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International Outlook for Privately Protected Areas

Country Profile: BELIZE

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Introduction

This country profile is part of a study by the International Land Conservation Network (ILCN) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) summarizing the **legal, policy, and institutional mechanisms used to establish and incentivize privately protected areas (PPAs) in 30 understudied countries.**

PPAs contribute to the achievement of global conservation goals and biodiversity targets by contributing to landscape-scale conservation, connectivity and ecological-representativeness of protected areas.

For the purposes of this profile, an area is considered a PPA if it conforms to the definition agreed upon by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Generally speaking, a PPA's protection must be recognized and durable (with long term conservation intent); it must be governed by a private or non-governmental entity; and it must be governed and managed to meet the general conservation standards of a protected area (PA) as laid out by the IUCN.^{1,2} **Note: Alongside currently existing mechanisms in these countries, this study also references mechanisms that represent *potential opportunities for the creation of PPAs.***

The data in this profile is based on a 2018 desk review of law and policy documents, government reports, publications by multi-lateral organizations, scholarly literature, and other sources. For 28 of the 30 country profiles, data was reviewed by a volunteer in-country expert. We are grateful to these experts, whose names and the profiles they reviewed are listed in the appendix to the [International Outlook for Privately Protected Areas summary report](#).

Finally, this profile is intended to be a living document, which will be updated periodically as more information is submitted and time and resources allow. If you have a contribution, please contact the authors at landconservation@lincolninst.edu.

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¹ Mitchell, B.A., Stolton, S., Bezaury-Creel, J., Bingham, H.C., Cumming, T.L., Dudley, N., Fitzsimons, J.A., Malleret-King, D., Redford, K.H. and Solano, P. (2018). *Guidelines for privately protected areas*. Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 29. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. xii + 100pp.

² Dudley, N. (ed.) (2008). *Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. x + 86pp. WITH Stolton, S., Shadie, P. and Dudley, N. (2013). *IUCN WCPA Best Practice Guidance on Recognising Protected Areas and Assigning Management Categories and Governance Types*, Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 21. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN

BELIZE

Outlook for Privately Protected Areas

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1. Celia Mahung, Executive Director, Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE)

I. Country Overview

Land Area

Belize is a small country, with fewer than half a million inhabitants and a total land area of 2,297,000 hectares (ha).³ As of 2014, approximately 160,000 ha were forested, and 1,371,320 hectares were in agricultural production.

The southern interior of Belize is comprised of highlands, while the coasts consist of a largely marshy shoreline with mangrove forests. A long-standing timber industry has its roots in the mahogany trade. Agriculture concentrates in the northern lowland plains. The Belize Barrier Reef runs parallel to Belize's coast and supports exceptional marine biodiversity. Known as British Honduras until independence from the United Kingdom in 1981, Belize has high ethnic and linguistic diversity in addition to exceptionally high biodiversity.

Land Ownership and Tenure

The two major forms of land ownership in Belize are *declared* and *undeclared land*.⁴ Declared land is that land which falls inside the compulsory registration areas identified by the Belizean government. Transactions on declared land are handled by the Land Registry, while those on undeclared land are handled by the Titles Registry. One may gain rights to land without a transaction—i.e. declare squatters' rights—by occupying land for more than 30 years, but those taking this route must still deal with the Lands and Surveys Department.⁵

The right of local and foreign parties to private property is protected by the preamble to Belize's national constitution.⁶ Three generally-equivalent forms of freehold title—a *deed of conveyance*, a *land certificate*, and a *transfer of certificate of title*—are recognized as legitimate by the Belizean government. The government has sought to consolidate these multiple freehold title systems since the passage of the Registered Land Act of 1977, with an increased effort to regularize tenure since 2001.⁷ This transition (spearheaded by the Lands and Surveys Department) has included the partitioning of indigenous lands,

³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2014. "Belize Country Profile." Accessed December 2017. <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=BLZ>.

⁴ Ministry of Natural Resources and Immigration. n.d. "Land Information Center - What We Do." Accessed January 2018. <http://mnra.gov.bz/natural-resources/land-information-system/what-we-do/>.

⁵ Government of Belize. Law of Property Act, Revised 2000. Accessed December 2017. www.belizelaw.org/web/lawadmin/PDF%20files/cap190.pdf.

⁶ Export.gov. 2018. "Belize – 5-Protection of Property Rights." Derived from the US State Department's Office of Investment Affairs' Investment Climate Statement. Accessed February 2018. <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Belize-Protection-of-Property-Rights>.

⁷ Ministry of Natural Resources and Immigration. n.d. "Land Information Center - What We Do."

formerly held in common, into privately-owned parcels, as well as the strengthening of community systems in other areas.⁸

Protected Areas

According to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), 840,200 ha (37.68 per cent) of Belize's total land area is protected.⁹ These protected areas are coordinated at a national level through the National Protected Area System. The 2015 National Protected Areas System Plan outlines a blend of state, private, community, and collaborative approaches to land conservation.¹⁰ This plan also emphasizes the economic value of services provided by protected areas and the importance of connectivity among conservation lands.

II. Law and Policy for Private Land Conservation

Privately Protected Areas

Privately Protected Areas (PPAs) were formally defined by the legislature of Belize in the *National Protected Areas System Act* (2015).¹¹ The Act defines PPAs as any protected area established on privately-owned land under the auspices of said Act. PPAs are thus enumerated as one of 13 types of protected area, alongside national parks, nature reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, and others.

