



Promoting Core Conservation

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EU FAO-FLEGT's Support Phenomenal



After an exhaustive 4 year effort combatting illegal logging in the Chiquibul National Park, Chiquibul Forest Reserve and Caracol Archaeological Reserve, FCD is better armed and knowledgeable on the methods required to address complex environmental problems. Thanks to the FAO/FLEGT Programme, who stayed with us and assisted in identifying and implementing strategies for four years, we have assimilated our experiences and reported to stakeholders the results of the financial and technical support. The closing

workshop took place on the 28th of January, followed by the production of a systematization booklet which tests 4 hypothesis and assumptions.

The support from FAO/FLEGT Programme took us to explore new areas and strengthened new platforms that are there to stay at FCD and in the Chiquibul jungles. These platforms includes, joint forces activities, conservation posts, targeted research, bi-national twin projects and inter-agency coordination among others. The systematization exercise undertaken by former Forest Officer, Mrs. Tanya Santos Neal, notes that, "The partnership between FCD and the EU FAO FLEGT Programme produced impactful, innovative results which demonstrate strength and creativity."

The Chiquibul Forest today is more silent and chainsaws are seldom heard. But FCD will remain attentive and vigilant. Special appreciation goes to Mr. Robert Simpson, EU FAO FLEGT Programme Manager and Mr. Claus Eckelmann, Regional Forestry Officer of the FAO for their confidence and support.

WKU Trains Karst Team

From the 11th to 13th of January the much awaited karst training was finally made possible by Dr. Jason Polk and Dr. Leslie North from the Center for Water Resource Studies of the Western Kentucky University. This time, apart from FCD personnel, we were joined by members of the Cayo Tour Guide Association and the National Institute of Culture and History.

The training which centered on karst inventory, survey, mapping techniques, and data entry provided the necessary tools and techniques for the karst unit to be more systematic in collecting data about the Chiquibul Cave System (CCS). Gliss Penados, who leads the karst unit, notes that the techniques learnt will help them better document what they see in the field and better organize data for management purposes. For the last 12 months,



the team has been gathering information about caves and sinkholes, thanks to a Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) grant but a platform for data entry had been missing. The Chiquibul Cave System Working Group agreed that one of the most important tasks is to better understand the system and members of this group have pledged to form a volunteer Cave Mapping team to support the karst Unit at FCD.

Rangers Undergo Training

Like last year, the FCD Park Rangers underwent a rigorous training during the month of January to help them sharpen their skills in green laws, tactical interventions, first aid and rescue. These park rangers, comprise the largest number of staff at FCD whose main duty is to protect biodiversity in the Chiquibul Forest. Although our focal area is the Chiquibul National Park, over the years the rangers have always assisted regulatory agencies in the Caracol Archaeological Reserve and the Chiquibul Forest Reserve. These three protected areas totals over 423,000 acres of tropical forest and 7.7% of Belize's land mass. Training is vital not only to prepare them to survive and protect the flora and fauna, but also serves to evaluate the standards of rangers and identify areas for improvement.

FCD has the opportunity to formulate a specific ranger training program applicable to our own circumstances since it is implemented by our very own instructors that are part of the ranger staff. FCD also partnered with the Belize Association of Search and Rescue (BASAR) to conduct the training. To cap this up, we had Richard Pyshorn of Survival Wisdom from the United Kingdom who is a seasoned instructor and was an observer at the Course.



The Park Ranger Tactical Rescue Medic Course ran for 7 days and involved over 12 rangers, 4 Forest Officers and 2 from the Institute of Archaeology (IoA). This marked the first time that other institutions were invited to join the ranger training which took place at Tapir Camp. At the end the rangers were scored on their performance and awarded. Chief Ranger Marco Diaz was the top overall student, followed by Ranger Ellsworth Sutherland and IoA Park Warden Felix Cruz. Diaz is now preparing to represent FCD proudly at the Ranger Congress to be held in Denver, Colorado during the month of May.

