



With Funding from Pfizer



Selva Maya Project

A Capacity-Building Alliance to Conserve the
Maya Forest of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize



Canopy view of ruins at Tikal National Park in the heart of the Maya Biosphere Reserve © Susan G. Ellis/TNC



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Maya Forest of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize**

A Report to Pfizer

February 2007

With sincere appreciation for Pfizer's contributions to the Alliance, we are pleased to provide a report on our progress over the last year to build capacity for conservation activities in the Maya Forest region of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. With your support through the World Environment Center, the past year has been especially productive for The Nature Conservancy (the Conservancy) and the Rainforest Alliance (RA) in protecting this global treasure.

Stretching from Mexico across northern Guatemala to the southern half of coastal Belize, the Maya Forest is the largest block of contiguous forest left in Mesoamerica today. Rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage, the Maya Forest is also a treasure-trove of economically valuable natural resources. The region harbors tropical rainforest, old growth forests, seasonally inundated lowland forests, wetlands, rivers, pine savannas, and caves, and is home to endangered species such as the giant anteater, scarlet macaw, jaguar, tapir, jabiru stork, ocelot and spider and howler monkeys. The Maya Forest is also of great importance to immense populations of neotropical migratory birds that winter in the area. Unfortunately, the Maya Forest is being cleared at the rate of about 200,000 acres per year due to forest fires, illegal logging and cattle ranching. As threats to the region continue to increase, it has become clear that we need to look beyond protected area boundaries to conserve the Maya Forest as an entire ecological system.



The Nature Conservancy and the Rainforest Alliance have been working to build capacity for conservation by engaging local communities and promoting sustainable livelihoods that support forest health and biodiversity conservation in the Maya Forest region. Because the Maya Forest possesses a wealth of economically-valuable natural resources, the Rainforest Alliance has been working with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in forestry, agriculture and tourism in the Maya Forest to increase income to these operations through better management practices and improved marketing of

products such as coffee, timber, bananas, non-timber forest products, and ecotourism services. Because they are produced sustainably, these products have the potential to be long-term sources of income for the local communities and cooperatives that produce them. Simultaneously, The Nature Conservancy has worked on developing and implementing an ecoregional plan to identify a portfolio of priority places for conservation in the Maya Forest, as well as the strategies and investments needed to achieve the lasting protection of the forest. This action agenda for the Maya Forest is serving as a framework to guide conservation in Mexico, Belize and Guatemala, where the Conservancy and its partners are implementing activities like private land protection, debt-for-nature swaps, community-based forest management and forest fire prevention.

We are pleased to send you this annual report which summarizes the outcomes and achievements of the Rainforest Alliance and The Nature Conservancy Selva Maya efforts in Mexico, Belize and Guatemala. The staff and partners of the Conservancy, RA, and the World Environment Center thank you for your support, without which these achievements would not have been possible.

Capacity Building Track One: Building a Conservation Coalition *Completing the Maya Forest Ecoregional Plan*



After three years of collaborative effort among a wide variety of organizations, experts and stakeholders, the Maya Forest Ecoregional Plan is complete and a solid and credible conservation agenda is in place that outlines key strategies for conserving biodiversity in this expansive forest. The ecoregional plan has essentially created a conservation blueprint for the Maya Forest with a network of priority conservation sites identified that contain

ecological processes, natural communities and species populations representative of the Maya Forest's biodiversity. These sites were selected on the basis of rigorous science-based analysis of existing biodiversity, socio-economic and cultural data; threats; and opportunities and institutional capacities. The results of this analysis illustrate what sites are under the greatest pressure and where it is most urgent to act to protect biological diversity.

Through a series of stakeholder assessments, threat and opportunity studies, strategies workshops and regional contextual analysis, a tri-national conservation agenda for the Maya Forest was developed to guide the long-term protection of priority sites identified in the ecoregional plan. Key strategies identified in the ecoregional plan included: promoting sustainable farming and ranching activities, developing sustainable tourism projects, implementing fire prevention activities, managing timber

Photo: Conservancy staff and local partners worked together gathering data and formulating the Maya Forest Ecoregional Plan. © Mark Godfrey/TNC

and wildlife extraction, executing land use planning, developing conservation finance mechanisms, expanding protected areas, and creating biological corridors.

Once the conservation agenda was defined and agreed upon by all participating parties, a final document was produced encompassing all of the findings of the ecoregional plan. Key conservation information was gathered and generated, including 18 scientific reports, eight databases and more than 500 maps. All of this information was compiled and published in English and Spanish and an additional 3,000 DVDs and 3,000 CDs were produced and distributed to interested parties and stakeholders.

Sharing the Plan's Unified Vision

The conservation agenda and priority actions identified in the ecoregional plan are already influencing the investments of large public and private donors, national governments and the private sector in the Maya Forest. Recently, one of the Conservancy's partners — Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) — received a multi-year \$1 million grant from the Interamerican Development Bank to implement a tri-national conservation project in the Maya Forest based on four strategies from the ecoregional plan. The project has full support from the governments of Mexico, Belize and Guatemala, which are shifting their conservation efforts in the Maya Forest to more closely align with those identified in the ecoregional plan.

