

FCD Tracks

The Official E-Bulletin of Friends for Conservation and Development
 March 2026, Issue #58

Forging Connections in a Living Landscape

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LCRS Agreement Renewed



The 15th of September 2025 marked the ending of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Belize and FCD for the management and administration of Las Cuevas Research Station (LCRS). By then, FCD had presented a formal request for a renewed agreement to the Belize Forest Department and presented a ten-year summary report, audit statement for the entire ten years, letters of recommendations and a management proposal.

The proposal indicated that the LCRS outlook is promising for research in the natural and cultural sciences and envisioned LCRS as a premier research and educational facility that fosters collaboration, innovation, and conservation. Its mission would be to (a) enhance research capabilities, (b) promote Education and Training, and (c) strengthen partnerships that support collaborative research and conservation efforts.

On the 27th February, an event to extend the agreement was held at LCRS where the Government of Belize, represented by the Minister of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Solid Waste Management, Hon. Orlando Habet, Chief Executive Officer in the Ministry, Ms. Milagro Matus, the Acting Chief Forest Officer, John Pinelo, other forest officers, Bulridge Limited, the Press and FCD staff participated. The MoU provides for FCD to manage and administrate the LCRS for the next ten- years and be renewed automatically at the end of this period unless terminated by either party. With this agreement in place FCD will continue the mission of LCRS and submit quarterly activity reports to the Belize Forest Department.

Binational Watershed Workshop Held

Prior to COVID-19 FCD had a vibrant binational effort with community leaders from both Belize and Guatemala to protect the shared rivers of Chiquibul and Mopan. Following its advocacy strategy, FCD had gone about in building and supporting local organizations aimed at generating increased public participation. In Guatemala ASIPROCOM was instituted while in Belize, it created the Cayo Watershed Conservation Alliance (CWCA). CWCA, however, has become defunct. ASIPROCOM has sustained its commitment and increased its membership from among 9 communities of Southern Peten.

On the 13-15th of March, a three-day event brought ASIPROCOM and 8 community leaders of Belize together for a way forward in activating joint actions to protect the Chiquibul, Macal and Mopan Rivers. Funded by The Nature Conservancy, under the theme “Voices of the Watershed”, 16 community leaders discussed the current state of affairs of their rivers, the major threats, and community actions that could help protect the water resources. The results of the exercise were the development of a two-year action plan. The key actions identified can be summed up in riverine restoration, water quality studies, clean up campaigns and



public education. At the same forum, the leaders reviewed a draft binational agreement that eventually will be signed, committing leaders from both countries to the protection of the rivers.

The Belizean communities participating include Arenal, Benque Viejo, San Jose Succotz, Calla Creek, San Ignacio/Santa Elena, San Antonio, Cristo Rey, Bullet Tree and Santa Familia. From Guatemala: Arenal, Melchor de Mencos, La Polvora, Salpet, Cidabenque, Santa Rosa Chiquibul, Los Encuentros, Tikalito and El Cruzadero.

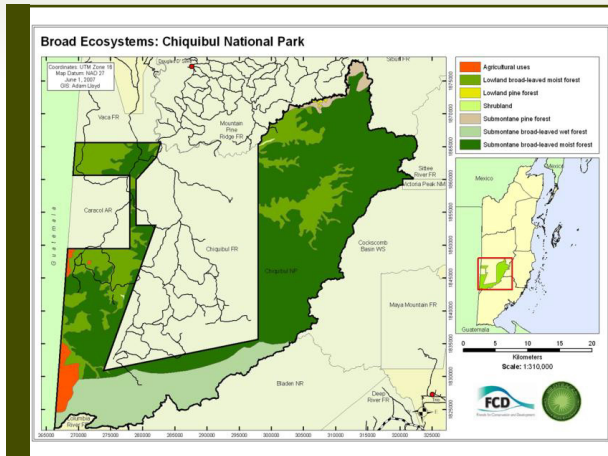
Annual Reporting with NBio

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.



The National Biodiversity Office (NBio) found under the auspices of the Ministry of Sustainable Development has been delegated to oversee national parks in Belize. As a result, FCD communicates more directly with NBio on all matters related to the Chiquibul National Park (CNP). During the month of February, NBio was provided with results of our Annual Management Plan implementation

effectiveness and the annual operational plan (AoP) for the period 2026.

The 2024-2025 AOP for the CNP comprised of 208 management actions. Overall implementation success for the CNP increased from 74% last year to 89% this year; with 64% fully implemented, 9% initiating implementation; planning for 6% completed but not yet implemented, 11% still at the planning phase, and only 10% not seeing any implementation. Execution of program work plans was more successful this fiscal year; successful implementation increased from only 37% last year to 64%, and non-implementation more than halved (from 27% to 10%).

