

PROVIDING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES OF CROOKED TREE WILDLIFE SANCTUARY (CTWS), BELIZE

» Context and challenges

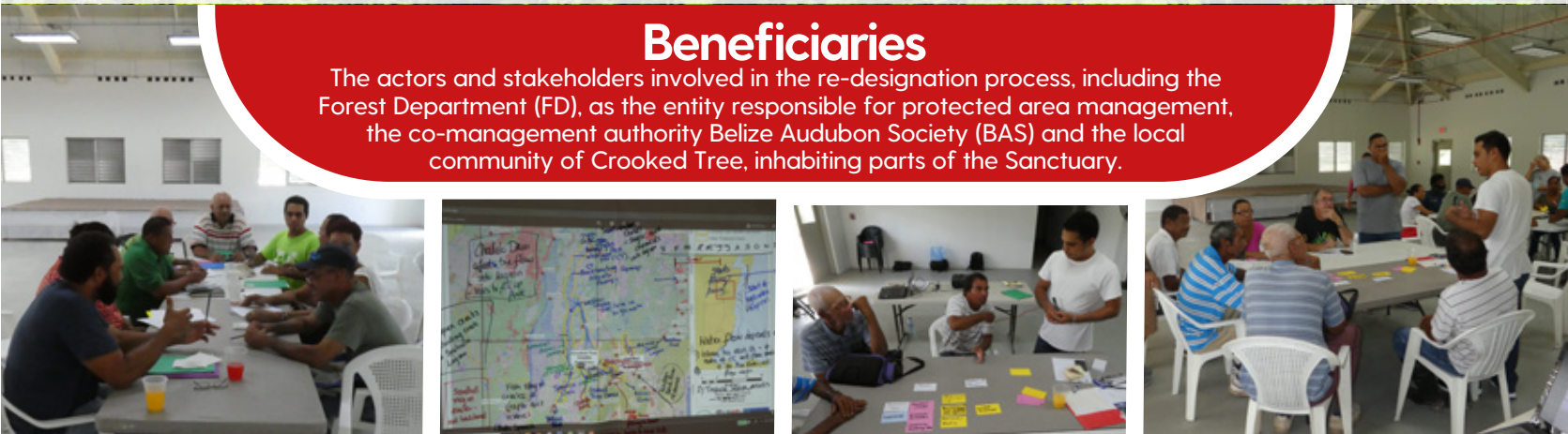
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The Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (CTWS) which was established in 1984 as a protected area (PA) in recognition of its importance for waterfowl is the largest freshwater wetland in northern Belize and a globally recognized RAMSAR site. The Village of Crooked Tree itself has been in existence for more than 200 years, however, the establishment of the CTWS did not take its existence into account although the villagers are dependent on the resources of the lagoon. On December 2013, the Belize Audubon Society (BAS) signed a co-management agreement with the Forest Department (FD) to co-manage the CTWS. The Sanctuary has potential to generate social, economic and environmental benefits for nearby communities. More specifically, the fishing resources of the lagoon have long been a local source of income. However, with its current national designation (Wildlife Sanctuary Category 1) the law

does not allow for resource extraction, thus not considering traditional rights and usage. Nevertheless, as the Crooked Tree lagoon system has been traditionally of great importance to the local communities, continued extraction of natural resources has been permitted, albeit with restrictions. This contradiction between the legislation and the aims of the PA has caused confusion and has exacerbated tensions between BAS and local community members. After the National Protected Areas System (NPAS) Act was amended to provide the option for Wildlife Sanctuaries to be re-categorized to allow traditional community-based resource extraction based on sustainable use plans, the re-designation process from Wildlife Sanctuary Category 1 to 2 was initiated in 2018, facilitated by the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project.

Beneficiaries

The actors and stakeholders involved in the re-designation process, including the Forest Department (FD), as the entity responsible for protected area management, the co-management authority Belize Audubon Society (BAS) and the local community of Crooked Tree, inhabiting parts of the Sanctuary.