Over the past several months, the Conservancy and its partners have presented the findings and strategies identified in the Maya Forest Ecoregional Plan during state and federal meetings in Belize City and Guatemala City and in Mexico City, Merida, and Xalapa, Mexico. More than 240 representatives from government institutions, academic institutions and conservation non-profits attended these presentations. Meetings with the World Bank and U.S. federal funding agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development have also been conducted to share this information.

Leveraging Investments in the Conservation of the Maya Forest

The Rainforest Alliance has been working to involve the resources of other public and private institutions to ensure that future conservation investments continue to have the highest possible impact in this region. Through the Certified Sustainable Products Alliance (CSPA), a three-year partnership between the Rainforest Alliance and USAID's Global Development Alliance, RA has been working to increase biodiversity conservation efforts and improve the livelihoods of farmers and workers in Central America and Mexico. Since its inception in 2004, the CSPA has enjoyed great success in bringing certified products to market by partnering with over 30 private sector partners, such as Kraft Foods, Nespresso, IKEA, Chiquita Brands International, Citigroup, and Gibson Musical Instruments who have made firm and significant commitments to purchasing sustainable products. Over the last year, the CSPA project has generated gross sales of \$4,200,000 in certified coffee in Mexico, improving working conditions for more than 5,500 farm workers. In Guatemala, more than 9,500,000 boxes of certified bananas have been sold, improving working conditions for more than 8,500 farm workers. More than \$7,300,000 in gross sales of certified coffee has been generated in Guatemala, improving working conditions for more than 12,000 farm workers.

Forest communities in Central America and Mexico make better use of their wood and gain access to premium markets as part of the CSPA. Those efforts have significantly improved community-based forestry in the Maya Biosphere, where communities have hired professional foresters to design and administer forest management plans, improved their administrative capacities, ensured safe working conditions and made various other changes in order to earn their certification. Once certified, the Rainforest Alliance helps these communities gain access to preferential international markets and provides the training necessary to meet buyers' demands. As a result, certified operations are making weekly shipments of jade leaf palm (an important non-timber forest product in the Maya Forest) to the United States and exporting milled wood and finished products, mostly manufactured from little-known woods such as pucté and manchiche, for which there was no market just a few years ago. Over this past year through our work with the CSPA, 1,318,964 board feet of wood were sold, corresponding to a monetary value of \$4,867,001, bringing income and sustaining livelihoods to forest communities in Central America and Mexico.

The Rainforest Alliance has been working with communities, indigenous groups, companies and other organizations to help integrate sustainability into land-use and business practices. The RA has made significant progress in conservation of the Maya Forest by creating markets for sustainably-harvested jade leaf palm and forest products as well as assisting small- and medium-sized enterprises and local communities in developing their capacities to produce high-value wood products and access international markets. Weekly shipments of jade leaf palm have resulted in \$171,000 of additional income for these producer communities. Continental Floral Greens has been instrumental in capacity building and business plan development for these producers by providing support in training, transportation and seed capital. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture has provided funds for a refrigerated room where the palm is stored before being shipped to the US. Meanwhile, the Conservancy continues working with local partner organizations and communities to implement the strategies identified in the ecoregional plan intended to strengthen the Maya Forest's protected areas across Mexico, Belize and Guatemala.

The support of Pfizer in the Rainforest Alliance and the Conservancy's efforts in the Maya Forest region along with the results from this capacity-building alliance has been instrumental in generating the additional resources to strengthen conservation efforts in the Maya Forest of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize.

Capacity Building Track Two: Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods

The Rainforest Alliance has been working with small and medium enterprises in forestry, agriculture and tourism in the Maya Forest to increase income to these operations through better management practices and improved marketing of products such as coffee, timber, bananas, non-timber forest products, and ecotourism services. The Rainforest Alliance's central tool for building SME competitiveness and conserving biodiversity is certification, whereby an operation's adherence to rigorous social and environmental standards is continually verified and awarded with a seal of approval. These standards are developed through a transparent process and in consultation with

workers, scientists, industry, government, and NGOs. Universally accepted and proven principles are then adapted to specific types of operations, crops and/or regional differences.

Certification standards cover the following basic principles: ecosystem conservation, wildlife conservation, fair treatment and good conditions for workers, community relations, conservation of water resources, energy conservation and use of alternative energy, soil conservation and erosion control, environmental planning and monitoring, reduction of herbicides and/or pesticides, and waste management.

Rainforest Alliance certification has been accepted with enthusiasm by industry stakeholders from small farms and forestry operations, to many of the major players in the banana, coffee and timber industries. Certification rewards producers by allowing them to access new markets, those that specifically demand certified products, and by earning them, in some cases, a premium for their products, so that they have continued incentive to improve their environmental and social practices. Through the purchase of certified products, it also gives consumers the choice to "vote with their dollars" -- to influence corporate commitment to sustainability.