For the 2025-2026 period, about seventy seven percent (77%) of the annual budget has been allocated to the CNP. From a programmatic perspective, most financial resources will be allocated to efforts in the Natural Resource Management Program, accounting for approximately 27% of the annual budget. Another 15% have been allotted for work in the Research and Monitoring Program, and about the same proportion for Administration. Requiring less of this year's budget are the Infrastructure, Stakeholder Outreach, Education and Advocacy, and Public Use Program, each requiring 7.9%, 7.0% and 5.6% of this year's budget respectively.

Vaca Forest Reserve SoP Confirmed

The Vaca Forest Reserve (VFR) is the northernmost protected area in the Maya Mountain Massif. It is a unique area since it provides for farmers to use the land for crop production. FCD has been operating in the area for more than a decade with the intent of reducing any human expansion within the protected area. This it has aimed to achieve through the promotion of smart agro-ecological methods, demonstration plots and patrols. During the month of February, the Belize Forest Department reaffirmed and clarified the roles and responsibilities of FCD through a formalized Standing Operating Procedure (SoP).

The SoP authorizes FCD to continue working with communities and farmers within the VFR and specifically to manage the field farm school. FCD is also required to monitor wildlife activities and human footprint developments. Suspected illegal activities, including unauthorized clearing, illegal timber extraction, wildlife offences and or land encroachment are to be reported



though it is not empowered to conduct law enforcement independently. In addition, FCD is to assist in the prevention, early detection, and reporting of forest fires and support the Forest Department in fire suppression activities where required.

Continued collaboration remains essential to the sustainable management and protection of the Vaca Forest Reserve.

Macaw Biomonitoring Jumpstarts



As early as February of every year, FCD's Research Unit jumpstarts the macaw biomonitoring program at the Chalillo Lake. The lake is known to be one of the most active nesting sites for macaws in the Maya Mountains. This year, once the two-year permit was received the team started their preparations for the field season. The four-person team deployed into the area and started the search

for potential nest cavities. By late March, the team had documented macaws nesting on cavities and the season appeared extremely promising in terms of numbers of eggs and fledglings. An expedition was also conducted to identify other nesting areas. The patrol effort extended for a total of 6 days which totaled 126.75 Kms of upstream paddling, reced in a total of 41.98 hours. The patrol departed from Camp 25 and went 25.81 Kms upstream the Macal River documenting potential nest cavities and evidence of illegal wildlife trade in the riparian zones.

FCD is thankful to the Forest Department for providing us the opportunity to continue to increase the macaw numbers in the wild. Up to date, we know of some 350 individual parrots living in Belize. Although the last two nesting seasons have been extremely successful, and this year likewise, the specialized biomonitoring effort must be maintained to subsequently remove the species from the endangered list.

HCCF Supports Chiquibul Efforts



The Harvest Caye Conservation Foundation (HCCF) has typically supported FCD on the scarlet macaw conservation program. Its support has helped increase the number of macaws in the wild. This year HCCF has

provided financing for acquisition of t-shirts and uniforms for the FCD staff. In addition, bumper-stickers and posters have been produced. The bumper-stickers which read, "I Slow for Wildlife", are specifically designed to encourage drivers to go slow inside the limits of the Chiquibul National Park and prevent wildlife kills.

During weekends there is a marked increase of visitors traversing the park, heading to the Caracol Archaeological Reserve. Park Rangers have handed over these bumper-stickers at the entrance of the park, at the Guacamallo Bridge on these busy days. FCD is also proposing to conduct roving patrols on a motorbike to monitor visitor use, particularly on weekends. The paved road has certainly made the Chiquibul jungles more accessible, and with-it other challenges in protecting the richness of the Chiquibul National Park as a key biodiversity area.

FCD Awarded for Binational Efforts

On the 3rd of February FCD was awarded the Cross Border Collaboration Excellence Award at the UK-Belize Climate & Nature Legacy Awards event which was funded by the UK's Climate & Nature Diplomacy Fund (CNDF) and delivered by the British High Commission.

Nominations were sourced internally across multiple expert teams, ensuring a diverse and representative pool of candidates. Every nominated project underwent an independent evaluation based on a detailed, category specific scoring matrix developed by the UK's Climate, Environment and Energy Officer for Belize & the Caribbean, Ms. Zana Kristen Wade. Each category had its own tailored criteria to ensure fairness and consistency. The final slate of awardees was endorsed by the British High Commissioner to Belize, Mr. Alistair White and Ms. Mellissa Rivero, the High Commission's Programme Officer. Their endorsement ensured that the outcomes reflect both technical merit and strategic significance for UK-Belize cooperation.

The award to Friends for Conservation and Development (FCD) highlighted the UK-Belize project: Cross Border



Forest Fire Prevention and Response Collaboration Between Belize and Guatemala which was led by FCD. The project helped formalize binational coordination by establishing shared protocols, community outreach, and the foundations for a joint Belize-Guatemala Forest Fire Taskforce. The effort included shared training, equipment, and regional partnerships that protect the Maya Forest and reduce cross border wildfire risk.

