

FCD Tracks

The Official E-Bulletin of Friends for Conservation and Development
June 2026, Issue #59

Forging Connections in a Living Landscape

In This Issue

High Level Visits
at Las Cuevas

Page 2

Binational Taskforce
Meets

Page 2

BDF Partnership
Strengthened

Page 2

What Next in
Protecting The
Mopan?

Page 3

FCD Partners
with Hydro Belize

Page 3

Greening Belize
MoU

Page 3

Meeting Succotz
Tour Guides

Page 4

Post Survey
Conducted

Page 4

BNCF Project
Starts

Page 4

Prime Minister Visits Chiquibul



On the 29th of May, FCD had the honor of welcoming Prime Minister Hon. John Briceno, Minister of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Solid Waste Management, Hon. Orlando Habet, and his CEO Ms. Milagro Matus to the Chiquibul National Park. Other important authorities included Acting Chief Forest Officer, Mr. John Pinelo, Chief Environmental Officer, Mr. Anthony Mai, Director of National Biodiversity Office, Mr. Saul Cruz, PACT Director, Mr. Abil Castaneda, FCD's President

Ms. Susana Vanzie and Dr. Melissa Badillo, Director of the Institute of Archaeology.

The Prime Minister was the guest speaker at the Official Launch of the FCD Ranger Base Initiative, who reiterated the Government of Belize's support for the ongoing efforts of FCD on its quest to protect the Chiquibul National Park. FCD's Executive Director outlined next steps and recommendations noting that regarding the permanent establishment of the Ranger headquarters a development plan will be developed for endorsement by the Department of the Environment and a site reconnaissance together with the Belize Defence Force and the National Biodiversity Office for selection of best location for installation of the Ranger base will be required. The event highlighted the actual situation of the Rangers, necessitating for a more suitable building as the main hub for deployment of rangers to five conservation posts.

This event was made possible with support from Astrum, who flew via helicopter the Prime Minister to the location and to CEO Milagro who supported the event with the presence of her heads of department.

Las Cuevas Commission Launched

With a new 10-year agreement in place for management and administration of Las Cuevas Research Station (LCRS), FCD is excited in boosting the station as a vibrant research facility in the Western Maya Mountains. In line with this vision, FCD has activated a Research Advisory Commission whose purpose is to guide and where applicable support and promote research initiatives undertaken at Las Cuevas Research Station, ensuring they align with both academic standards and conservation goals of the station. The members to this collaboration will also help promote and support actions relevant to the sustainable management, development and mission of the LCRS.

Member academic institutions on this Commission include the University of California – Davis, University of Southampton, Durham University, University of California – Merced, Wheaton College, University of Belize – ERI and Rice University. These institutions have had a long-standing relationship with Las Cuevas for many years conducting research and teaching ecology and biology modules.



The first session held in June introduced the members, reviewed the Terms of Reference, provided an overview of the management agreement and discussed the LCRS Newsletter design. The second session is scheduled for December.

High Level Visit at Las Cuevas



On the 10th of June FCD welcomed the British High Commissioner, Mr. Alistair White and his technical staff at Las Cuevas Research Station, on an exploratory visit

to partner on a new initiative, Red Box for Habitats: A UK–Belize Nature Partnership.

This initiative utilises one of the UK's most iconic symbols, the red telephone box, as miniature bird feeders to be installed across Belize's protected areas. The campaign will roll out 12 installations nationally, celebrating the UK–Belize partnership in protecting biodiversity while supporting public engagement and conservation storytelling. As a Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC) Site, the Chiquibul National Park is an ideal location for the UK-Belize Nature Partnership, and as a co-manager we are pleased that the park is being selected as one of 12 sites. The QCC was launched at the 2015 Malta Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, becoming the first environmental initiative in The Late Queen's name. The project ended in 2022, after pan-Commonwealth sign-up was achieved.

During the visit High Commissioner White toured the research facility, visited the Cave and Maya mounds found in the area.

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.

Binational Taskforce Meets

The first meeting for this year of the Binational Illegal Wildlife Trade Taskforce was held at the Log Cabin Resort. Attending were representatives of the Forest Department, National Biodiversity Office, Institute of Archaeology, Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas, Wildlife Conservation Society (Belize), Asociacion Balam and FCD.