Sustainable Forestry – Progress to Date

In forestry, the Rainforest Alliance certifies operations under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) system, through its SmartWood program. Though we have been focusing our work in sustainable forestry in the states of Durango and Oaxaca in Mexico, we have been intensifying our efforts in the state of Quintana Roo, located in the Maya Forest. In the past year, our SmartWood certification program has certified one new forest management operation, Ejido Chacchoben, and one chain of custody operation, a small furniture maker called Torneria Creativa; both of these businesses are located in Quintana Roo. In the state of Campeche, we certified the first operation of the state, INFOGUASA. We are working to develop the domestic demand for certified wood products in Mexico and have conducted a diagnostic visit to Quintana Roo to determine how we might provide support to the certified forestry operations in this state. One success in this area is a recent order placed by the municipal government in the state of Oaxaca for certified school furniture.



To protect the natural resources and ancient temples of northern Guatemala, the government established the 5.2 million acre (2.1 million hectare) Maya Biosphere Reserve, a mosaic of protected areas and expanses where limited development and harvesting is permitted through long-term concessions. The reserve holds over a dozen important archaeological sites and such rare wildlife as jaguars, brocket deer, scarlet macaws and ocellated turkeys. The Guatemalan government requires all logging operations within the biosphere reserve to be certified under the standards of the FSC. The Rainforest Alliance has certified 12 community and two private forestry operations

Photo: Mayan Ruins in Uaxactún, Guatemala. © Labeeb Abboud.

in the reserve, and assesses them annually to ensure that they follow strict standards for protection of the environment and people. Thus far, 514,000 hectares of forest in the Maya Biosphere Reserve are certified as sustainably managed.

Uaxactún, a town of 850 people and once a major Mayan city, lies within the confines of the Maya Biosphere Reserve in the rainforest north of Tikal National Park. Uaxactún's community forestry project is typical of operations certified by the SmartWood program in that the changes required for certification have benefited local people and the environment. Uaxactún has sold non-traditional wood species to several companies, produced special cuts of mahogany for Gibson Guitars and exports weekly shipments of jade leaves to the US floral supplier Continental Floral Greens.

Carmelita is also one of the communities managing tracts of forest within the Maya Biosphere Reserve. In Carmelita, members of the forestry cooperative have steadily increased the profits from their sustainable forestry business and have invested more than a third of their earnings in community development, improved technology and sustainable management methods. "I used to think that the way to protect the forest was to say, 'stop, don't touch.' We put people in jail and confiscated the illegal wood. But the forest just kept getting smaller and smaller," explains Carlos Crasborn, the 23-year-old leader of the Carmelita cooperative. "I realize now that a more effective way to conserve the rainforest is to show the people who live there that they can make a better living by managing the forest sustainably than they would if they cut it down. This is something we are accomplishing in Guatemala, and that we would like to repeat in and around Central America's other biosphere reserves in order to ensure the survival of this region's endangered wilderness."

In total nine companies are buying certified wood products from the forest concessions in the Mayan Biosphere Reserve Multiple Use Zone: Earth Source (USA), Selva Verde Products (USA), Espen (Alemania), Rex Lumber Company (USA), Gibson Guitar (USA) North American Wood Products (USA) Ottar Norman Saeterlid (Noruega), Carpintería Riviera (Gua) and Instaparquet (Gua).

Diversifying community income sources and capturing additional values from forest resources through certified forestry concessions offer the hope that it is possible to make a living in the forest without destroying it. In Guatemala, RA continues to organize marketing meetings and buyers' visits, whose main focus has been to promote lesser known species and lower grades of wood. Target species for marketing are pucté (*Bucida buceras*), santa maría (*Calopyllum brasiliense*), manchiche (*Lonchocarpus castilloi*) and danto (*Vatairea lundellii*). Extensive technical assistance has been provided to local industries on processing and product development, with a focus on value added production that uses wood more efficiently. Working with the Forest Community Operation (FORESCOM), member communities, and associated private sector industries in Petén, we have succeeded in developing and selling new value added products of lesser known species. Products that were developed and commercialized include guitar components, ecodecking, flooring, decking, musical grade wood and moldings.

In cooperation with the CSPA and as mentioned previously in this report, 1,318,964 board feet of wood were sold, corresponding to a monetary value of \$4,867,001. In order to achieve these sales, an investment of \$1,319,072 was made in 2006. The Rainforest Alliance has secured financing from the Guatemalan Ministry of Agriculture to install a processing plant for linear products with a focus on less used species. The plant will begin operating in February 2007 and will belong to FORESCOM.

To further develop capacity building of communities, RA is implementing a program of learning by doing, in cooperation with Baren Comercial S.A, INCAE-FOMIN, PRONACOM and INTECAP. Ten members of the communities are getting trained in different issues related to added value. Thus far, the students have already had five months of training in the Baren Comercial Plant. The idea is that most of them will work in the FORESCOM plant that is being installed.



The focus on key non-timber forest products (NTFP) continues to provide increased and diversified income to communities in the Maya Forest. In the Maya Forest, jade leaf palm is one of three important NTFPs. It is harvested mostly by women. There is strong, year-round market demand for jade leaf palm, and 80% of the world's supply from Mexico and 12% from Guatemala. Thirty million palm fronds are delivered each year to the US and Canada for Palm Sunday services. More than 150,000 hectares of forest are producing jade leaf palm in the

Maya Forest region.

