

FCD Tracks

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Forging Connections in a Living Landscape

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AGM Conducted with Prime Minister



With over 100 attendees, FCD's 25th Annual General Meeting was successfully conducted on December 7th at San Ignacio Hotel Resort. FCD's Executive Director and Programs Director introduced and summarized the achievements of the 2023-2024 period. An 8-minute video also highlighted the arduous work of the field staff who are now scattered throughout several protected areas including the Chiquibul National Park, Vaca Forest Reserve, Caracol Archaeological Reserve and Mountain Pine Ridge.

Guest Speaker, Prime Minister Hon. John Briceno, who attended the entire 2.5-hour event, described the work of FCD since 2006 when he first signed the first co-management agreement as Minister of Natural Resources. He recalled visiting the region with the late Sharon Matola and later as Opposition leader visiting the Natural Arch. He explained the importance of FCD's efforts and expressed his support for the protection of the border areas and understood the importance of landscape conservation in the western Maya Mountains.

Later in the meeting, FCD members endorsed the nomination and eventual endorsement of three new Board members, namely Dr. Dionne Chamberlain, Mr. Greg Maheia and Mr. Hector Guerra. With the incoming Board members FCD has acquired additional technical resources in social development, financing and legal affairs.

Awards were given to the Best Manager, Best Ranger and Best field staff in recognition of going beyond the expected duty. The event culminated with Dr. Elma Kay thanking the many organizations, foundations and individuals who have made the work possible this current period.

12 New Special Constables

Financed by the World Wildlife Fund, the Special Constable Training course started on the 9th of December for a period of 10 days. A three person staff comprised of Inspector of Police Gilbert Martinez, Corporal Teddy Teck and Sergeant Deshawn Garcia conducted the ten-day session. Some of the topics included the following: Constitutional Rights, Commissioner's Rules, Beat and Patrol, Observation and Perception and Principles of Criminal Liability.

To cover the Green Laws, FCD resorted to personnel from the regulatory agencies. On the 12th of December, Mrs. Victoria Chi-Cawich and Mrs. Mercedes Valdez of the Belize Forest Department discussed the Wildlife Protection Act. Then on the 13th of December, Mr. Kenrick Gordon of the Department of the Environment presented on the Environmental Protection Act. Finally, on the 17th of December, Mr. Saul Cruz, Director of the National Biodiversity Office presented on the National Protected Areas Systems Act.

By the end of the training Inspector Martinez summed up as follows the performance of the Rangers, "I'm really impressed with the guys. They are doing great and were all great



participants in the course. They perform better than trained Police and I love the way they testify. They are doing a superb job."

The closing of the course culminated with a short ceremony at Las Cuevas Research Station with the attestation of the Rangers.

FCD's 25th Anniversary Celebrated

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.



Twenty-five years ago, the name FCD became synonymous to a jumpstart of environmental protection in central Belize through the original efforts of a group of youths who had originally been called the Youth Environmental Action Group.

Since then, an evolution has been transpiring, described by FCD's Executive Director through a lengthy power-point presentation. This activity took place at Log Cabins Lodge on the afternoon of the 7th December.

It was 1999 when FCD held its first AGM. At this time, the organization was comprised of only volunteers. This period was marked with the establishment of institutional governance and networking. By 2005, the organization became registered and started to develop conservation projects. In 2007 and 2008, it then entered with formal arrangements with the government of Belize for natural and cultural protection. Since then, FCD has been consolidating its efforts in the western Maya Mountains, moving steadily towards meeting its mission of biodiversity protection and cultural preservation.

As part of the Anniversary event, Dr. Filiberto Penados welcomed the guests while Lenney Gentle gave the thankyou remarks. They both were pioneering members of the group. Awards for staff beyond their 10 years of service were handed over with gratitude for their commitment to FCD. The event was then followed with a social among staff, friends and guests.