Meeting at Adjacency Zone



The Guatemalan community, La Rejoya is the closest community located along the adjacency line, Belize-Guatemala. The community historically is known to be the source of a multiple of stressors including theft and trade of scarlet macaws, cattle ranching, crop production and illegal logging. Valentin Conservation Post was constructed across this community, within the limits of the Caracol Archaeological Reserve to address the high level of encroachment. Over the years, patrols and stringent law enforcement activities in the area have led to several locals from La Rejoya being arrested and charged in Belizean courts.

Four years ago, with support from the US Department of the Interior, FCD developed a new intervention aimed at reducing the tension and threats in the area. This consisted of opening dialogue with two communities, namely La Rejoya and San Jose Las Flores. The community visits occur informally at a point defined by FCD and community leaders. The visiting team would hike for an hour and reach at the meeting point where matters such as prevention of forest fires, protection of biodiversity and reforestation are raised and discussed. This time during the month of March, FCD and the Institute of Archaeology conducted a community linkup to discuss a projected community assistance program.

Over 25 community members and their leaders, including park authorities and municipal staff presented several community potential projects including upgrading the primary school, establishing a water tank for a new sector of their community and acquisition of forest fire equipment. Community members also requested from Belizean authorities the permit to construct a shade over the source of water the community uses and committed themselves to reforest areas denuded near the source of water. Another linkup is programmed for this year.

Vision:

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

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Bald Hills/Cooma SoP Finalized



The Baldy Beacon/Cooma Cairn region is located on the northeastern section of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. The Baldy Beacon Road ends at the fringe of the Chiquibul National Park. For this reason, FCD requested a permit from the Forest Department to establish a presence at the Baldy Beacon region. With the increase of more visitation the presence of FCD has surely been a powerful deterrent for cyclists, motorists and hikers in the area who may plan to approach the park from this area unauthorized.

On March 6th, FCD's Park Manager, Derric Chan handed to the Belize Defence Force (BDF) a set of mattresses as well as essential field utensils to be used at the various conservation posts. This donation was made possible through the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) funds to upgrade the conservation posts where both the BDF and FCD Rangers are based.

FCD operates with BDF elements at five conservation posts, namely Ceibo Chico, Rio Blanco, Cebada, Valentin and Caballo. The first conservation post was established at Rio Blanco in 2008 with the aim of setting on the ground a credible force deterrence to combat Guatemalan incursions in the Chiquibul National Park. Through the 2019 joint enforcement protocol signed between the Ministry of National Security, Forest Department and FCD, roles were defined and coordination mechanisms established. It

For more than 2 years FCD has established itself at the Cooma Cairn Ranger Outpost. A three person staff conduct a robust patrol system on a daily basis. Monthly reports shows that the area becomes busy on weekends as folks seek the freshwater creeks and the cool environment to recreate.

During the month of February, the Forest Department reaffirmed and clarified the roles and responsibilities authorized to FCD for the Cooma Cairn and Bald Hills. The primary responsibility for the staff is to conduct surveillance and monitoring through the patrolling of access routes and reporting any unauthorized entry or suspected illegal activities. FCD is also to conduct fire monitoring activities and provide operational support to the Forest Department in fire prevention and suppression when requested, and conduct biodiversity monitoring related to species presence, habitat condition, and ecological threats. In addition, FCD is to undertake watershed surveillance including the observation of erosion, land clearing, pollution and other activities that can jeopardize water quality or hydrological stability.

FCD Donates to BDF



was understood, therein, that all parties were to assist in keeping the conservation posts operational.

Patrols are launched north and south from these conservation posts as a joint unit to address the threats to biodiversity along the western flank of the Chiquibul and Caracol landscape. The main threats today consist of cattle ranching, illegal logging and poaching.

FCD Joins EcoLens Summit



"Focusing on People and Nature" was the theme of the EcoLens Summit held by the Protected Areas Conservation Trust and Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future which took place on the 5th of March at the Civic Center in Belize City.

FCD's Executive Director participated on the panel discussion: Let's Talk Enforcement, joining other panelists representing the Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment, Tour Operator Association and Corozal Sustainable Future Institute. At the panel, FCD expressed that one of the main attributes to law enforcement has to be the commitment to undertake the rigors of the job, despite the dangers and challenges it brings.

ECOLENS Summit convened national and international stakeholders to reflect on Belize's progress in biodiversity conservation and to strengthen collaboration around the management, financing, and future of the National Protected Areas System. The summit was designed to foster shared learning, highlight impact, and strengthen collaboration in support of Belize's sustainable development goals.

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E-Bulletin Funded by:

NTOTA
Nature Trust of The Americas, Inc