



ANNUAL REPORT
2020
BKHC



BELIZE KARST
HABITAT CONSERVATION

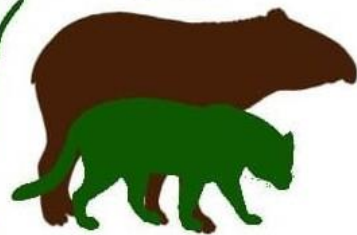


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MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A fresh start does not have to be at a new place; it can also be through new ideas, new faces, new talents, and new energy! This was the feeling my team and I had at the beginning of the year. All our plans were falling into place, and this gave us a great feeling of accomplishment at Belize Karst Habitat Conservation. Little did we know, in March 2020, our world as we know it would change drastically.

Belize Karst Habitat is a new NGO that entered a co-management agreement with the Belize Forest Department in January 2019. About a year after this achievement, Belize Karst was able to secure a grant from PACT, which would enable us to develop a five-year management plan and clear the boundary lines for the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve. Shortly after, the Covid pandemic hit Belize and caused the country to close its borders, airports, and go on lockdown. This resulted in one of our biggest donors, Mayawalk Tours, to pause their operations. This also resulted in the postponement of the scheduled workshops that we had with the surrounding communities, which would give us information needed to complete our management plan. Our cleared and demarcated boundary lines also started to regrow during the long delay in the completion of the management plan.

We had a lot of setbacks in 2020, which made us feel defeated at times, however, we made the decision to push through, despite all the things that went wrong. We remained open with our donors, and we ensured that our first grant ended in a success. Due to the tourism background that several members of our board, along with myself possess, we had a brilliant and unique idea to adapt our management and marketing practices from the tourism industry, to fit the conservation and management of Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve. This got the attention of many people in government agencies and other NGOs.

We have a strong desire to see the logging and poaching that occurs in Tapir Mountain to come to a complete end. Due to this, we remain resilient in our plans to properly manage the nature reserve, despite half of our board members no longer being able to partake in the decisions of the NGO because of the negative impact the pandemic also had on their lives. Our presence in greatly needed in Tapir Mountain, and this will only be possible if we continue receiving support from donors like PACT, Mayawalk Tours, and eventually other entities. The next step is to receive funding to build a ranger station and employ rangers to properly oversee who enters and leaves the Nature Reserve. We also want to get the neighboring communities and youths involved with helping to protect the integrity of the forest. Together, we can make a difference; together we can create a better tomorrow.

Best Regards,


Aaron Juan
Executive Director
Belize Karst Habitat Conservation

*Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone
can start today and make a new ending.*

~Maria Robinson

Belize Karst Habitat Mission and Vision Statement

Mission Statement: BKHCP's mission is to promote sustainable development of Belize's natural resources through innovative management of the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve for the benefit of all Belizeans.



Vision Statement: We are an innovative, dynamic and progressive community-based conservation organization with a global perspective that is committed to inspire people to sustainably develop Belize's environment through tourism, education, research, and sustainable management of its resources.

History of Belize Karst Habitat Conservation

The Executive Director of Belize Karst Habitat Conservation, Aaron Juan, accompanied the first archeologists who discovered the Actun Tunichil Muknal (ATM) cave site, located in Teakettle Village. This cave site is directly in front of the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve. From a very young age, Aaron has always had a love for animals and nature. He owned many different pets and took immensely good care of each of them. Being a tour guide for over 20 years has increased his exposure to nature. In addition, developing a newfound love for birding has opened his eyes even more towards the delicacy that nature entails and the importance of preserving and nurturing it.

Aaron quickly realized that there was an overwhelming amount of logging and illegal hunting occurring in the Tapir mountain Nature Reserve. Sadly, there was no management entity to properly manage the reserve in order to stop the illegal activities that were occurring. Different NGOs were then approached and asked if they would like to take up the task of managing tapir Mountain so that the illegal activities could come to an end. However, due to Tapir Mountain being too small, not being a National Park, and not being a part of a corridor, none of the NGOs that were approached did not want to take up the task at hand.

Feeling momentarily defeated, Aaron decided that he would form his own NGO and undergo the challenge of co-managing the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve, along with the Forest Department. Having no experience with managing an NGO, a board with members who are all a part of the tourism industry, in Belize, were formed and started to try their best to learn how to properly manage the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve. The only source of income that Belize Karst Habitat Conservation had was from donations made from the tour operator owned by Aaron Juan, Mayawalk Tours. He placed countless amounts of his own money into providing the various needs that Belize Karst had. Many mistakes were made along the way, and even more unanticipated setbacks occurred, however, Aaron, along with his small team, pushed through the struggles and were able to obtain their first grant, which was given to them by the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT).

With this grant, Belize Karst Habitat was able to develop a 5-year management plan, and clear and demarcate its border lines. Now having a management plan, Belize Karst hopes to be able to achieve more financial help to run and maintain Tapir Mountain and help it to become partially self sustaining.

Belize Karst Habitat Conservation Board of Directors

The Board of Directors for Belize Karst are five highly skilled individuals that have several years' experience in the tourism industry. They plan on using this expertise to help them effectively head the activities conducted by Belize Karst Habitat Conservation as it strives to co-manage the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve.



Giovanni Martinez
President



Aaron Juan
Executive Director



Natasha Velasquez
Treasurer



Samantha Angba
Secretary



Ronaldi Martinez
Vice-President

Borders of Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve Project



Implementation – Clearing Boundary Lines

Thanks to the grant given to us by PACT, we were able to allocate a budget of \$20,000.00 to clear and demarcate the boundary lines of Tapir Mountain. This started on February 24th, 2020, and was completed on August 1st, 2020. This project was initially expected to take only 2 months to be completed, however, one month into the project's implementation, the country went on lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic. This stopped the workmen from being able to continue clear the boundary lines. They were not considered essential workers, at the time, and only essential workers were allowed to go to work.