Nurture It!! Campaign Expands



The Belize River outreach campaign continues to raise awareness amongst children, youths and adults from within

the 13 targeted communities along the Lower Belize River Valley. During the month of October alone, FCD's Environmental Educator reached out to the youth population by sensitizing high school students from the Valley of Peace S.D.A. Academy in Valley of Peace, the Cayo Christian Academy in Ontario and the Belize Christian Academy in Belmopan. A total of 89 youths (50 boys and 39 girls), mainly 2nd Forms students from among the 3 high schools visited have been informed on the threats the water resource faces and ways to protect through a 45-minute presentation titled: "Healthy River, Healthy Environment, Healthy People". This presentation was made possible with the continued support from the Cayo District Education Center –Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (MoECST). By the end of October 2024, a cumulative total of 1,035 children, 228 youths and over 140 adults are now aware of the Belize River benefits, impacts, and are more aware of the need to nurture the Belize River resources. This effort is made possible through the financial support from the United Nations Development Programme, GEF6 Project, led under the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Climate Change.

FCD Joins Archaeology Day

On October 18th, FCD's Cultural Heritage Technician and Environmental Educator partnered up with the Heritage Education Network Belize to participate on an educational exposition held at the Museum of Belize in Belize City to commemorate Archaeology Day 2024. Over 80 students from primary schools and high schools from Belize City along with teachers and other visitors were enlightened about the ancient Maya achievements with interactive informational booths displaying Hieroglyphics, Pottery Making, Research, Park Management and Archaeological enforcement. This event had the participation of NICH, the Institute of Social & Cultural Research, the Institute of Creative Arts – Belize, 501 Academy, Belize Maya Writing Club, San Antonio Women's Group, and the Ministry of Education Culture, Science and Technology (MoECST).

FCD's booth highlighted the karst formations in the Chiquibul National Park, the fauna and flora of the Chiquibul Cave System,



and cultural heritage efforts being conducted jointly with the Institute of Archaeology.

FCD Renews Agreement with Balam



On October 31st, a 5-year agreement was reached once more between Asociacion Balam and FCD which extends the work of collaboration until 2029. This provides for both organizations to jointly develop and implement strategies for the protection of the binational, biocultural Chiquibul-Maya Mountains

Landscape. The first agreement held by both organizations was started in 2011. At the time, the challenges were immense and diverse. Extraction of non-timber forest products, illegal logging and gold panning, all converged in making the Chiquibul too complicated to govern.

The work between Balam and FCD is now a center of studies, as we both identify the success stories, lessons learnt and key elements to success of the last 13 years. Led by Donald Perez, Secretary to the Inter-institutional Roundtable for the Environment and Land, the systematization exercise reveals that the threats have extensively been reduced, while tension and conflict along the Belize-Guatemala border have remained stable with no serious situation occurring since 2016. It is also clear that binational cooperation has been a key contributor to the reduction of conflict among communities on the adjacency zone, since joint actions, led by Balam and FCD have been able to build confidence through dialogue and exchange.

Vision:

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

Board of Directors

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Mrs. Susana Vanzie

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Dr. Elma Kay

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Mr. Mark Wilkins

The one-day training took place at Las Cuevas Research Station on the 19th of December. The session was imparted by Retired Colonel Javier Castellanos. The sessions imparted by the Retired Colonel included: Importance of Discipline, Importance of Teamwork (buddy system), Following Orders, Evaluating Performance, Setting/Developing Operational Goals, Building Trust and Importance of Hierarchy.

Twelve Rangers and other middle Managers attended the one-day course. By the end of the session, staff were able to understand the importance of learning new skills as they evolve on their environmental profession. At FCD, we acknowledge that environmental protection is more complex and that it requires multi-skill sets to perform well in the field. It has also been clear

Training for Leadership



at FCD that with more training and good performance, staff must accrue better benefits which ultimately helps in retaining adequate staff.

PACT Visits Chiquibul



Without a doubt the many achievements in protected area viability of the Chiquibul National Park and other areas

where FCD operates, has been possible due to the financial support of the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT). We were, therefore, excited and encouraged in facilitating a visit for the PACT staff which was aimed to hear more from FCD regarding project achievements and outputs.