At the working session FCD's Executive Director explained the beginnings of this initiative that started more than 10 years ago. At the time, the Wildlife Conservation Society in Guatemala chaired the taskforce, financed by the UKAid/Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. At the end of the project, the taskforce became dormant. FCD initiated the taskforce once more after a few years since it saw the benefits of a transborder cooperation particularly at a time when illegal trade in timber and non-timber forest products including scarlet macaws remained a major threat of forest degradation in the Chiquibul ecosystem.

Today, illegal wildlife trade on timber species is prevalent in the Columbia River Forest Reserve, while a resurgence



of illegal activities is observed in the Chiquibul. Poaching of wild species appears to be building, scarlet macaws are still targeted although not as impactful as other previous years while the search for copal resin is becoming a new sought wild product.

BDF Partnership Strengthened



Since 2007 the Belize Defence Force (BDF) has been an essential partner in patrolling the Chiquibul National Park. Most of the area is rugged and access to the several conservation posts is generally by foot. Arduous hours are taken to reach the destination points. In many ways FCD and the BDF share the pains of protecting this large portion

of land which represents 5.5% of the country's land surface. Camp Belizario located in the Cayo District is the home of the Infantry Unit in Central Belize. With the changing of a new Commander, FCD was honored of hosting the new Commanding Officer at the FCD headquarters. This working session held in June with FCD's Executive Director and the Park Manager was an opportunity to describe the various threats facing the Chiquibul ecosystem, limitations and challenges facing the patrol units and recommended steps to improve joint patrols. BDF Officers reiterated their commitment to continue working in support of the Ranger Units which operate at the Conservation Posts. These posts are located along the western flank of the park, facing towards Guatemala.

In 2019 a Joint Forces Protocol was signed among security agencies and FCD which serves as the main platform binding the two organizations in protecting Belize's natural and cultural heritage.

What Next in Protecting The Mopan?



With The Nature Conservancy (TNC) financial support FCD has ended successfully an eight-month campaign “Voices of the Watershed”, which saw the activation of the Binational Watershed Alliance. The Alliance brings together 19 communities from both Belize and Guatemala with

the common goal of protecting the Chiquibul, Mopan and Macal Rivers.

Apart from bringing the community leaders together, in the very short period, a two-year action plan was developed, a binational joint agreement was signed and river conservation actions were launched in the 19 participating communities. These activities primarily consisted of public outreach, clean up campaigns and installation of garbage bins.

The project culminated with a working session to evaluate the results of the project and to chart a way forward. Leaders committed to continue to implement the action plan; a resolution was passed to organize a working group that can coordinate more cohesively with the 10 communities from Belize and TNC committed to work together with FCD in search of potential finances to continue the effort in river conservation.

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:

Dr. Dionne Chamberlain Miranda

Director:

Mr. Gregory Maheia

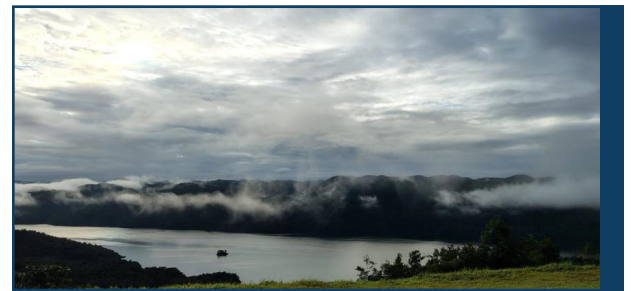
Director:

Mr. Hector Guerra

FCD Partners with Hydro Belize

FCD has been collaborating with the hydroelectricity company located in the Chiquibul-Maya Mountains for many years through the Eco-Guard Program. The partnership has helped FCD maintain a presence on the adjacent areas to the Chiquibul National Park, where it is provided with an opportunity to monitor and document any human footprint that eventually can impact the national park.

More recently with the acquisition of 4,200 acres of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve by Hydro Belize, the company has reached out to expand the Eco-Guard Program which will entail assisting in monitoring the added forested area. The area was impacted by forest fires two years ago and a visible need to restore high elevation areas is important in order to safeguard the integrity of the hydro facility.



As part of the management regime in the area known as the Chalillo Conservation Area, Hydro Belize has identified a series of steps including the development of a rapid ecological assessment, a conservation strategy and thereafter an operational plan.

