



30 Years of Core Conservation

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## Water Quality Testing in Guatemala



With support from GIZ Selva Maya not only are the youth in Belize conducting water quality of the Mopan River, but also a similar initiative is currently

underway in Peten, Guatemala. The Mopan River is a shared water resource with a diversity of threats ranging from erosion, sedimentation and other human induced practices that are altering the water quality. We can merely deduct the condition of the river at this time but no concrete data is there to corroborate the state.

During the month of September volunteers from the youth group from Melchor de Mencos, *Todos Por Un Mundo Verde*, and *Asociacion Integral para la Proteccion, Restauracion y Manejo de las Cuencas Chiquibul y Mopan* undertook a training on how to collect data and use of equipment for water testing. The training was conducted by personnel from the Department of the Environment in Guatemala.

By October the volunteers started to collect information from three locations of the Mopan River. This is similar to what the FCD Environmental Youth Group is doing on the Belizean side. This project has a life of 6 months with GIZ Selva Maya, but we remain committed to see it get extended in time and throughout other sections of the Mopan River.

## Wildlife Camera Trapping Expands

Wildlife camera trapping was began in Chiquibul after more than 7 years of an absence of this type of research. But with the activation of a Forest Department project, subsidized under the Key Biodiversity Area, cameras were reincorporated once more. Later this year through a partnership with Panthera, the work has been sustained in the Chiquibul and in the Vaca Forest Reserve.

Collecting data on big mammals and their prey is an essential element to evaluating the state of wildlife species in the Chiquibul. The most recent Chiquibul National Park Management Plan, under review, has identified jaguar, tapir and peccaries as conservation targets. Thus, the camera traps is an adequate method to conduct the required research.

In the past there was a high risk of losing the cameras due to theft and destruction of these by poachers. But with the



containment of the human footprint by an increased patrol system undertaken by Park Rangers, there is a lessened probability of these losses.

## Preparing for 2021 Anti-Poaching



Earlier this year the Anti-Poaching Unit came into operation through the financial support from Harvest Caye Conservation Foundation. This Unit was created at FCD in order to address the illegal wildlife trafficking of scarlet macaws. For this year, the macaws have flown out

from their nests, but another breeding season is coming up. To prepare the Unit for next season, it became important for the Rangers to sharpen their skills on the use of Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART).

As a result during the month of November a two day training was conducted by FCD's Conservation Data Manager, Wilmer Guerra at Las Cuevas Research Station. SMART is used by Rangers every day to document their patrols and observations made regarding threats, encounters and any signs of impact. The Wildlife Conservation Society has been the prominent partner to FCD in building its capability to use SMART in the field. Blackviews are the main instruments used by Rangers to store their data, which subsequently is analysed by the Conservation Data Manager every two weeks.

## Partnering with Toucan Education Program

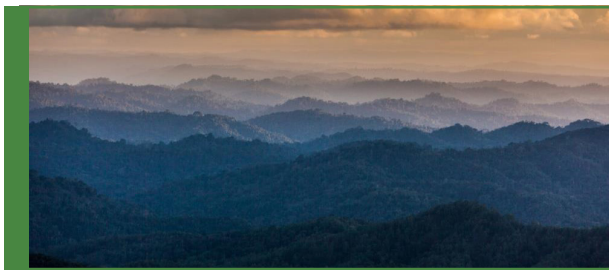
On the 15th of October FCD signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Toucan Education Program (TEP) for a duration of 3 years. TEP is an international education program administrator. Through impactful service, intentional learning and responsible exploration, students and faculty participate in a reciprocal educational process with the community that leads to an increase in valuing cultural, social, economic, and environmental collaboration. FCD and TEP entered into this Memorandum of Understanding to mutually promote and support educational activities related to natural resource management and environmental education with the focus on valuing, conserving, and protecting the cultural and natural resources.

Through the partnership FCD expects that TEP will strengthen the expertise of the FCD in administering natural resource management, protection, conservation, and sustainable development; promote the natural resources,



facilities, and programs administered by FCD for educational and experiential activities among North American students and professors; and support FCD in developing an outdoor environmental learning concept. Meanwhile FCD will collaborate with TEP in designing programs that value the management, conservation, protection, and sustainable development of cultural and natural resources; explore and provide opportunities for TEP staff to learn about natural resource management, and expose TEP staff and students to the wonders of the Chiquibul-Maya Mountain ecosystem.

## What is Landscape Management?



That has been a question lingering on the minds of FCD technicians, now more so when we often use the terminology, Western Chiquibul-Maya Mountains Landscape.

Zoe Walker of Wildtracks who conducted a one-day introductory training for FCD staff, and other invited guests from the National Biodiversity Unit, Economic Development Council and Bio-Fin noted that conservation has to move beyond single protected areas and biodiversity protection. This is imperative since 'Everything is connected - through water, through culture, through livelihoods.' A landscape approach provides 'overarching solutions to long-term, systems-level problems, which require leveraging a diversity

of resources, developing collective, landscape level goals, and providing leadership, planning, and actions that transcend organizational, land ownership, political, and jurisdictional boundaries.'

For FCD the landscape target includes the Chiquibul National Park, Chiquibul Forest Reserve, Caracol Archaeological Reserve, Vaca Forest Reserve and Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, as well as the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains Biosphere Reserve located in Southern Peten, Guatemala. A landscape approach here would mean a shift from single sector-orientated perspective towards an increasingly integrated planning perspective.