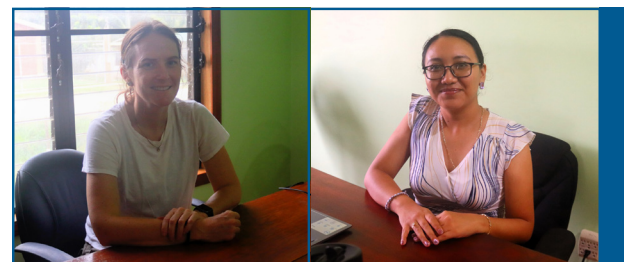
The site visit which was held in November, provided an opportunity for the PACT staff to visit Tapir Camp Conservation Post and Las Cuevas Research Station and met field staff on duty. The Programs Director and Finance Manager gave an overview of the project, while the Executive Director explained the challenges as well as overall achievements.

PACT has been a formidable supporter to FCD for more than 15 years. We are honored and extremely thankful for their continuous financial support.

During this quarter two important vacant posts have been filled at FCD. The first one was the Landscape Communications Technician. After a thorough interview phase, Ms. Kiria Chan was identified for the post. She was highly recommended by the National Biodiversity Office and the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Climate Change. Her understanding of proper communication with regulatory agencies gave her a plus for such a post.

Ms. Jane Champion was also hired to fill in the Destination Manager vacant post. She is the central person to lead the Las Cuevas Research Station into a new venture of research and education opportunities for students and professors. This comes at a time when the station is strengthening its outlook for core

New Staff Joins FCD



research. Ms. Champion has a background on primate research and has been organizing student groups previously. These skills will help drive Las Cuevas unto new frontiers.

River Protection Continues

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability



On the 4th of October a reunion was held with the Executive body of the Guatemalan Association for the Protection and Restoration of the Chiquibul and Mopan Rivers (ASIPROCOM) at the FCD Office. During this event, both FCD and ASIPROCOM went over the draft agreement that supports for the conservation and restoration of the Chiquibul-Mopan Rivers. After the review, copies of the agreements were printed and signed by Mr. Jose Mayen, President of ASIPROCOM and FCD's Executive Director.

This agreement binds both organizations for the next three years into coordinating and implementing river conservation activities. With financing from the USDOJ-International Technical Assistance Program, FCD has already a small fund that can enable cross border cooperation. The binational river conservation effort has its beginnings since 2008 with the participation of 19 communities whose goal was to generate public participation in protecting a shared resource. This remains the central focus of the agreement.

Atlas Arqueológico de Guatemala has been an integral part of FCD's binational partner, providing the Karst Management Unit with technical assistance in surveying and documentation of cultural sites.

As part of this collaboration, the KMU facilitated a binational exchange visit to Petén in partnership with, Atlas Arqueológico. The exchange emphasized practical hands-on training in archaeological surveying and documentation using established methodologies.

The exchange also provided an opportunity to immerse in the region's rich cultural heritage. The KMU, observed a traditional Mayan ceremony at Tikal, performed to ensure a productive crop season, and while on tour a lecture on architectural classifications of the Mayan era was discussed. Additionally, the four-person team toured the Tikal Museum, where they learnt identification and classification of ceramic types. This exchange served as a comprehensive learning opportunity,

Karst Team Visits Tikal



combining technical skills in documentation and archaeology with an appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Wildlife Returns at Cooma



Since nearly two years ago, FCD has been actively patrolling the Baldy Beacon area of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. The primary objective has been to assist the Forest Department in monitoring for wildfires, beetle infestations and illicit human activity. The presence of FCD Rangers has not only controlled the expansion of illegal activities in the reserve but has enabled for wild animals to feel safer.

Observations of white-tailed deer, armadillo and even big cats like puma and jaguar are more frequent. This is exciting news since at the time of FCD's arrival on location, wildlife observations were unknown of. Wildlife species are resilient and once they feel safe, without a doubt they start to come back and repopulate the habitat. Kudos to the FCD Ranger Unit for helping bring life back into these high elevated locations!!!

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