The Rainforest Alliance has fostered a market linkage between Continental Floral Greens, a buyer based in the United States, and five communities in the Maya Forest of Guatemala— Uaxactún, Carmelita, La Bendición, Umi, and El Esfuerzo. This alliance continues to gain strength in capacity building and business plan development. In the beginning, only two communities participated in the alliance. The goal is to have three



more communities involved during 2007.

Additionally, the Conservancy is working with local communities to develop sustainable forestry practices and businesses in Mexico's Calakmul region. The Conservancy has assisted one community, known in Spanish as an ejido, in obtaining their SmartWood certification and developing the

Above photo: Floridalma Ax and Benedin Garcia found that working toward certification strengthened their organization, Conservation and Management Organization (OMYC), in managing Uaxactún's concession in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. © Rainforest Alliance

Photo: Sr. Juan de Dios Estrella Cahuich with local community members explain their community managed sustainable forestry operation. © Susie Zaragoza/TNC.

necessary business, finance and marketing skills to establish and grow their sustainable forestry business. These practices are helping the ejido increase both the profitability and sustainability of their community-managed forest operation.

Partnership Profile: Ornamental Greens from the Maya Biosphere Reserve

For Uaxactún, exporting to Continental Floral Greens has meant better living standards for local families. According to Floridalma Ax, a member of the Conservation and Management Organization (OMYC), which manages the community's forest concession in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, women who until recently had no cash income now earn between \$6 and \$7 per day harvesting, selecting and packaging the xate for export. "For us, it's an achievement, it is progress." says Ax. The road to certification requires dedication from the community. "Getting certified was a bit difficult," recalls Benedín Garcia, one of the OMYC's founding members. "At the beginning, we felt inconvenienced — we said, 'we're poor, and they want us to make these investments.' But in the long run, we realized that those changes were essential for improving our forest management and addressing the basic needs of our community."

Sustainable Agriculture – Progress to Date

In agriculture, RA certifies operations under the “Rainforest Alliance Certified” seal, with certification implemented by a group of local NGOs that make up the Sustainable



Agriculture Network (SAN), for which we serve as Secretariat. Agricultural products that come from the Maya Forest include coffee, bananas, citrus and cacao.

Our coffee sector has grown in terms of certified acreage and sales volumes, but perhaps as importantly, in terms of new committed brands and corporate buyers, roasters and importers. As these international coffee marketers increase efforts to ascertain demand, locally, Rainforest Alliance has been strengthening the SAN's capacity to address the needs of coffee producers in the field to adopt and consolidate best management practices.

Hurricane Stan dealt a devastating blow to the Mexican coffee industry in late 2005. Over the last year, Rainforest Alliance reached out to buyers of certified coffee to attract additional interest in Mexican coffees, in support of the affected producers. As a result, Kraft began to purchase coffee from Mexico for the first time. As Kraft's buying policy is to develop ongoing relationships with suppliers we expect that these purchases will continue in future years. The Kraft purchases from Mexico are supplying their products in France, Germany and the U.S.

Kraft's purchase of Mexican coffee was a turning point in interest from farmers, who now see a stronger message from the demand side and are showing more interest in

Photo: Coffee beans. © Rainforest Alliance..

getting certified. Most of the producers certified to date have been larger producers. They have created a stable base of supply for the market, and now smaller producers are showing interest in certification.

The internal market for certified coffee in Mexico is also developing. In the coming year a national coffee chain with 150 stores will begin selling Rainforest Alliance Certified coffee. At the end of September ProNatura held a meeting with Walmart Mexico that will have interesting implications in the future.



Agriculture currently accounts for 25% of Guatemala's GDP and about two-thirds of exports, and half of the labor force. Coffee, sugar, and bananas are the main products. We have had a history of working to certify farms in Guatemala for over a decade, and has succeeded already in certifying over 13,000 hectares of banana and shade-grown coffee farms, with 3,000 additional hectares in the pipeline for just the coming few months. The Sustainable Agriculture marketing team focused on strengthening our presence in Europe to attract and support buyers of certified bananas and coffee. Towards the end of 2005, Chiquita Brands introduced bananas bearing the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal in nine countries in Europe

and launched an innovative and bold marketing campaign. Chiquita's campaign to promote the joint Chiquita-Rainforest Alliance seal in Europe is a milestone not only for us but also for all those organizations working towards sustainability through consumer awareness and market forces.

Creating market linkages was a primary focus of our work to increase coffee sales in Guatemala over the last year. Certified Guatemalan coffee was sold to the U.S., Japan and Europe. Caribou Coffee, is preparing 5 farms for certification, including a group of four producers in Huehuetenango, and one producer in Santa Rosa. The Japanese company Kanematsu is buying from 4 farms. The Belgian company EFICO is buying from another farm for use in the Colruyt supermarket chain. As a result of these efforts, more than \$7,300,000 in gross sales of certified coffee has been generated in Guatemala, improving working conditions for more than 12,000 farm workers.