Dry Weather Means *Milpas*

The expansion of the agricultural frontier in the Chiquibul Forest is a chronic and devastating threat. Agricultural encroachments started to appear after 1980 and increased slowly up to 2000; highest expansion occurred from 2004 (1,290 ha.) to 2010 (3,547 ha.) translating into an increase of 175% in just 6 years reaching a total deforested area of 3,615 hectares (8,932.86 acres) by 2013 and 3,773 hectares by 2015. Projection models suggest that by the year 2050, 8,377 ha. of the Chiquibul Forest will be converted to agriculture once no effective interventions are put in place. This

projection represents a 131% increase in deforested area from 2013 to 2050 (a period of 37 years).

Thanks to a US Fish and Wildlife Service grant, FCD is now more focused in addressing this problem. Aerial flights shows that with the onset of the dry weather, farmers have started to slash and burn the forest primarily on the southern region of the Chiquibul where a presence is minimal due to the remoteness of the area. Recent patrols, however, have detained Guatemalan farmers and these have been processed in court.



To understand more the magnitude of the problem Minister of State for the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Honorable Dr. Omar Figueroa and his Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Colin Young joined FCD on a flight over the Chiquibul Forest. FCD's recommendation include mobilization of more man-power to combat the agricultural expansion and start off patrols along the border as early as November in order to prevent deforestation. FCD also recommends the urgent installation of the Cebada Conservation Post to control expansion of *milpas* and marijuana fields in southern Chiquibul.

AGM Elects New Board

Before the end of every year, there is an agitation of activities at FCD in preparation for the Annual General Meeting. This year our 16th AGM was held on the 5th of December, 2015 thanks to the sponsorship of the San Ignacio Resort Hotel. The event brought together our members and supporters for an evening of activities that ended with the election of new Board members.

FCD's Executive Director Rafael Manzanero gave a synopsis of achievements for the 2014-2015 period and highlighted the development of the strategic plan which will drive FCD's activities for the next 5 years. Park Ranger Benjamin Cal was awarded the Ranger of the Year Award and he gave an illustrated summary of the efforts ongoing in the Chiquibul National Park. FCD was honored to have as Guest Speaker, High Commissioner Mr. Peter Hughes of the British Embassy in Belize. HC Hughes described the financial support of his Government to FCD that has helped forge partnerships in Guatemala and strengthened confidence building among local people over the last 4 years. He reiterated the importance of FCD's work in the Chiquibul and felt that with

the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy initiative that was launched By Queen Elizabeth II, forest areas like the Chiquibul will have a higher level of visibility and support.

FCD members then had the opportunity to elect new Board members. This resulted in the conformation of a 7 person team consisting of Dr. Filiberto Penados, Major Oscar Mira (Retired), Mr. Wiezsman Pat, Dr. Isabelle Durand, Mrs. Susana Vanzie Canton, Mr. Jose Awe and Mr. Jorge de Leon.



FCD Reports To The Nation



Two years ago FCD held the Chiquibul Symposium then later a Chiquibul Telethon in order to raise visibility of the problems taking place in the Chiquibul and to generate public support for the protection of this key biodiversity area. To maintain the public informed, Mrs. Valerie Smith facilitated a Press Conference on the 16th December, 2015 in Belize City. A three person panel comprised of FCD's Executive Director, the Park Manager and Biologist described the actual conditions, interventions underway and the achievements so far. The report explained that *xatero*, illegal logging and pet trade activity was generally contained but

that expansion of the agricultural frontier and gold panning remained being the two primary threats to Chiquibul's biodiversity.

The telethon held in October 2014 was instrumental in multiplying the number of rangers from 6 to 18, and it was this increase of rangers that had alleviated part of the incursion problems. Much of the success was, therefore, due to the Telethon supporters and undoubtedly FCD remains thankful to all individuals, companies and organizations that participated.

FCD's good performance continues growing and this has also been possible through the support of Asociación Balam and other counterparts in Southern Peten, Guatemala. By December 2015, Zoe Walker of Wildtracks presented to FCD the overall scoring card of FCD's performance in management effectiveness for 2015. She wrote, "average assessment scores have shown an increasing trend in the management effectiveness rating from 2006 to 2015, from 1.61 (40.3%) to 3.14 (78.5%), demonstrating that Chiquibul National Park has benefitted significantly from the FCD co-management partnership."