By the end of the training, it was agreed by consensus that an opportunity for putting into effect an integrated landscape approach would be timely in the Western Maya Mountains. Today, there is a Sustainable Development Plan, launched by the Government that speaks to the need for implementing that approach in the Chiquibul/Mountain Pine Ridge-Caracol Complex. FCD is keen in mobilizing the approach and is in the preparatory stage for developing a Landscape Management Action Plan.

## FCD's Advocacy Strategy Presented



By the end of October, Mr. David Gibson, Coordinator for the Centre for Strategic Studies, Policy Analysis and Research (CSSPAR) presented to FCD an Advocacy Strategy. CSSPAR is a registered, multi-disciplinary virtual 'think-tank', conducting research, and future oriented studies in

Belize. The strategy had been developed over a period of 5 months through the support of the US Department of the Interior-International Technical Assistance Program.

The strategy advocates for the Declaration of a protected landscape status for the Chiquibul National Park, Chiquibul Forest Reserve, Vaca Forest Reserve and Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve contiguous region; and related matters. The strategy is to guide and inform FCD's effective engagements targeted at influencing the public knowledge and opinion, and government's policies and best practices for the advancement of the protection of the Western Chiquibul-Maya Mountains.

The strategy also identifies headwater protection as a key and emotive pillar for urgent attention and conservation intervention across the targeted landscape and recommends the strengthening of local grassroot river conservation groups and to advocate for implementation of the Belize River Management Plan.

### Vision:

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

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## Ecotourism Development Strategy Finalized

The Eco-Tourism Development Strategy developed by FCD's Tourism Development Manager, Arlo Cansino, was specifically developed to identify needs and opportunities for launching of recreation activities in the Chiquibul Forest. The Las Cuevas Research Station was selected as the primary hub, but first the recommendations have been to upgrade the facilities and launch marketing materials that can attract local visitors. Local visitors, due to the COVID-19 that has kept foreign visitors away.

The recommendations follow the guidelines presented by Neil Rogers, who served as the principal consultant for the Tourism Enterprise Development Plan four years ago which provided all the steps to move forward the Chiquibul Forest into a wilderness destination. The Plan specifically recommended the upgrade of the Chiquibul Cabin into a comfortable stay at the heart of the Chiquibul jungles, and



on this regard FCD is pleased to inform that this is almost complete through the partnership made with The Nature Trust of the Americas.

## Research Field Camp Improved



On the next scarlet macaw season, volunteers assisting our research team will find an improved base camp where they will feel more secure and dry. For over the years, the Research staff have slept either in tents or hammocks and ate under a tarp. Rains are unpredictable, therefore many

times they have had to wallow in the mud as they moved around the camp. That is changing thanks to the financial support from Adventure Travel Conservation Fund (ATCF).

The funding provided has paid for improvements to the Research staff quarters at Las Cuevas Research Station, and more importantly provided for a non-permanent deck infrastructure to be constructed at the field base. Transporting materials up the Chalillo Lake proved to be difficult, but in the end with BECOL and FCD's skiffs, it was possible and construction was begun. With this deck installed, the Research team is able to erect their large tent inside the structure and enables them to keep themselves and their equipment dry above the ground.

The Research team spend up to 7 months conducting biological monitoring with the aim of protecting the young chicks. Earlier this year, FCD obtained 20 volunteers, who provided a critical helping hand for this effort.

## Red Bank Supports Macaws



The village of Red Bank is situated on the Eastern Maya Mountains in the Stann Creek District. It is unique since annually scarlet macaws from the Chiquibul fly over

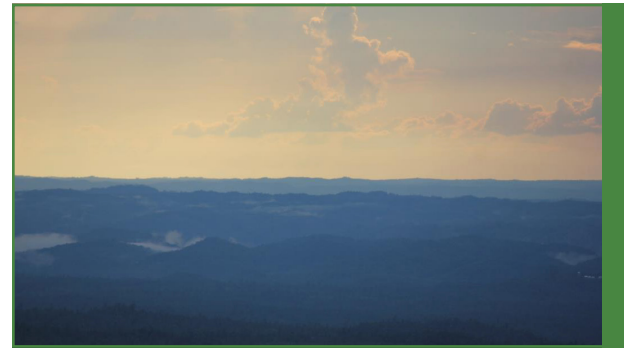
during the months of October to January in search of food. But food is getting scarcer as trees in the areas are being chopped. Forest fires also affected the macaw feeding areas this year.

But not all is grim as local people in the village of Red Bank are helping protect the feeding areas and conducting reforestation. Polewood is one of the favourite trees of the macaws and this is where Mr. Florentino Sub and his family are trying to make a difference. Mr. Sub depends on the macaws for tourism-based activities which he has established well in the village through a Bed and Breakfast initiative. Earlier in the year FCD supported Mr. Sub financially so that he could plant polewood. After six months we have found Mr. Sub growing seedlings of polewood and reforesting areas that were affected by fire. By November a total of 375 seedlings of polewood had been planted while 175 are yet pending.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Chiquibul Symposium Coming Up

The 1<sup>st</sup> Chiquibul Symposium was held in 2013. Thereafter in 2015, an update on the state of the Chiquibul was provided through a Press Conference. The Symposium brought to light the actual conditions of the Chiquibul ecosystem and helped galvanize public support for the protection of this majestic ecosystem. This time around, after 7 years, many things have changed and it is the aim of FCD to once more provide a status report to the general public, at home and abroad, to further strengthen public knowledge.

Apart from the status report which will be provided via Zoom to the public, FCD will also outline key recommendations. The date is tentatively set for the 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2021; therefore, we want to invite you as from



now to join us virtually. Don't miss it!!! Listen to your radio or follow our Facebook page for confirmation of the date.

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