

FCD Tracks

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Forging Connections in a Living Landscape

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LCRS After Ten Years



The 15th of September marked the expiration of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Belize and FCD of a ten-year management and administration of Las Cuevas Research Station (LCRS). Subsequently, FCD has been proactive since last year, requesting for an extension of management of the research station. Over the last ten years, over 3,650 researchers and students have visited Las Cuevas, gaining invaluable experience through field courses and

knowledge exchanged by FCD staff. This influx of researchers has not only enhanced FCD's capacity-building efforts but has also positioned Las Cuevas as a center for scientific excellence and innovation in the Western Maya Mountains.

Audits for LCRS has been done annually. Over the last ten years, LCRS has experienced fluctuating financial performance. Despite the fluctuations, including the modest losses particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and in 2023 the station maintained financial stability with a good performance in 2018-2020, 2021-2022 and 2024 that helped balance the shortfalls experienced during the less profitable years. The total income for the period 2014-2024 was Bz\$1,318,864.00 and expenses totaling Bz\$1,130,533.00. The positive balance of Bz\$188,151.00 highlights the station's ability to sustain a stable operation.

With an improved security and stability of the Chiquibul ecosystem, the LCRS outlook is promising for research in the natural and cultural sciences. As we look to the future, FCD envisions LCRS as a premier research and educational facility that fosters collaboration, innovation, and conservation.

Eco-Guard Agreement Renewed

On August, a three-year agreement was renewed with Fortis Belize Limited to continue Eco-Guarding duties at the three hydro facility infrastructures. By doing this, FCD helps protect over 1,700 acres of forest cover in central Belize. Earlier this year, with community support at the Vaca plateau, FCD led efforts to contain forest fires that prevented forest loss and impacts on the hydro facility. These integrated efforts go along the lines of helping maintain the water resources in a stable condition.

The hydro facility is Belize's central output of electricity, and its green corporate responsibility has been growing. Over the last three years, FCD has observed a reduction of human footprint in the areas administered by Fortis and wildlife populations are safeguarded.

The 2023 wildlife assessment conducted on the hydro facilities noted the positive impact of reservoir creation on certain species, such as Morelet's Crocodile and Baird's Tapir, emphasizes the potential benefits of well-planned environmental interventions. Continued monitoring and research efforts are



crucial to unraveling the ecological processes and ensuring the long-term sustainability of these ecosystems in the face of ongoing environmental changes. FCD is grateful for being a part in making a difference.

Belize River Valley Visit



On 21st and 22nd of July a two-day visit was made to the Belize River Valley communities including Bermudian Landing, Double Head Cabbage and Willow's Bank, primarily to highlight the work that has been undertaken and for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) project parties to meet the targeted people on the ground. The visit was organized by UNDP GEF6's Project Manager who runs the project, "Integrated Management of Production Landscape to deliver Multiple Global Environmental Benefits." The project which is

on its 3rd year of implementation supports the Government of Belize in facilitating national and local stakeholders' direct, free, and equal participation in the planning and implementation of measures for mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and sustainable land/water management in production landscapes.

During the visit project partners met with villagers and community leaders who learnt about the challenges faced in monitoring and reporting environmental impacts observed on the Belize River. It was also obvious that erosion of the river banks due to loss of forest cover and pollution are threatening the integrity of the river. Trees were planted by participating institutions and a community meeting with leaders was conducted.

FCD's role on the project has been primarily to raise awareness and sensitize people from 13 communities about the importance of protecting the water resources. By the end of September 2025, an overall total of 1,649 children, 753 youths and over 568 adults have been sensitized.

FCD Report to Institute of Archaeology

During the month of August, FCD's Cultural Heritage Coordinator submitted to the Institute of Archaeology the study titled, "Survey, Mapping, and Preliminary Archaeological documentation of Putz Bak, Puzlum, and Spider Monkey Caves, Chiquibul National Park, Cayo District, Belize". The document was prepared by Ms. Jessica Ratcliffe, M. A, M.Ed. (prospective DPhil student, Oxford University). The research was made possible on the month of February for the Boundary Fault Karst Project and FCD through a research permit provided by the Institute of Archaeology.

