INTEGRATED FIRE MANAGEMENT (IFM) IN PROTECTED AREAS: STRENGTHENING THE FOREST FIRE CONTROL AND PREVENTION STRATEGY IN PETÉN, GUATEMALA

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Context and challenges

Agricultural activities carried out by community members in and around protected areas (PA), specifically within the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), can lead to forest cover loss, fragmentation, deterioration and loss of ecosystems due to land-use changes. Fire is used as a tool for ground preparation and bears the risk of causing forest fires and damage to the health and economy of the population. Although there are technicians, forest rangers and community members trained to implement preventive and forest fire control activities, it is not enough to inhibit forest fires. Both climatic conditions and anthropogenic pressures make it necessary to have better trained human resources to implement a work plan aimed at strengthening the institutional presence in high-risk areas, developing community extensionism and promoting compatible productive alternatives to the territory. The Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project, in cooperation with the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP), contributed to the implementation of the Integrated Fire Management Strategy of the Department of Petén, through three actions: 1) development of an Integrated Fire Management (IFM) Training Guide and its implementation through the strengthening of technical and operational capacities; 2) technical advice for the development and implementation of Forest Fire Prevention and Control Plans and 3) advice on the systematization and implementation of the Forest Fire Early Warning Systems (FFEWS) to reduce fire risks by agricultural burns in communities in the Multiple Use Zone of the MBR.

Beneficiaries

Groups of technicians, forest rangers and community members that have strengthened their knowledge and skills at the technical-operational level. Institutions, civil society organizations and rural population, through specific workshops and awareness activities on fire management.

Impacts

- CONAP's technical field staff, 204 forest rangers and 334 community guards improved their basic technical skills to deal with forest fire emergencies (accidents, snake bites, sunstroke).
- At the institutional and inter-institutional levels, particularly among technicians and decision makers, coordination and planning for the development of field actions derived from the Forest Fire Prevention and Control Plans has been improved and strengthened in an orderly and efficient manner.
- The implementation of Forest Fire Early Warning Systems (FFEWS) has improved the management of controlled burns for agricultural activities in seven community committees
- 445 members of community groups and 10 technicians strengthened their technical and operational capacities to attend and control fires, as well as their response ability to suppress forest fires and reduce affected areas, resulting in no forest fires in their communities in 2018.

Intervention

Elaboration and implementation of the Training Guide for Integrated Fire Management (IFM)

With the support of the Project, the IFM Training Guide was developed and implemented, which, based on a "Classrooms in the Field" model, trained technical personnel and forest rangers in immediate attention to forest fires, resource management and interpersonal relations. The application of this model facilitated communication between institutions and communities and motivated communities that had not been involved in the conservation of natural resources before to be interested in improving their relationship with government institutions.

Enabling factors: The training through the "Classroom in the field" model facilitated the understanding of the problem and improved relations between communities and government institutions in coping with forest fires.

Preparation and Presentation of the Forest Fire Prevention and Control Plans

For the annual forest fire season, the CONAP-Petén Regional Directorate prepares and presents the Forest Fires Prevention and Control Plans, focusing on the prevention and the strengthening of community organization and management. With the support of the Project, technical assistance has been provided, contributing to inter-institutional organization and coordination, leading to orderly planning and objectives aimed at reducing impacts of forest fires through sensitized communities.

Enabling factors: Communities, institutions and authorities have shown willingness and commitment to prevent and attend forest fires.

Implementation of the Forest Fire Early Warning System (FFEWS) in pilot communities

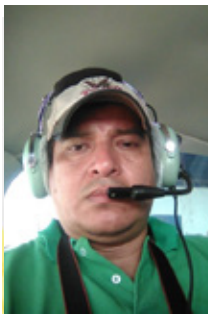
The Forest Fire Early Warning System is a community tool for the prevention of forest fires caused by agricultural burns advised by CONAP. The Project supported the characterization of 28 Systems identified in the MBR that were socialized with neighboring communities for implementation. In order to institutionalize and implement it, CONAP prioritized the monitoring of systems in seven pilot communities, which have received training, in the four Forest Fire Early Warning System components: organization, training, equipment and accompaniment of the communities.

Enabling factors: The socialization of learning between community has had a multiplier effect.

Interaction

The training of technicians, forest rangers and community members based on the Integrated Fire Management Training Guide (1), which is anchored in the plans for prevention and control of forest fires for Petén (2) has promoted inter-institutional coordination and organization as well as the involvement of municipal and local authorities, improving the prevention of forest fires with the application of FFEWS (3) in the pilot communities.

» Story



"Taking into account the current climatic conditions, the Selva Maya is key in mitigating the effects of climate change and at the same time is one of the most important ecological niches in the entire region. Strengthening the capacity of technical and operational personnel is one of the most important foundations for decision-making in the event of forest fires. The integration of organizations from society and communities is of great importance in the development phase of forest fire prevention plans. Early warning systems are an essential part of good planning and immediate response as long as strategic alliances are sought and the communities implementing these systems are strengthened through adequate equipment. For the future of the Selva Maya, we must consider the involvement of communities to maintain forest cover, while at the same time increasing the political will to invest more efficiently in the management and conservation of protected areas."

Nery Franco, forest firefighter in charge of the forest fire unit, CONAP Petén.

Find out more:
www.selvamaya.info

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