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INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



DOI-ITAP

Factsheet

Environmental Governance

Strengthening Environmental Governance in Protected Areas in Guatemala

Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), home to much of the country's biodiversity, hundreds of Maya archaeological sites, and community forestry concessions, is managed to balance economic sustainable development with conservation. Growing criminal activity in this region (e.g., drug and human trafficking, illegal land settlement, illegal logging, poaching, looting) is directly impairing the MBR natural and cultural resources, as well as its economic potential.

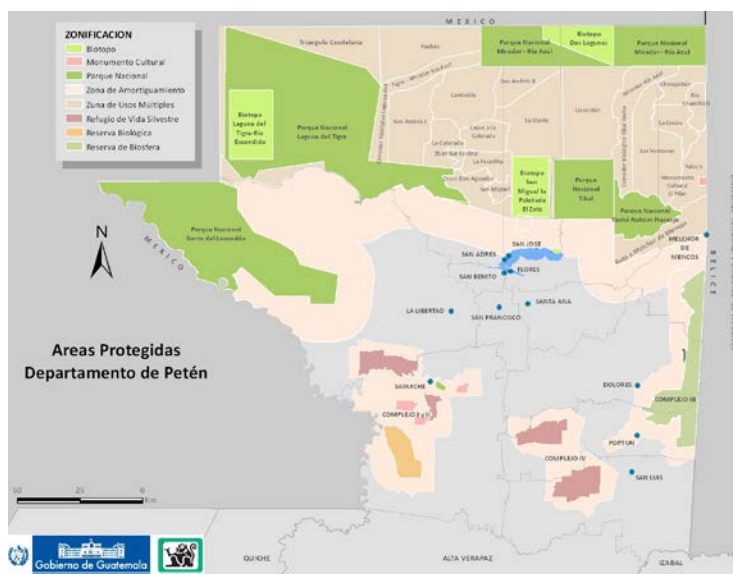
To address key components of these threats, the Government of Guatemala (GOG) is collaborating with the Department of the Interior's International Technical Assistance Program (DOI-ITAP) and its implementing partners to lend their expertise and support.

Selected Accomplishments

Highlights of successes from this partnership are listed below.

Judicial System Strengthened: DOI-ITAP supported the creation & ongoing operation of the Environmental Justice Forum (EJF) of Petén to serve as a legal advisor to the GOG, helping to:

- Establish the **first-ever environmental court** is in the Petén, along with the re-posting of environmental prosecutors. These are being replicated nationwide, starting in Izabal (2017) and the Verapaces (2018). More courts being planned.
- Promote a **"National Strategy to Strengthen Environmental Law Enforcement,"** led by the Supreme Court to raise the profile of environmental crimes and based on the successful courts model.
- Prosecute **High-Profile Emblematic Environmental Cases**, as prioritized by the Guatemala's Attorney General and the National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP).



At over 2.1 million hectares, the Maya Biosphere Reserve comprises nearly one-fifth of Guatemala's land mass. The MBR core protected areas are depicted in green, dark tan is the multiple use zone (forestry concessions) and light beige is the buffer zone. CONAP

Environmental Law Enforcement Successes: With strong GOG political will, led by CONAP, Guatemala has:

- **Recovered 155,000 hectares of usurped lands** under the illegal control of human settlers and "narco-ranchers," who were evicted. Remaining under GOG protection to prevent resettlement, these ecosystems are recovering.
- **Successful prosecutions of environmental cases** - since 2013, all 12 cases processed resulted in convictions or guilty pleas and land recovered. A total of 43 cases remain under development.

Monitoring Governance to Strengthen Decision Making: Trends are measured through 20 wide-ranging indicators (e.g., land cover, socio-economic, GOG budgets) and publically reported by the CONAP. Based on these reports, the GOG has taken the following strategic decisions to strengthen governance in the MBR:

- **Increased Budget** for Laguna del Tigre National Park: In 2017, CONAP increased investment by 2.5 million Quetzales (\$335,000 U.S.) in this park, one of Guatemala’s most threatened protected areas.
- **Improve Environmental Case Management:** From 2007-2017 and within Peten’s protected areas, the number of environmental cases presented for **prosecution has increased by 340%** (from 42 to 146).
- **Standardized Field Patrols:** Training courses, operation manuals, and software (e.g., “SMART” patrolling) are helping guards to systematically report data on threats encountered.

Public Participation Strengthened and Replicated: Since 2006, DOI has helped to launch and/or support the:

- **MBR Multi-Sector Roundtable:** A public-private forum for information sharing and consensus building.
- **Inter-Sectorial Roundtable:** Replicated based on above model to serve southeaster Petén.
- **MBR Committee and Laguna del Tigre National Park Committee:** Official decision-making forums for their respective areas.



Meeting of the South Petén Roundtable, San Luis, Petén, Guatemala, March, 2014. (Photo by Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticias)

Promote Economic Alternatives: Support communities in the MBR and the Adjacency Zone with Belize with honey and “seed fund” alternatives.

Cross-Border Species Protection: Guatemala-Belize technical exchanges to share best practices to reduce poaching of iconic species shared by both countries.

Community Tourism Development: through community tourism guide accreditation, drafting of “Public Use Plan” for Mirador-Rio Azul National Park, Uaxactun-Carmelita tourism portfolio exchange, and design of visitor infrastructure and interpretive panels for tourists at four sites.

Protection of Archaeological Heritage: through support of enhanced field presence at strategic and culturally important archaeological sites, including El Peru/Waka, La Corona, and El Mirador.

Funding and Implementing Partners

The Program is funded by a U.S. Congress Direct Apportionment (via USAID) and previously, by the Department of State (DOS) through the Central America and Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement.

DOI-ITAP’s implementing partners in Guatemala include the Wildlife Conservation Society, Asociación Balam, and the Environmental Justice Forum of Petén, and in Belize the Friends for Conservation and Development.



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