Impacts

- ◆ The management planning process provided a positive entry point to moving forward towards a more collaborative management regime under a multi-sectoral management committee.
- ◆ A five-year Management Plan considering the input of government agencies, the BAS and community representatives is in place.
- ◆ Measures are established that allow the identification of best practices for the operation of the Forest Department.
- ◆ A shift in the attitudes of community members has taken place, with natural resource users becoming increasingly positive in their interactions and engagement in the process and a high degree of awareness and willingness to engage the enforcement agencies to curb illegal extraction of resources by the Crooked Tree Village.
- ◆ Re-designation from a Wildlife Sanctuary 1 to Wildlife Sanctuary 2 on December 2018, allowing established, traditional community use, based on a sustainable use plan.



Memorandum of Understanding for the protection and sustainable use of the CTWS

In the context of the challenge that resource extraction in the CTWS under its designation as a category 1 Wildlife Sanctuary was not allowed, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was negotiated and signed between the parties involved in the management of the protected area. These are the Forest Department, the Belize Audubon Society (BAS), responsible for the administration of the area, as well as the community of Crooked Tree. The Memorandum was to make provisions for the Crooked Tree Village and the BAS to work hand in hand in the protection of the Sanctuary and allow the sustainable extraction of resources from within the area as embraced in the recently updated National Protected Areas System Act. The intent, signed in the MoU, was a re-designation of the Sanctuary category for which a roadmap was drawn up.

Enabling factors: The signing of this MoU was only possible because the NPAS Act had recently been updated to include the possibility of sustainable natural resource extraction within certain Wildlife Sanctuaries categories. Furthermore, the value identified by the FD and BAS in working with the community for the protection of this RAMSAR Site as opposed to without it.

Formalization of the CTWS Steering Committee

Based on the MoU between FD, BAS and Crooked Tree Village, and as part of the road map to re-designate the Wildlife Sanctuary, a Management and Natural Resource Use Plan had to be developed as well as a governance structure to facilitate the process. For the latter, a Steering Committee (SC) was formalized chaired by the FD and composed of representatives from the following organizations: Crooked Tree Village Council, Fisheries Department, BAS and FD. The SC objective was to oversee the implementation and to serve as technical advisor throughout the process and proved to be extremely useful in increasing transparency and coordination.

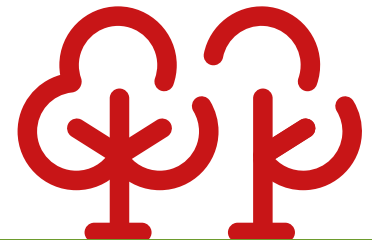
Enabling factors: The formation of the Steering Committee was possible since all involved parties had identified the need for a re-designation of the PA and were aware that this could best be achieved with a representative and operational steering structure to lead the process.



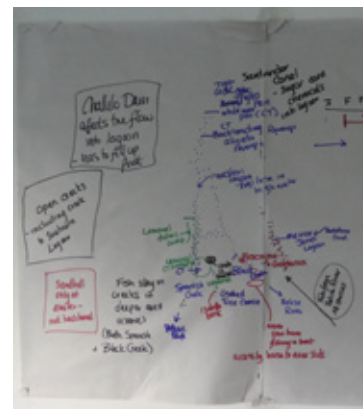
Development of the Management Plan for the CTWS

For a re-designation of the CTWS a Management Plan was necessary. The management planning process used a series of consultation workshops and meetings facilitated by a local consultant that brought together all key stakeholders from both the Government and the community, and was designed to promote an enabling environment to provide the foundation for collaborative management of the Wildlife Sanctuary. Five workshops were held in the community using the Conservation Measures Partnership Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation, supported by the Conservation Action Planning excel tool to identify and assess viability of seven management targets, to identify the stresses and sources of stress to the targets and identify priority targets and threats for the focus of conservation action strategies. The result was a five-year Management Plan for the PA including objectives and responsibilities.

Enabling factors: The MoU and the steering structure allowed for a coordinated implementation in which all views were considered. To ensure the availability of the villagers, the workshops were all held during weekends which showed commitment from the governmental institutions. This contributed to the community feeling to be taken seriously and increasing their ownership.



The Memorandum of Understanding (1) formed the basis for the development of the Management Plan (3) and the Steering Committee (2) as a governance structure for this process enabled coordination and transparency.



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