



Environmental Gatekeepers

A Focus on the Chiquibul National Park

BACKGROUND

The Chiquibul National Park (CNP) is Belize's largest terrestrial protected area, encompassing an estimated 285,937 acres (115,717 ha) located in the Cayo District.

It lies entirely within the Belize River Watershed, protecting a large section of the headwaters of this key watershed.

IMPORTANCE

The National Park also makes a significant contribution to mitigating the effects of climate change by storing and sequestering carbon, providing clean air, and replenishing adjacent areas with genetic resources, medicines and food (derived from plants and animals).

Of particular importance are the key environmental goods and services provided by the CNP. A large portion of the headwaters of the Chiquibul River lie within its boundaries.

CONSERVATION

The CNP provides protection and conservation management for extensive tracts of critical wildlife habitats, supporting viable populations of species including:

- Scarlet Macaw
- Jaguar
- Baird's Tapir

Environmental Financial Crimes (EFCs)



Environmental Financial Crimes are illicit activities that exploit natural resources for profit while violating environmental and financial laws occur in the protected area.



EFC EXAMPLES IN BELIZE:

- Illegal logging
- Cattle ranching
- Illegal wildlife trade
- Illegal gold panning

Gatekeepers of EFCs

Professional enablers are described also as facilitators, and controllers, among other terminologies that address similar concepts.

In the financial system, they are also referred to as:

- Facilitators
- Controllers
- Gatekeepers

Professional Enablers

In Belize, some professionals such as lawyers, accountants, real estate agents, and company service providers, occupy positions of significant trust. They play key roles in forming businesses, managing assets, and facilitating financial transactions. These individuals are often referred to as gatekeepers because they stand at the intersection between legitimate businesses and potential financial abuse.

Hypothetical situations where trusted professionals can enable financial crime:

- **Lawyers and Notaries:** assisting in illegal land transactions.
- **Registered Agents:** creating shell companies tied to illicit land use.
- **Real Estate Agents:** facilitating sale of illegally acquired land.
- **Accountants:** masking proceeds from environmental crimes.
- **Business Intermediaries:** helping foreign clients exploit loopholes.

Enabling Activities

- Registering shell companies for land acquisition.
- Turning a "blind eye" to suspicious transactions.
- Manipulating land titles and environmental permits.



Preventative Role

- Conducting due diligence.
- Reporting suspicious activity.
- Refusing to participate in unethical transactions.
- Supporting environmental compliance and transparency.

Environmental Gatekeepers

- **Environmental Gatekeepers** are individuals, organizations or institutions that are in a position to prevent, detect or report environmental crimes.
 - Their decisions can either permit or help aid in the prevention of illegal activities such as:
 - illegal logging, illegal wildlife trade or other Environmental Financial Crimes (EFCs).
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Chiquibul's Environmental Gatekeepers

- FCD has a co-management agreement with the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Solid Waste Management for on-site management and conservation of the Chiquibul National Park.
- Since taking co-management responsibilities it works closely with:
 - Belize Forest Department
 - National Biodiversity Office
 - Institute of Archaeology
 - Immigration Department
 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 - Belize Defence Force
 - Police Department



GOAL:

- To protect the CNP as a core area of biological diversity within the Maya Mountains with high ecological integrity, and intrinsic natural and cultural value, and
- For the provision of vital environmental services in support of Belize's national development, climate resilience, and regional security and cooperation.

CASE HIGHLIGHTS IN THE CHIQUIBUL NATIONAL PARK

In the Chiquibul National Park human incursions and encroachment from Guatemala into the protected area has been a constant threat.

The hunt for natural resources and extraction of timber and non-timber species have created much tension between the two countries over the years.



From non-timber forest product extraction, illegal logging, cattle and crop production, hunting and gold panning these cross-border activities are affecting the conditions of the park.

Wildfires are the most impactful and most recent threat. In many areas, however, natural regeneration appears to be occurring.

According to data from FCD, Human footprint direct and indirect impacts accounts for approximately **11%** of the area affected with over 70% recovering in large parts due to patrols.

Joint Forces in the Chiquibul National Park (CNP)

Joint Forces efforts which include:

- **Belize Defence Force**
- **Police Department**
- **Belize Forest Department**
- **Friends for Conservation and Development**

These Joint Forces have the role to control and uphold Belize's environmental laws and regulations.

Mitigation Measures

- Maintain a cohesive and well-coordinated joint effort to patrol and address cross-border environmental crimes.
- Strengthen Government inter-agency data sharing to prevent financial and environmental crimes more efficiently.
- Improve compliance training and environmental due diligences by the private sector.
- Promote community monitoring, establish whistle-blower protections, and promote cross-border partnerships.