



# FRIENDS FOR CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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San José Succotz, Cayo District, Belize

## 2nd Natural Resource Management Symposium

### Integrated Management – a Paradigm shift in the Making

First of all I want to thank the Planning Unit of this Symposium from the University of Belize, and the sponsors for providing this wonderful opportunity in Belize to showpiece some of the important work that currently is ongoing in the country in the field of management and research. From what appeared to have been a defunct Chapter of the MesoAmerican Society for Biology and Conservation in Belize just two years ago, we can proudly say that through the University of Belize we are now members of a proactive Chapter. The conduction of this 2<sup>nd</sup> Natural Resource Management Symposium is a testament of the great work of Dr. Elma Kay and her team.

It is great to have Officials from the Governmental agencies, the non-governmental sector, the academia, students and researchers; and of course not forgetting our visitors Mr. Olivier Chassot and others. Our colleagues who have joined us from as far as Golden Stream, Bladen and the Cayes - Nick Wicks I am certain must have swam through the river to be here - A pleasant good morning to all.

This year's theme, "Building research knowledge for the Integrated Management of our Natural Resources", combines two very important topics, namely *research* and *integrated management*. Though Research on this context is considered a tool for management purposes - the central message and key to this year's theme is INTEGRATION. If you glance at your program you will note that all of today's session

will focus on large scale management of Belize's protected areas. And INTEGRATION of efforts is certainly the driving force behind the large scale management programs. Large scale management of protected areas is now a new paradigm in Belize and you bet there are good reasons why this is occurring. Talk about the size of Belize and you will understand why it makes sense to combine greater efforts in the protection of green areas. Talk about the sheer number of activities and organizations seeking funds and you will realize that there is a big competition for a limited pot of funds. If it makes sense then why may it be challenging to enter into this new paradigm shift? If large scale management aims to create a more effective protected area system, simpler to administer and more cost effective then why is it that entering into this portfolio will be more challenging than suspected at plain view?

The country's protected areas history dates back to the early settlement period. Europeans were first attracted to Belize due to its rich timber resources. The first settlers in 1640 made timber resources the primary economic base and remained supporting the settlement into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

In 1922 with the appointment of a Conservator of Forests the country then known as British Honduras established the Forest Department. This also became the first step in the practical application of a proper management of the forest resources and the possibility to provide policies for the declaration of forest reserves. Since 1925 the Forest Department maintained steady progress in the area of forest management and succeeded in establishing different categories of protected areas.

The establishment of the forest reserves as early as the 1920s, marked the beginning of the protected area network in Belize. Five of the existing reserves namely, Freshwater Creek, Sibun, Silk Grass, Vaca Plateau and Columbia River were created by 1930. By 1984, there were about 16 forest reserves in the country.

Today, the network of protected areas in Belize is extensive; covering approximately 26% of the national territory. A total of 94 protected areas have been gazetted. When taken separately, these protected areas amount to approximately 37% of the country's terrestrial area and 14% of the marine territory. Clearly this is impressive; however; there has been a

need to develop a coherent approach to protected area establishment and management on a national scale.

Globally, the concept of a comprehensive protected areas system has evolved and it is important to note that Belize fits within this context.

The establishment of a 10% target for protected areas stemmed from the Fourth World Parks Congress in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1992, where it was recommended “that protected areas cover at least 10% of each biome by the year 2000” (IUCN 1993). Subsequently, the 10% target for protected areas has become deeply entrenched in the thinking of many conservationists and incorporated into the national legislation of many countries for establishing protected areas.

Dramatic advances in the compilation of data on species distributions over the last decade together with the World Database on Protected Areas helped develop a first ever global gap analysis of terrestrial vertebrates species covered by protected areas. The results demonstrated that biodiversity falls outside protected areas. Despite exceeding 10% of the global land area, the coverage of biodiversity by protected areas is far from complete, primarily due to the lack of a systematic approach to protected area planning. These gaps are certainly more dramatic in freshwater and marine biomes.

Thus at the Fifth World Parks Congress the call was made for a strategic expansion so as to best address the distribution of and threats to biodiversity. The Convention on Biological Diversity states that by 2009 the Parties to the Convention should designate the protected areas as identified through the national or regional gap analysis and complete by 2010 terrestrially and 2012 in the marine environments the establishment of comprehensive and ecologically representative national and regional systems of protected areas.

By 2004 in Belize a protected areas task force comprised of an inter-ministerial group was charged with the development of a National Protected Areas Policy and System Plan. This plan emphasizes among other actions the simplification of an existing protected area system by consolidating adjacent protected areas into single, multi-zoned, management units, allowing a more coherent approach at a landscape and seascape level. Organizations are already acting under this principle and conducting the proper assessments. Hannah's

presentation this morning will present the Maya Mountain Massif Technical Assessment; Joe from TIDE will share the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor Planning, and Robin will relate to the Glover's Reef seascape initiative. We can therefore safely say that the framework is there but now the hard work is about to start. The challenge lies on how to strategically safeguard biodiversity when multiple players are involved.

This is where I want to center my presentation today.

In 2005 we held in San Ignacio a consultation workshop for the development of a vision statement and program for the conservation of the Chiquibul National Park. The park though being a part of a trans-boundary ecosystem and part of the Selva Maya Corridor had never enjoyed a concrete management presence since its creation in 1991 due to a lack of resources.