Partnership Profile: UCC and Nueva Granada

Improving coffee quality through cupping events with feedback for producers from the expert cuppers was another strategy to increase sales in 2006. At the 3rd Annual Rainforest Alliance "Cupping for Quality" event, Guatemalan farm Finca Medina won third place. Finca Medina undertook an interesting approach to increasing sales this year. Demand for certified coffee outstripped their available supply. In response, they helped a group of neighboring small farmers achieve certification, and now buy and market the coffee from those farmers.

Sustainable Tourism – Progress to Date

Tourism has become one of the world's largest industries, yet it can overwhelm small, often impoverished communities and surrounding natural areas with insensitive development, pollution and challenges to traditional cultures. Nature-related tourism is a fast growing market segment of the industry, making developing countries with beautiful, species-rich natural areas extremely vulnerable. When developed thoughtfully and responsibly, tourism can be a great contributor to the conservation of natural resources and local cultures and traditions which can be threatened or degraded by tourism activities.

In order to make the tourism industry into an agent of sustainable environmental conservation and economic development for communities living in the Maya Forest region, we have been working with local partner organizations to strengthen small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMEs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) that offer accommodations and services to visitors. The Rainforest Alliance provides training and technical assistance in implementing best management practices for tourism, which include measures for recycling, reduced water and energy usage, and promoting on-site opportunities for conservation and education. We link enterprises implementing these practices with certification programs that are members of the Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas (STCNA), for which we also serve as Secretariat.

- Guatemala

To advance the tourism industry's commitment towards conservation and social well-being and promote globally recognized, high-quality certification programs for sustainable and ecotourism, the Rainforest Alliance has supported the participation of the national certification program "Green Deal" managed by our local Petén partner, Asociación Alianza Verde. Alianza Verde's participation in the STCNA allowed them to expand their certification activities country-wide and increase the number of certified operations up to 36 (certified in December 2005) and 40 more applying for the certification during this year. From all those 10 SME and 1 community-based operation from Petén are certified, and 7 more in the process of achieving it this year.

Additionally, Green Deal's standards have been compared and integrated in the STCNA Base Line Standard; 8 of their auditors have been trained in the use of the Network diagnoses tool, and received specific trainings on water savings, energy consumption, waste management, and tourism activities impact in biodiversity through the International Biodiversity Impact System for Tourism Activities (IBIS-TA) framework.

In January 2006, the Rainforest Alliance launched the Eco-Index of Sustainable Tourism (<http://eco-index.org/tourism>). This free online tool offers users a database of sustainable tourism businesses - including hotels, inns, lodges and more - that conserve biodiversity and help local communities. It is the only Web site with a searchable database of exclusively sustainable tourism alternatives. Listings are in both English and Spanish, allowing small- and

medium-sized businesses that may not have Web sites or the resources to advertise internationally a way to connect with environmentally conscious travelers who want to support sustainable practices. To be included, an establishment must either be certified by an ecotourism certification program or recommended by a reputable conservation organization that verifies its use of sustainable practices. Thus far, there are 12 certified enterprises from the Petén in Guatemala and 2 from Belize are included in this resource.

The Rainforest Alliance has continued to disseminate Best Management Practices for Sustainable Tourism: A Guide for Small and Medium Entrepreneurs, a useful and insightful manual to help tourism businesses become more efficient, improve their relationships with their natural surroundings and neighbors, and do a better job of attracting clients. By explaining Best Practices in a systematic way – including the justifications for them and actions necessary for achieving them – the guide acts both as a stimulus for positive change and a tool for solving specific problems. It is packed with the practical information small and medium-sized tourism businesses, and community projects need to become sustainable, qualify for certification, and better position themselves within the marketplace. This guide provides a starting point in the development of the training modules that are being implemented in key landscapes such as the Maya Forest.

In order to increase marketing opportunities and generate demand for sustainable tourism, we have been participating in several eco and sustainable tourism workshops and trade fairs. Information about sustainable tourism activities and pilot operations in the Maya Forest have been disseminated at various venues, such as the Adventures in Travel and Expo in Los Angeles, New York (January 2006), and Washington, D.C. (February 2006), the Latin America Travel Association (February 2006), the 8th Annual Central America Travel Exchange –TREX (March 2006), and EXPOVERDE, Costa Rica (June 2006).

The Rainforest Alliance has also become an Associate Partner of the World Heritage Alliance, a joint initiative of the United Nations Foundation and Expedia, Inc. to support sustainable tourism, conservation and economic development for communities in and around UNESCO's 830 World Heritage sites. As an Associate Partner in this alliance, the Rainforest Alliance will extend our model of BMP training to businesses located around World Heritage sites, and conduct consumer education to visitors to these sites. To date, the World Heritage Alliance has been active in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, but hopes to expand activities to Central America and the Caribbean in 2007.