FCD Programs

Protection & Enforcement

Community Development

Bi-national Relations

Education & Public Awareness

Karst Management

Research & Monitoring

Landscape Management

Monitoring & Evaluation

Financial Sustainability

FCD And Balam Sign Agreement



The Commonwealth of Municipalities of Southern Peten (ManMuniSurP) is comprised of five municipalities, namely Melchor de Mencos, Dolores, El Chal, Poptun and San Luis. These municipalities contain villages and farms that are located adjacent to Belize's western border. For this reason, both Asociacion Balam and FCD signed

an agreement in 2013 with four municipal alcaldes of the ManMuniSurP aimed at reducing tensions amongst communities on the adjacent border and working together to protect the Chiquibul Maya Mountains ecosystem.

On the latter part of 2015 with the election of new leaders, the ManMuniSurP leadership changed and thus it was necessary to revisit the agreement. Fortunately enough, the new leaders recognized the importance of the private public partnership and agreed to have a new agreement signed with Balam and FCD for a period of four years. So it came to be that on the 16th of February, a new agreement was signed in San Luis marking another age of collaborations. This agreement enables FCD to plan, strategize and promote socio-economic and environmental programs in Southern Peten that can help reduce further incursions from Guatemalans into Belize.

Vaca Forest Reserve Revisited

The Vaca Forest Reserve buffers the Chiquibul National Park to the north and has been an area of interest to FCD since 2005. With support from the Global Environmental Facility/Small Grant Programme we started to work with 22 farmers which culminated in the creation of the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve. Subsequently the GIZ Selva Maya project funded us for one year; however, rather unfortunately after January 2014, we were unable to continue working with farmers due to lack of funds. After 15 months of absence, a reunion was held with the farmers to understand the actual conditions in the reserve. In attendance were members of the Belize Forest Department who pledged to support the work of farmers in the reserve and to regularize their stay. Deputy Chief Forest Officer, Mr. Marcelo Windsor acknowledged the important work of the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve who have kept away from expanding any farmlands in the reserve and instead have even recovered areas that were previously denuded.

Farmers have asked for an official permit to remain in the reserve and are aware of the special



conditions inherent to a permit. FCD supports this concept since this is a pragmatic approach for the protection of the reserve. Vaca farmers have proven that they can protect the resources but will need to build their capacities. Community concessions can occur, but there must be a system of support, oversight and monitoring to ensure compliance. Over the next few months, FCD expects to heighten its work once more in the reserve with the aim of strengthening the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve and continue instilling in them a concept of stewardship.

International Athletes Race



In February 2014, the first ever Maya Mountains Adventure Challenge Race brought together more than 40 athletes from the USA, Holland, Ecuador and Belize. But this was not to be the last. February 2016 promised to be more competitive in adventure racing. Why? Because the adventure race was elevated to a world-series event. This time over 50 athletes competed for the coveted

prize that would carry them into extraordinary and exceptional locations of the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains. And this time FCD's team competed on the 4 person Elite category.

The race consisted of over 340 kilometers; included canoeing, rafting, hiking, running, biking, rappelling, orienteering and navigation. The race which started and ended at Cahal Pech took athletes into Xunantunich, El Pilar, Mountain Pine Ridge, Chiquibul National Park, Caracol and Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve.

FCD's team led by Park Manager, Derric Chan included Park Ranger Jose Sierra, Biologist Boris Arevalo and Belize Defence Force Officer Gina Lovell. We are grateful to all the sponsors of the FCD Team *Chiquibul Grisons* including Belize Tourism Board, San Ignacio Resort Hotel, Chaa Creek Resort, Cayo Tour Guide Association and Hun Chiik Tours.

Trainer In Action

Richard Pyshorn of Survival Wisdom preparing training gear at Tapir Camp, Chiquibul National Park. His years of experience as a Jungle Warfare Instructor in Belize inspired him to establish Survival Wisdom, a Cornwall based survival training school. Richard's goal is to design and deliver the essential Forest Safety & Survival program that will significantly lower the risks faced by the FCD rangers.

Survival Wisdom's involvement in the FCD Park Ranger Training was made possible by a kind donation from Mr Paul Lister. FCD is grateful to Mr. Lister for this support.



E-Bulletin Funded by



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Protected Areas Conservation Trust

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