Greening Belize MoU



The Greening Belize Initiative is a national effort launched by the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change, and Solid Waste Management to plant one million trees across Belize by 2035. This initiative aims to restore degraded landscapes, protect vital watersheds,

and build climate resilience. It is supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the GEF6 Project. The Greening Belize Initiative aligns with Belize's Nationally Determined Contribution and international commitments such as the Bonn Challenge.

During the month of June FCD joined 12 other organizations in signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Forest Department, committing itself to plant over 8,000 seedlings in the Vaca Forest Reserve. FCD has been working with local farmers for more than a decade promoting agroecological farming methods in the reserve. Before the end of this year, it proposes to establish a nursery and start the process of reforestation at least 12 acres as demonstration plots. The field farm school established two years ago inside the reserve will serve as the main hub for learning and distribution of plants.

Due to intensive forest fires, the Vaca Forest Reserve is one of the most critical protected areas identified for restoration. Over 60% of the area is denuded, largely due to agricultural forest fires.

FCD Programs

Protection &
EnforcementCommunity
DevelopmentBi-national
RelationsEducation
& Public
AwarenessKarst
ManagementResearch &
MonitoringLandscape
ManagementMonitoring &
EvaluationFinancial
Sustainability

Meeting Succotz Tour Guides



During the month of May, presentations to the Succotz Tour Guides and the Cayo Tour Guide Association were made with the purpose of highlighting the conservation efforts of FCD and to generate support from the tourism sector at a time when visitation is increasing in Chiquibul/Caracol as a result of the paved road. Tourism in the Chiquibul National

After 2 years of public awareness about the importance of the Belize River and informing people on how to protect the water resources in the Belize River Valley, it was time to assess results. The methodology has been to compare pre-survey and post survey gauging knowledge, attitudes and changes in behavior.

Twelve watershed communities with proximity to the Belize River Watershed were the targeted communities. These communities included Esperanza, Unitedville, Ontario, Teakettle, Roaring Creek, Valley of Peace, More Tomorrow, Big Falls/Willow's Bank, Flower's Bank, Double Head Cabbage, Isabella Bank and Bermudian Landing. A total of 328 youth and adults were interviewed.

Based on the post survey results FCD's Environmental Educator has recommended the following: Increase awareness on the legislations (Environmental Protection and Forest Acts) that protects the rivers and its regulatory

Park may well be recorded low, and is restricted to the use of the road access with a destination to Caracol. Iconic areas in the park are yet too inaccessible and remote but the mere use of the road will have an impact on wildlife especially if vehicles travel with high speed.

Thanks to Global Conservation, FCD is preparing to launch roving patrols on motorbikes to better monitor and control traffic speed.

The tour guides were impressed at the majestic areas yet shrouded under the jungle such as the Chiquibul Caverns, Belize's Highest Point – Doyle's Delight and the huge sinkholes. FCD's aspiration is to develop and be a part of a sustainable tourism program that cares for the outdoors, is respectful of the intrinsic values of nature, and develops standards to promote a high level of integrity so that the beauty and the pureness of these areas be kept for generations.

Post Survey Conducted



agencies that reaches a wider audience; design and produce materials on the Environmental Protection Act, Forest Act and its regulatory agencies; increase awareness and knowledge on garbage as the main threat affecting the Belize River, its effects and ways to reduce garbage reaching the river; and continue to build awareness on the Belize River Watershed, its importance, attributes and state using social media and radio.

BNCF Project Starts



With funding from the Belize Nature Conservation Foundation, FCD's Karst Management Unit has launched a set of 16 patrols aimed at mapping any human activity along the stretch of the Chiquibul Cave System (CCS). This system that starts some 6 kilometers within Belize traverses west towards Guatemala and is divided

in 4 sections. Most of the CCS is in the extensive karstic landscape of the Chiquibul Ecosystem. The karstification has produced numerous unique caves, large chambers, sinkholes, and natural arches. The highly permeable karstic landscape also results in the obvious absence of surface water and extensive subsurface water drainage.

Armed with a patrol plan the objective of the BNCF funded project is to maintain the integrity of the Chiquibul Cave System Management Area through sustained monthly SMART patrols. The team has, therefore, set its goal in conducting two patrols every month accompanied by Park Rangers. The data recovered will help plan for any future targeted patrols necessary to address any illicit activity.

Projects funds are also helping acquire equipment and gear for the staff, as well as field cameras.

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