- Belize

From the Maya mountains to the Gulf of Honduras, Belize is home to many species of birds, fish and other marine life, and the country's island cays provide critical habitat for nesting birds and sea turtles. According to the Belize Tourism Board, Belize's tourism industry is the country's largest single foreign exchange earner. Over the past year, RA has educated and trained more than 550 tourism practitioners in Belize on the principles and practices of

sustainable tourism. A total of 55 operations in Belize have signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to become pilot operations, thereby agreeing to be assessed for their implementation of best management practices. This assessment is part of the direct technical assistance services that we offer to SMEs.

Between the months of May and September 2006, the project team held a series of consultations with forest managers from the Mountain Pine Ridge and Chiquibul Forest Reserves of Belize to develop a baseline standard that is specifically for tourism activities in the tropical rainforest, to be included in the best management practices guide. In September, we issued a request for bids from consultants interested in conducting the analysis of this ecosystem-specific baseline standard. Three bids were received; however, the final analysis has yet to be conducted.

As part of this project, the Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Tourism technical team developed a framework for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) that includes indicators that measure the impacts of the implementation of best management practices and/or certification. This framework is called International Biodiversity Impact System for Tourism Activities (IBIS-TA). In July, six trainers and assessors were trained in the use of this tool. Our goal is to have tourism enterprises participating in our programs as pilot operations incorporate the use of this M&E system into their business operations.

- Mexico

The Conservancy and its partners are also pursuing a community-based conservation strategy in the Calakmul region of Mexico that creates economic incentives for local people, while increasing the long-term productivity of their lands. As part of this strategy, the Conservancy and its partners are training local community members in nature-based income generating activities, such as ecotourism. In one project, 14 youth from nine communities were trained as nature guides through an intensive, 500-hour naturalist course that included lessons in English, archeology, birding and history. Four of these nature guides have already been hired by a local hotel to provide guiding services and all are working within their own communities to share what they have learned.

Partnerships

The Rainforest Alliance has forged important partnerships in promoting and developing sustainable tourism in the Maya Forest region. To identify opportunities for collaboration, we set-up coordination agreements with other national and international organizations working in the area, such as Counterpart International (CPI), Asociación Alianza Verde, Guatemalan Development Foundation (FUNDESA), Guatemalan Clean Production Center (CGPL), National Competitiveness Program (PRONACOM), Guatemalan Inbound Tour Operators Association (ASOPTUR) and the Guatemala Tourism Commission (INGUAT). Additionally, we have established agreements with Guatemalan inbound tour operators such as Martsam Travel, STP, Explore, and Gray Line; all four operating in Tikal (a World Heritage Site located in the Maya Forest of Guatemala) and its surroundings; to encourage them to contract those tourism services

providers that are certified or under the implementation of best management practices.

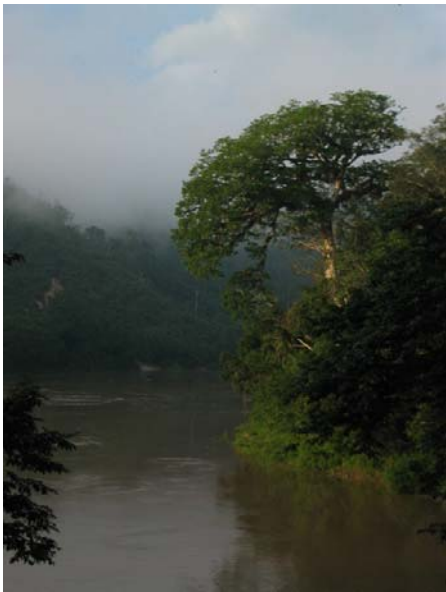
Capacity Building Track Three: Strengthening the Protection of Parks and Reserves

Guatemala

The Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala spans approximately 5.2 million acres. It is a critical centerpiece for maintaining the connectivity of the Maya Forest, as well as providing habitat for vast ranges of biodiversity. The reserve covers a large area once inhabited by the ancient Maya and contains remains of at least 175 Mayan cities. Today, its cultural heritage is a major attraction for tourists and its ecological wealth provides timber and non-timber products that support the local communities.

The Conservancy has helped to conserve biodiversity in the Maya Biosphere Reserve for the past 16 years. Over the past year, the Conservancy worked closely with local organizations and in collaboration with communities and the national government on the following activities:

\$24.4 Million for Conservation through a Debt-for-Nature Swap



The Conservancy and its partners helped the government of Guatemala carry out the largest debt-for-nature swap to date under the 1998 U.S. Tropical Forest Conservation Act, securing \$24.4 million for conservation of the country's unique biodiversity. Under this deal, the Conservancy and partner Conservation International each contributed \$1 million to leverage the U.S. Government's forgiveness of \$15 million in Guatemalan debt to the U.S. Treasury. Under this agreement, the Guatemalan government will redirect its regular debt payments, that it previously would have made to the U.S. Treasury, now payable instead to a Conservation Trust Fund. Managed by an oversight committee made up of the Conservancy and other participants in the deal, the trust fund will provide grants to local NGOs to

protect tropical forests in priority conservation areas, such as the Maya Forest, the Sierra Madre Volcanic Chain and the Motagua Polochic cloud forest. The fund will also establish an endowment that provides financial support for conserving Guatemalan forests into the future.²

Debt-for-nature swaps address a chronic problem for conservation in developing countries: while many successes have been achieved in the creation of protected areas,

Photo: Funds from the debt swap will support the management of protected areas like Lacandon National Park, a key protected area in the Maya Forest. © Sue Ellis/TNC.

these parks rarely receive the funding needed to manage and protect them into the future. To date the Conservancy has contributed nearly \$6.9 million to enable debt swap agreements in Belize, Panama, Jamaica, Peru, Colombia and Guatemala, which will result in almost \$90 million over the next 10-20 years for tropical forest conservation.