At the forum I recall vividly that my focus was the Chiquibul National Park, but alas that was lost as an intrepid person threw into the room the concept of thinking beyond just the Chiquibul National Park. Who was that? No other than Jan Meerman! The contention was that species such as jaguars would not be able to survive in small protected pockets or territories regardless of how effective management was done, and thus the need to think at a larger scale. As a researcher obviously he was able to understand the dynamics of wildlife populations and the need for a change in the management of ecosystems. For a park manager, at first instance the idea would appear impractical. The main reflection would be to rally efforts for "his or her protected area". Save your area and forget the rest. And so I was not an exception. Even after the reunion the discussions continued and if I am not mistaken we ended up having a working session in Panama with my good friend Jacob Marlin. The issues became bigger, since we could not come to a consensus of whom to lead the project once it was open to other parties. If you have heard about the incident of two villages surrounding the Rio Blanco National Park, where ultimately both lost the funds due to a lack of understanding on who to maneuver the project – then that was prone to occur.

But there was much to learn from researchers. We ought to think then as researchers if indeed we are serious about biodiversity conservation. And act as a Gandhi, namely with humility, if we are colleagues in this field.

The program planning took a twist for good and we came up eventually with a positive plan of action. If I were to look back in retrospect I can see the serious limitations that we would be confronting in ensuring large scale management and protection as required by the NPASP. Though the program finally only focused in the core conservation areas and primarily on the Bladen Nature Reserve and the Chiquibul National Park due to funding constraints – there has been much to learn from this initiative. Having passed through this phase, I feel confident that integration of efforts does bring multiple advantages. Luckily for us there is the NPASP that serves as the roadmap for protected areas management at the large scale. Three areas are considered to be of exceptional importance where consolidation would reinforce national prominence in protected area system management at a regional scale. These areas includes: the Maya Mountain-Mountain Pine Ridge Massif, 2) Belize Barrier Reef System and 3) the North-Western forests.

But what exactly does consolidation signify and what will it take to make it possible? Consolidation does not indicate that management units already existing are absorbed to become a larger unit. It means the integration of efforts from multiple partners. To be successful in large scale management it means a merging of efforts. Integration of abilities, skills, needs, visions to attain the common goal of biodiversity conservation. Because the governmental agencies are empowered to look over the common good and services then it is the governmental agencies that can encourage and support this type of management. NGO's alone will possibly linger with the idea but not gear into action as openly as required. And the more partners there are, then the more difficult the integration of efforts can become.

The magic is **identifying the common ground**. Perhaps the common interest and need among those involved is protection, surveillance, education or fundraising. If this is the case then there is a common value. Partners in this integration have to feel that they are all winning. It is not a one way situation.

**Endorsement and guidance by the agencies** is critical for embarking on integrated management. Otherwise it is perceived as **A** organization leading this for its own agenda. These agencies primarily include the Forest Department, Fisheries Department and the Archaeology Department. Given that they represent the national context then we should look to them for that leadership. I have no doubt that such a management style can be monitored and promoted from this end.

To remove any ambiguity or false assumptions, it is recommended the formation of **partnership agreements**. These sorts of agreements are not legally binding but outline the roles and guideline for operating as a partner in achieving the common ground.

As in other relationships, the parties engaged in the integrated efforts must work and maintain a partnership based **on trust, confidence and transparency**. It does not matter what sector of society is involved – be it community members, researchers, educators, and what activity is being engaged – be it research, protection or fundraising - in the end a mutual integrated effort will prosper but if there is trust and transparency.

To maintain a vibrant integrated effort it is also vital to have an **effective communication** system. The development of a communication protocol can go a long way in preventing any potential conflicts or tensions among the parties. Guidelines and protocols of communications may also be a part of the partnership agreement.

A return to the **core foundations of conservation ethics** is essential. I always recall the great lessons learned at the Belize Zoo back in 1986 and I am thankful to Sharon Matola. Beyond the scope of romanticism for the environment, I understood that there must be cordiality, good will and pride in the work we do. Perhaps we are losing these – once again due to a world of competitiveness.

Finally, I would put special interest in maintaining a **positive character**. One ought to be pleased and enthused about the partnerships and be willing to work along with others. Integrated management then means working with others, confronting different idiosyncrasies and coercing for the common good. If the authentic spirit of collaboration is not there then we are in for a rough time.

In the end, it is vital that managing organizations can **revisit their missions and vision statements** constantly because within the daily turmoil of surviving as an organization, we certainly forget about the importance of integrating efforts, and constantly fall in a scenario of competing for the same funds.

We are living in exciting times.

Belize does have a wonderful opportunity to conduct integrated management because the natural and cultural resources are still in existence, also given the size of the country there is a certain level of camaraderie among institutions.

The examples that will be presented shortly clearly open a wide spectrum of possibilities. On the technical aspects there is much to be shared and the assessments already finalized at Golden Stream, in the Maya Mountains Massif and the Maya Mountains Marine Corridor does provide the fundamental guidelines. I am yet; however; to see an integrated financial generating mechanism or instruments that looks at financing large scale protected area systems. We should not forget this because this is where the confrontations are prone to occur.

I can visualize a team of environmental educators from across the ridge to the reef corridor discussing the development of a holistic and comprehensive curriculum for primary schools; I can see a set of researchers following a standardized RIM protocol across landscape and seascapes areas in Belize. How about more multi-agency patrols with over 20 rangers in remote areas where normally rangers do not dare to hike alone? I can also see an active secretariat such as in the Maya Mountain Massif already putting into gear the multiple programs and fundraising for the greater massif. I can also visualize tighter working relations among the Department of Lands, Forestry, Archaeology, Mining and the Environment that can provide for a more synchronized management and conservation of our resources. Finally, I can see a closer and vibrant working relationship with our neighbors. We cannot stay isolated from our Central American colleagues. We must integrate regionally.

Thank you and have a great two day symposium.