The objective of the Boundary Fault Karst Project mission was to connect three caves recently discovered in the Chiquibul National Park by members of the FCD Karst Management Unit. The purpose of surveying and mapping the caves was to create a digitized map of the connecting passageways, which would aid future examinations of the distribution of cultural materials throughout the caves.

The document notes that, "The caves contained Maya cultural materials dating to the Late and Terminal Classic Periods.



Following the Mesoamerican cave paradigm and accepted speleo-archaeological pedagogy in the Maya region, these caves were likely loci for rituals intended to appease the gods residing within the cave. The caves each contained high concentrations of fragmented ceramics, as well as human remains, tools, and jade beads. The density of artifacts warrants future revisits to ensure they are undisturbed and protected from nefarious activities in the area."

Scarlet Macaw Release



On the 25th of August, one of the largest numbers of scarlet macaws to be released from the in-situ lab took place in the Chiquibul. A total of 11 parrots were released from their enclosure after several weeks of attention and care provided to them. After opening the enclosure, one or two of the birds flew out rapidly while the rest explored and hesitated for a while.

Eventually they all flew from the flight cage. Over the following days these parrots have been returning back to the release site but we are confident that over time they will move off.

The macaw nesting season overall has proven to be a highly successful year. Up to September 30, 2025, a total of 40 chicks; 24 from natural nests and 16 from the In-Situ laboratory made it to the wild. No poaching activity was registered in the area bio-monitored. Notably no antipoaching efforts were conducted this year, therefore it is uncertain if parrots were traded into Guatemala. However, Guatemalan counterparts have not reported any sightings of poached macaws in the rural communities.

The in-situ lab has been an intervention utilized to help the macaw population increase, but its management and operations is strictly guided by a protocol devised by the Belize Forest Department. Every chick that makes it to the lab, has to be justified in terms of its probability of survival with human intervention. Candidates for extraction and moved to the lab are those that run a high risk of being stolen by poachers, cannot be fed by the parents or due to structural damage to the nest or tree.

New Ranger Base Established



A new chapter has been opened for the establishment of a Park Ranger base in Chiquibul, thanks to the support provided by the Ministry of National Defence and Border Security. The letter received on the 23rd of September gave a no objection for the construction of the main Ranger Headquarters located nearby the Belize Defence Force Guacamallo Training area. The letter read in part, "We recognize the valuable work

carried out by FCD and appreciate the continued efforts toward conservation and protection of Belize's natural resources. We trust the proposed base will further strengthen your operations and presence in the area."

With a no objection received, FCD immediately mobilized efforts and established the first building of what is the main Chiquibul National Park Ranger Headquarters. The base is located immediately after the Guacamallo Bridge, at the very entrance of the park boundary. From here Rangers will be deployed to Caballo, Valentin, Cebada, Rio Blanco and Ceibo Chico Conservation Posts. A small Standing Unit is also to remain to do roving patrols across the Chiquibul National Park landscape as the need arise.

Infrastructure development consisted of upgrading the BDF camp site with culverts to deviate water flow, upgraded the helicopter landing site by reopening drains, scouted and opened a road to the actual new base and opened and prepared a 80 by 80 feet pad for landing of the Ranger first structure.

FCD Joins APAMO



APAMO's letter of acceptance noted, "We are delighted to welcome FCD back into the APAMO family and look forward to your active participation in advancing our shared mission of strengthening protected areas management and conservation in Belize."

Gold Panning Effect Results



FCD's Biologist, has recently presented the results of gold panning effects found in the southern region of the Chiquibul National Park. The paper, titled, "Assessment of the Impacts of Artisanal Gold Panning in the Rio-Ceibo Sub-Watershed", notes that the study area occurred in the Rio-Ceibo sub-watershed which includes the Ceibo Grande, Ceibo Chico, Malpago and South Chiquibul streams.

In 2025, a total of 426 stress sources were mapped out along the Rio Ceibo sub-watershed and along the riparian zones of such

tributaries, compared to the 252 stress-source points mapped out in 2021.