Purchasing Critical Lands

In 1990, when the Guatemalan government created the 500,000 acre Sierra del Lacandón National Park in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, not all the land within its borders was publicly owned. Two parcels called Naranjitos, totaling nearly 77,000 acres, occupied a central position within the park's nucleus. Without their inclusion, the park was fragmented, easily invaded, poached and looted, making Lacandón's long-term conservation untenable.



On June 2nd, 2006, The Nature Conservancy and its partner Defensores de la Naturaleza closed on the purchase of these two key properties. This simple act was the culmination of research, planning, documentation and negotiation dating back to initial talks with the owners in October 2003.

In accordance with Conservancy policy, the land acquisition project includes not only \$2.5 million for the purchase and transaction costs. In consideration of the size and management requirements of Naranjitos, another \$2 million will be raised for short term stewardship and to establish an endowment to fund the area's long term conservation. The title for this property is held by our partner Defensores de la Naturaleza who will manage the property and oversee stewardship activities. A conservation easement ensures protection of this forest in perpetuity.³

Mexico



Mexico's Calakmul Biosphere Reserve anchors the northern end of the Maya Forest. Its 1.8 million acres provide habitat to jaguar, puma, howler monkeys, crested guan and jabiru stork. Mayan temples and pyramids—more than 6,000 structures altogether—can also be found within the protected expanse of the Calakmul reserve.

For the past decade, the Conservancy has partnered with conservation organizations, local communities and government agencies to protect Calakmul and the diversity of life it supports. Conservation action over the past year focused on:

Photo: A photographer captures on film a trail of jaguar footprints along the river bank just north of the Naranjitos tract, which provides a home to these and other incredible species. © Sue Ellis/TNC

Photo: A total of nearly 600,000 acres of forest, stretching north from this Calakmul Biosphere lookout, will be protected through private acquisition. © Mark Godfrey/TNC

Protecting Private Lands

One of the Conservancy's greatest accomplishments in Mexico occurred on March 17, 2005, when President Vicente Fox officially announced the completion of an unprecedented land deal that involved the purchase of 370,000 forested acres buffering Calakmul's core conservation zone. Now, the Conservancy and conservation partners Pronatura Peninsula Yucatan and Reforestamos Mexico are working to purchase an additional 212,292 acre tract in the Calakmul region. Owned by the ejido community of Hopelchén, the parcel is located in the neighboring Balam-Ku state reserve, just north of the previously purchased tract. Once purchased, the land will be incorporated into the core zone of the state reserve, and the partners will undertake joint management of the tract in coordination with the State Ministry of Ecology.⁴

Once the purchase of the Hopelchén tract is complete, a total of nearly 600,000 acres of tropical forest will be under protection, securing the biological connectivity of this priority area. In addition, the purchase aligns with the Conservancy's efforts to address global climate change, as the protection of these forests — and their ability to absorb and sequester carbon — will help mitigate global warming resulting in part from the planet's rapid rate of deforestation.

Controlling Forest Fires

The fire-related needs of ecosystems and people in the Calakmul region are often at odds, with fire being both a conservation threat and an irreplaceable, life-sustaining tool for rural communities. Fires commonly used during the dry season to clear vegetation prior to planting crops are rarely controlled and often burn into the native forest. Some of these fires have been catastrophic, burning millions of acres of forest habitat, destroying crops, threatening livelihoods and damaging homes.

In order to mitigate the threat of fire and protect its investments in Calakmul, the Conservancy helped develop an Integrated Fire Management Plan for the reserve. The fire management plan outlines key activities in fire prevention and control, and community outreach and education that will equip reserve staff and local communities to protect their forest resources. The Conservancy and its partners are also working to develop fire management plans for individual communities around the reserve. The plans will include practical strategies such as training communities in non-fire agricultural practices, creating fire breaks before burning, registering planned burns to ensure that they are not occurring on the hottest days of the year, and establishing fire brigades to fight fires when they burn out of control.



Belize

Tropical forests still cover nearly 80 percent of Belize and are home to more than 4,000 species of native flowering plants (including 250 species of orchids) and 540 bird species. The Maya Forest's Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area alone harbors 240 species of trees and 70 species of mammals, including jaguar, puma, river otter and tapir. It is the largest private protected area in Belize and

Photo: A spider monkey hangs amidst lush forest canopy in Rio Bravo, Belize. © Ana Garcia/TNC

accounts for 4 percent of the total national land area.

