

Secure Critical Jaguar Habitat in the Maya Forest of Belize



RAINFOREST
TRUST

PROJECT AT A GLANCE

Hugh Possingham has identified Northern Belize as among the world's top 10% of places where habitat protection would most substantially reduce the extinction risk for mammals due to its beautifully unique, but critically threatened ecosystems.

Rainforest Trust and our partner, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), are part of an extraordinary coalition of local and international conservation organizations working in partnership to safeguard a critical and pristine 260,000-acre tract of forest habitat, accounting for nearly 10% of the country's land area. This project requires our urgent attention, as Belize is experiencing a deforestation rate twice as high as other parts of Central America to clear land for large scale agriculture and livestock operations.

The proposed protected area contains extensive hardwood (e.g., mahogany) and pine savannah forest cover types and is home to the healthiest and largest populations of jaguars and other native cats in Central America, including Ocelots and Margays. Populations of Central American River Turtles (CR), Yellow-headed Amazons (EN) and the Yucatan Black Howler Monkey (EN) are also found here.

This strategic purchase and donation represents a critical missing piece of the 11 million-acre Selva Maya protected areas complex, safeguarding the largest intact forest in Central America, extending from Mexico through Guatemala and Belize and south into Honduras and beyond.



PHOTO CREDIT: RAINFOREST TRUST/STEPHANIE WESTER

BELIZE

260,000 ACRES

PROJECT COST: \$10,080,000

GIFTS MATCHED 1:1

COST PER ACRE: \$38.77

STORED CARBON: 38,241,789 mT

BIODIVERSITY



PHOTO CREDIT: NICK HAWKINS

The proposed protected area is biodiversity-rich with 200+ species of trees, 400+ species of birds (including critical wintering habitat for more than 100 migratory species) and 70+ species of mammals, including 39 species of concern – most notably, jaguar, puma, margay, ocelot, tapir and howler and spider monkeys. Property access is tightly controlled and species that are uncommon in other parts of Central America – including ocellated turkeys, white-tailed deer, white-lipped peccaries, crested guan and great curassow – are not just present, but common. Together with the contiguous RBCMA, this conservation project is a critical part of the northernmost contiguous intact tropical forest in the Western Hemisphere and anchors the Mesoamerica Biological Corridor.

KEY SPECIES:

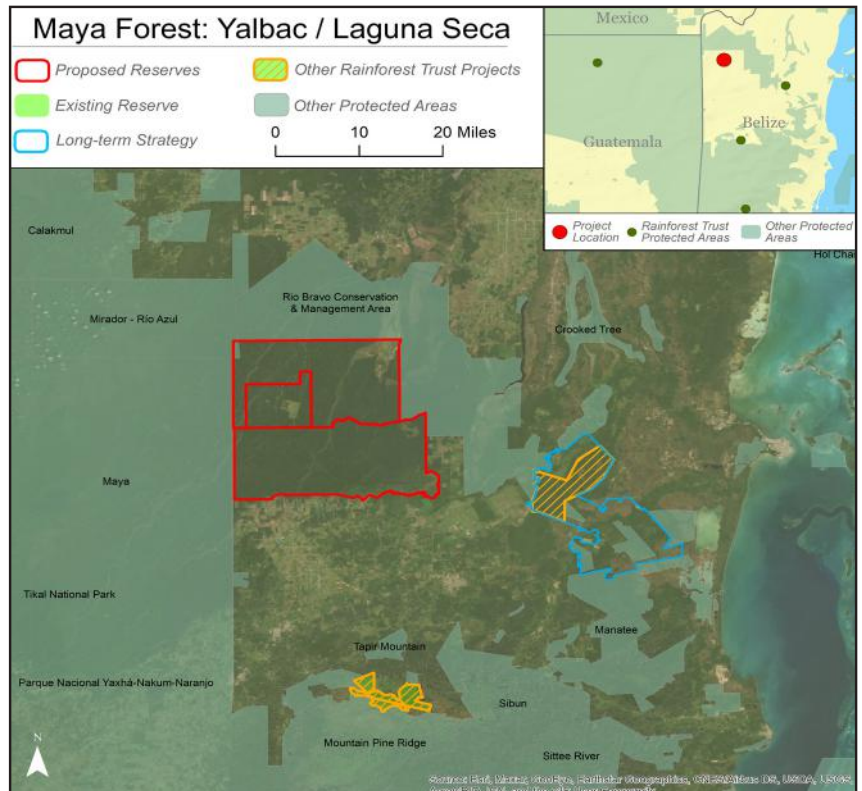
CENTRAL AMERICAN RIVER TURTLE (CR), YELLOW-HEADED AMAZON (EN), YUCATAN BLACK HOWLER MONKEY (EN), BAIRD'S TAPIR (EN), GEOFFROY'S SPIDER MONKEY (EN), PIGEONPUM (EN)



THREATS

In Belize, competition for agricultural land use is increasing almost twice as fast as in other Central American countries. The development of cattle, citrus, banana, and sugar cane plantations have escalated in recent years at the expense of the forests, and large scale agriculture has quickly become a mainstay of the Belizean economy. If we do not intervene now, the overwhelming likelihood is that the majority of this forest will be purchased and converted to livestock and feedstock agriculture.

Local farming interests in the immediate vicinity of the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area have begun to aggressively purchase properties along its southeastern border which have subsequently been slashed and burned for crop and cattle production. An agricultural company has already acquired and cleared neighboring lands, and has proposed to purchase significantly larger forested tracts, with the intent to convert the properties to cattle production. Losing this much of the Maya Forest would destroy habitat for iconic wildlife and level an ecosystem that contains huge stores of carbon.



SOLUTIONS

Rainforest Trust will be a partner in a consortium of international and Belizean conservation organizations and institutional donors, led by The Nature Conservancy to protect 260,000 acres. Two parcels will be purchased – Yalbac (~131,117 acres) and Laguna Seca (~105,277 acres), and a third will be given as a donation, Gallon Jug tract (~23,606 acres). Rainforest Trust seeks \$7.2 million to contribute to the \$72.5 million purchase which will be funded in part (50%) through the consortium and in part by a loan (50%) taken by TNC and repaid through the sale of carbon credits. After purchase, title will be held by a Land Trust that will be developed to also maintain and protect the property. The size of the subject property and its central proximity to other key reserves, national parks, and protected areas that make up the greater Selva Maya has led to an unprecedented coalition of U.S. and international NGOs, foundations, and donors working together to acquire and protect this native forest in perpetuity. The coalition includes: University of Belize, Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education, Belize Association of Protected Areas Management Organizations, Wildlife Conservation Society, Global Wildlife Conservation, Rainforest Trust, World Land Trust, International Tropical Conservation Fund, Belize Audubon Society, Mass Audubon, and others. TNC is committed to working together with the coalition and the Government of Belize to establish an organization similar to PFB with a multi-stakeholder steering committee (from the organizations listed herein) responsible for developing and implementing a management plan that ensures the long-term financial stability for the protection of the forest, while effectively integrating it into the larger Selva Maya corridor which spans Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico.

SAVES CHALLENGE

Recognizing the urgent need to act now to protect the most critical habitats for threatened species, a committed conservationist challenged Rainforest Trust to scale-up our efforts by pledging a **dollar for dollar matching grant of \$50 million**. Launched in October 2016, the SAVES Challenge saves species and tropical habitat throughout the world.

