in defining strategies for the protection of the Chiquibul National Park.

The award was presented by Mrs. Tennielle Hendy, Principal Hydrologist from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Petroleum and Mining. FCD's water conservation efforts, which span over two decades, has been made possible through the collaboration of multiple agencies, private sector institutions, and communities in both Belize and Guatemala.

In 1989, FCD, then known as the Youth Environmental Action Group galvanized a youth movement, whose main mission was to promote love for the land. Civic duties included clean up campaigns and reforestation along the Mopan River. By the late 1990's a Belize Riverkeeper Program was started and later in 2007 a campaign for water conservation in three districts was launched. By 2009 a bi-national watershed alliance was instituted. FCD's advocacy strategy today centers on two main pillars: landscape management and watershed conservation, making water conservation a key component of FCD's work.

For more information contact:

Friends for Conservation and Development
Chi-Hah Street, San José Succotz, Cayo District
Tel: 823-2657 • Email: fcd@btl.net • website: www.fcdbelize.org

E-Bulletin Funded by:

NTOTA
Nature Trust of The Americas, Inc