The Conservancy is focusing its conservation efforts in Belize's Maya Forest on the Rio Bravo priority site, as well as the Maya Mountains, a vast patchwork of protected areas in the west-central part of the country. By working with partners on the following activities, the Conservancy is having a long-lasting and far-reaching impact in Belize.

Raising Fire Management to a National Priority

In the past, The Nature Conservancy has been a strong partner in developing capacity for fire management in Belize. In collaboration with the Conservancy's Florida Chapter and the Global Fire Initiative, we have worked with the Belize Forest Department, and local partners TIDE and Programme for Belize to reduce the impact of uncontrolled forest fires. Now we are taking a step further by assisting in developing a National Fire Management Policy for the country's Forest Department. This initiative will include extensive training for forest managers and park guards. We will also support the establishment of a National Fire Working Group as a first step toward the creation of a Maya Forest Regional Fire Network.

Protecting the Maya Mountains

The Maya Mountains span some 1.2 million acres across 13 contiguous protected areas situated in west-central Belize. A new action site for the Conservancy, our involvement here more than doubles the acreage we are working to effectively manage. This grouping of protected areas holds at its core the Bladen Nature Reserve, Belize's most pristine protected area. The Maya Mountains complex was identified as a high priority in the Maya Forest Ecoregional Plan in part because threats such as the advancement of the agricultural frontier, uncontrolled fires, illegal hunting and extraction of forest products are beginning to penetrate the borders of this once unspoiled forest.

The country of Belize incorporated the findings of the Ecoregional Plan into the country's National Protected Areas System Plan, and as a result is calling for the consolidation of the many reserves within the Maya Mountains complex and the improvement of their management structure. In the coming year, the Conservancy, in collaboration with the Belize Forest Department and local area stakeholders, will conduct a technical assessment of the overall management effectiveness of the region's protected areas to determine the best course of action at a local level given the cultural context and natural processes of these forests.

Upcoming

With the Maya Forest Ecoregional plan to guide future investments, The Nature Conservancy and its partners will continue to work at the highest priority parks and protected areas in the Maya Forest – working to improve their management and increase the number of acres under protection. To improve management and viability of existing protected areas, we will collaborate with public and private partners to continue addressing the key threats identified by the planning consortium. We are working to stabilize the expansion of the agricultural frontier that is threatening the protected areas of Calakmul and Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve. We are addressing unsustainable practices of poaching and illegal timber and nontimber

extraction from protected areas by improving patrols and offering communities alternative income generation options. In addition to these and other key strategies, we will work to acquire key lands and add them to the protected area system such as the upcoming acquisition at Calakmul. With the help of supporters like you, the Conservancy will continue to work with partners like Rainforest Alliance to harmonize conservation with socio-economic development and create the necessary enabling conditions, including galvanizing political support, to sustain the treasures of the Maya Forest into the future.

The Rainforest Alliance will continue to work with government and local partner groups in the Maya Forest to implement sustainable land-use practices and to create a conservation system that integrates the well-being of communities in the region. Upcoming priorities include the expansion of certification to additional crops in the Maya Forest, such as pineapple, cacao, flowers, ferns, ornamentals, additional fruits (plantain) and macadamia nuts. In forestry and agriculture, we will continue to strengthen and develop the capacity of SMEs in the Maya Forest region to bring sustainable products to the world market. In tourism, we will continue to promote and train enterprises in best management practices and make great strides towards protecting critical wildlife habitat by promoting environmentally-sound management practices to tourism operations working in the Maya Forest region. Through our work in developing best management practices and consensus standards for environmentally conscious land use, we have demonstrated that forestry, farming and tourism can complement local and regional conservation efforts and provide a monetary incentive for communities to protect the biodiverse lands they depend upon.

The World Environment Center looks forward to continued partnerships with both our members, such as Pfizer, and organizations such as TNC and RA to further mutual environmental and Corporate Social Responsibility goals. Since the inception of the Selva Maya project, WEC has established corporate-focused environmental and energy efficiency programs in Brazil, El Salvador, Romania and China. Our and our members' commitment to sustainable activities is evidenced by success of these projects, and exemplified by Pfizer's support of Selva Maya.

Conclusion

We are grateful to have Pfizer Inc. as an ally in our efforts to protect some of the world's most threatened wildlife species and habitats. Pfizer's support of our partnership with the World Environment Center has helped us achieve important progress toward our goals of solidifying a tri-national conservation vision, improving the protection of private lands and protected areas, reducing threats to biodiversity and promoting an integrated approach for sustainable agriculture, forestry and tourism. Your support is helping us create sustainable options to improve the quality of life for communities in the Maya Forest.

Without your help, our work to harmonize environmental conservation and social well-being with the pressures exerted by human populations would not be possible. Your leadership was complemented this year by other corporations also lending their support to the preservation of the Maya Forest ecoregion, including Citigroup

Foundation, American Electric Power, Banamex, GBM International, and Grupo Bimbo. On behalf of the World Environment Center, The Nature Conservancy, and the Rainforest Alliance, we look forward to building upon the gains of this past year and thank you very much for your generosity and continued commitment to conservation.