During the 2025 survey, "Camps" and "Off-stream digging of pits" were the most commonly documented stress sources with each representing 28% of the total documentation. The same trend was seen in 2021 with "Camps" representing 23.8% of the stress source point data collected. By far, the tributary that is most negatively affected by stress sources relating to illegal artisanal gold panning is the Ceibo Chico creek, with 57.9% (146) and 58% (250) of the total documented stress source points, in 2021 and 2025 respectively. In 2021, the Rio Blanco River (RBR) had a total of 45 or 17.9% of the overall stress source points documented. At the time, most of the documentations that were made, were that of "drift pollution", like plastic bags, biscuit wrappers, and plastic bottles, which had drifted downstream from their point of origin. In both surveys, Malpago Creek had 11% of the overall stress source points documented along its channels. The Boiton Company Creek (BCC), or otherwise known as Cornec Creek, which is adjacent to the Boiton Minerals Limited (BML) had 15 or 6.0% and 48 (11.2%) of the stress source point data collected during survey field work, in 2021 and 2025 respectively.

Vision:

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

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IWT Taskforce Meets



On 25th of September the Binational Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Taskforce met at the OAS Office located on the Adjacency Zone Belize/Guatemala. Attended by 16 members representing Guatemalan and Belizean institutions, the purpose of the session was to share information regarding IWT matters

and identifying mutual actions that address cross border poaching and illegal trade of timber.

FCD's Biologist took the opportunity to report on the 2025 scarlet macaw nesting season, Foro de Justicia Ambiental explained the IWT workplan, while Asociacion Balam described the importance of the environmental security strategy that was up for revision. The Consulate General of Guatemala to Belize praised the initiative of bringing together Belizean and Guatemalan technicians to address common threats which goes along the agreement signed on December 17, 2014 by both Governments for the protection of natural resources and the environment.

The next session of the taskforce was agreed to take place on January 23, 2026, while the draft 2026 action plan will be sent to members of the taskforce for a preliminary revision.

Revisiting Friends of Vaca

For more than a decade FCD has been working with farmers to reduce land, forest and water degradation in the Vaca plateau. The Vaca Forest Reserve is the only reserve where farmers are permitted to cultivate under a controlled system, and where FCD plays a supportive role to the Forest Department in promoting integrated farming systems among farmers.

During the month of September, FCD convened a session with farmers from the Vaca plateau to discuss a way forward in strengthening the Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve. The group was registered as a way of uniting efforts and establishing a collective system for capacity building and assisting farmers. Farmers at the session noted that for too long there has not been a reunion with farmers and that there is a need to identify a new Committee that can look after the affairs of the group. Primarily due to the effects of fires, farmers understood the need to unite efforts and become



more resilient against climate change. FCD agreed to continue building capacity and use the field farm school as the main hub for this training. The demonstration plots, found at the field farm are to serve as a foundation for learning and replication.

The Friends of the Vaca Forest Reserve was originally comprised of over 20 farmers with a President and other Committee members.

Partnering with TNC



From the days of the Youth Environmental Action Group in the early 90's, FCD has been actively devising strategies and interventions to protect the water resources of Belize. Its main work has centered in 4 rivers, namely the Chiquibul, Mopan, Macal and Belize Rivers. Six main actions over the years have elevated FCD into a credible NGO working on this subject. These interventions range from enforcement,

monitoring, research, education, community engagement and binational cooperation. The FCD Advocacy Strategy of 2022, recommends the empowering of local groups to address the challenges faced in river conservation. As a result, FCD has worked with groups such as ASIPROM and Todos Por Un Mundo Verde in Guatemala and CORE and the Cayo Watershed Conservation Alliance in Belize.

During the month of July, FCD met with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) staff to discuss headwater protection initiatives and seek a way to partner on their new area of interest within the scope of a regional program. FCD's Executive Director expressed the work conducted with communities across borders regarding river protection and conservation, and described the challenges faced and important areas required to enhance and upscale the initiatives that FCD has been working on for more than 18 years.

TNC is seeking to develop a multi-year program on the protection of the Mopan River which is a binational shared natural resource, and FCD is poised to participate on it.

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