In the last week of May 2021, the workmen were finally able to commence the clearing of the boundary lines. Trying to remain as safe as possible, the number of workmen hired to clear the boundary lines was decreased. Their work weeks were also spaced out, which extended the time frame that the projected was completed.

While they were at the site, it was noted that logging was being done in the reserve. Reports of hearing chainsaws, and even gunshots were told to us. Due to this, we plan on starting frequent patrols of the reserve with officers from the Forest Department, in 2021.





Demarcating Boundary Lines

After the boundary lines were cleared, signage were placed in strategic locations around the borders to establish the presence of a managing body for the reserve. A few metal signs were there in the past, however, some families from the surrounding communities stole the signs and used them to create pots and other home equipment. A few wooden signs were also used in the past, but they would be burned and destroyed, possibly by loggers and/or hunters. Due to this knowledge, we decided to make our signs out of PVC, which can not be burned nor used as cooking equipment.

50 small signs and 3 big signs were ordered from Studio 7 and installed in the reserve. This was completed by the end of July 2020. Thankfully, the installations were all completed with no major setbacks. Below are some pictures of the signage installations.



Development of Management Plan Project

Implementation

\$30,000.00 was the budget we allocated towards completing a management plan. After publishing a terms of reference and submitting it to different organizations, we received a few applications. Upon review of the submissions, we believed that Wildtracks was the best organization to create our management plan. This is due to their vast knowledge on the type of NGO that Belize Karst is and the management of protected areas.

It was initially expected that the management plan would take four months to be completed. However, due to the country of Belize going on lockdown, and stricter measures being put in place for physical meetings, it took Wildtracks eleven months to complete. We had to request an extension of the project timeline, from PACT, two times due to the different setback that we had with completing this management plan.

Despite the challenges the pandemic caused us to face, we were able to successfully complete all the projects that PACT funded through the grant. Through some cost saving measures, as well, we were able to significantly decrease how much money we needed for the different sections of the budget. For future grants that we are awarded, we plan on utilizing the savings that we might have to conduct further developments that fall in line with the project being covered by the grant. This will enable us to get more things done for the reserve than was initially expected.



Acknowledgments

Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT):

Belize Karst Habitat Conservation would like to extend its deepest gratitude to the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) for awarding us with a grant to complete a much-needed Management Plan and to clear and demarcate the boundary line for the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve.

The management plan allowed us to prepare a clearly written guideline to help us properly co-manage the reserve for the next 5-years. The clearing and demarcation of the boundary lines helped us to establish a stronger presence in the reserve. Our upcoming plans include the placement of a ranger station and rangers to conduct daily patrols in the reserve. For the time being, the demarcation will let everyone who tries to enter the reserve know the managing authorities. This will hopefully help to lessen some of the logging and illegal hunting for now, until we can start incorporating the measures outlined in the management plan.



The Belize Forest Department:

The Belize Forest Department was very helpful in training the workmen who were clearing the boundary lines on how to use the different GPS devices that they would need to help guide them. They also donated their time to attend the workshops that we had and offered their knowledge to help us make better decisions and formulate a proper management plan. The Forest Department also helped us to conduct patrols in the reserve to stop any logging or hunting that occurred. Belize Karst Habitat greatly thanks everyone from the Forest department who assisted us over the past year. We look forward to continuing a thriving co-management arrangement for the reserve.



Acknowledgments (cont.)

Mayawalk Tours:



Mayawalk Tours has been the very first donor for Belize Karst Habitat Conservation. They helped to fund the small daily expenses that occurred before receiving the grant from PACT. They were also a contributor for some of the smaller expenses that occurred with the projects they did with the grant from PACT. Belize Karst Habitat would like to thank Mayawalk for all they have done to help get us started on the way to paving a greater future for Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve.

Wildtracks:



Wildtracks was a big contributor to Belize Karst Habitat Conservation in 2020 due to the production of the Management Plan that they completed for us. This was a lot of hard work and had frustrating moments due to the different setbacks. However, they managed to still complete a very professionally detailed management plan that will be used for the next years. A huge thank you goes out to the team at Wildtracks that made the creation of this management plan possible!

Other Acknowledgments:

Belize Karst Habitat Conservation would like to thank the members of the board who donated their time and areas of expertise into helping us to have a successful 2020! We would also like to thank Studio 7 for helping us to design, create, and install the signs that were placed around the boundary line for the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve. To all the workmen who were hired to clear the boundary lines, thank you for your time and energy. It was a job well done. We would also like to thank the members and leaders of the surrounding communities who assisted us with providing accurate information that our management plan needed. We would also like to thank them for the useful suggestions that they made during the workshops. Last, but not least, we would like to thank the general public and every interested person who was rooting for us along the way and wishing us the best in our efforts to co-manage the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve.

Belize Karst Habitat Conservation Financial Statement for January 2020 to December 2020

	2020
Income	
Grant Receipt	34,298.83
Donations	<u>4,160.94</u>
	<u>\$ 38,459.77</u>
Expenses	
Salaries and Wages	7,016.46
Social Security Expense	611.90
Field Supplies and Equipment	8,465.56
Management Plan Creation Expenses	19,640.00
Travel and Transportation Expenses	809.45
Bank Charges	19.25
Other Expenses	<u>1,673.00</u>
	<u>\$ 38,235.62</u>
Net Income	\$ 224.15