Rather than an entirely distinct category, however, a PPA is treated as a modified version of another specific protected area type, with 'private' affixed to the name. For example, a private nature reserve is a nature reserve on private land, and its management must follow the guidelines for the management of all nature reserves. Additionally, the Ministry of Forestry has jurisdiction to regulate tree conservation on specified private lands.¹²

Sections 20 and 21 of the *National Protected Areas System Act* (2015) elaborate on PPA establishment and governance.¹³ Among the requirements for PPA establishment are the written commitment of the current landowner, who must apply to the Ministry of Natural Resources to protect his/her land. A PPA can be established in order to protect an ecosystem that is poorly-represented by existing protected areas, to improve connectivity between protected areas or to buffer around them, to ensure sustainable resource use, or to protect specific natural or biological characteristics. Once accepted as a PPA, the area remains under protection in perpetuity even through a change in landownership. All use of the land must accord with the standards set by the government for a given classification of protected area—e.g. *nature reserve* or *national park*—as outlined by sections 8 and 23 of the 2015 Act. Sustainable resource extraction and tourism are considered legitimate for-profit uses of PPAs in the 2015 National Protected Area System Plan.¹⁴

⁸ Novogrodsky, N.B. 2012. "All Necessary Means: The Struggle to Protect Communal Property in Belize." *Wyoming Law Review* 12, no. 1: 197-214. <http://repository.uwyo.edu/wlr/vol12/iss1/9>.

⁹ UNEP-WCMC. 2018. Protected Area Profile for Belize from the World Database of Protected Areas. August 2018. <https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/BLZ>.

¹⁰ Government of Belize. 2015. National Protected Areas System Plan. <http://selvamaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/National-Protected-Areas-System-Plan.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Government of Belize. 2000. Belize Forests Act, Revised 2000 Edition. Chapter 213, Section 5.1.a. extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/blz2737.pdf.

¹³ Government of Belize. 2015. National Protected Areas System Act. www.nationalassembly.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Act-No.-17-of-2015-National-Protected-Areas-System-Act-2015.pdf.

¹⁴ Government of Belize. 2015. National Protected Areas System Plan. P.29.

As of 2014, the National Protected Area System includes eight private reserves (two of which have a standing agreement with the government; the others with de-facto recognition and management plans in place), covering 131,663 ha and varying widely in size, location, and ecological makeup.^{15,16} These eight PPAs comprise about 3.2 per cent of the national territory.

Conservation Covenants

Legislation to allow for conservation covenants has been in the works for over a decade. In 2009, a finalized *Conservation Covenant Act* proposal was put forward by the Belize Association of Private Protected Areas (BAPPA) and Ya'axché Conservation Trust, in partnership with the Association of Private Area Management Organizations (APAMO) and the National Protected Areas Commission (NPAC).¹⁷ As of 2015, a *Conservation Covenant Act* still had not passed, resulting in the continued failure to integrate private reserves into the national protected area system.¹⁸ However, lack of an explicit legislative basis has not stopped organizations from pursuing covenants and similar tools.

Conservation Easements

Several studies in the early 2000's, noted the feasibility of conservation easement legislation, and of similar prospects such as the leasing of management rights. Non-profit trusts, similar to land trusts in the US, have been created to serve private conservation goals.¹⁹ The basic enabling legislation for easements—and for restrictive covenants, a similar form of contract—is provided in the Law of Property Act (Rev. 2000), which closely mirrors the property laws of the UK.²⁰ However, to date, no legislation has been passed to specifically enable conservation easements.

There are several examples of easements being used for land conservation. The Community Baboon Sanctuary uses appurtenant easements to protect about one hundred parcels in their conservation area (see case study),²¹ and the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) has conservation easements and trust deeds for private protected lands acquired through a 'debt for nature' swap between US and Belize governments in 2001.²²

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)

Belize's most recent NBSAP (2016), submitted to the Convention on Biological Diversity for 2016-2020, underscores the need to formalize the role of PPAs in the national protected areas network. Target C2 of the NBSAP calls for the legal and physical establishment of three biodiversity corridors by 2020. According

¹⁵ National Protected Areas Secretariat. 2014. "Interactive Map of Protected Areas." Accessed November 2018. <http://protectedareas.gov.bz/largemap/>.

¹⁶ Walker, Z. and Walker, P. 2009. The Status of Protected Areas in Belize – Report on Management Effectiveness, 2009. <http://apamobelize.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Status-of-Protected-Areas-in-Belize-09.pdf>.

¹⁷ Ya'axche Conservation Trust. 2009. "Conservation Covenant Act." Accessed December 2017. <https://yaaxche.wordpress.com/tag/conservation-covenant-act/>.

¹⁸ Global Environment Facility of the United Nations Development Program. 2010. Project: Strengthening National Capacities for the Consolidation, Operationalization and Sustainability of Belize's Protected Areas System. <https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BLZ/SNC.PAs%20Inception%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁹ Marsan, J. 2004. Private Lands Conservation in Belize. Natural Resources Law Center, University of Colorado School of Law. https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1156&context=books_reports_studies.

²⁰ Government of Belize. 2000. Law of Property Act, Revised 2000. www.belizelaw.org/web/lawadmin/PDF%20files/cap190.pdf.

²¹ Marsan, J. 2004.

²² Celia Mahung, personal communication, July 15, 2018.

to the NBSAP, “establishing biological corridors will require the inclusion of both national and private lands.”²³

The NBSAP also reinforces the Belizean government’s desire to “enact a Conservation Covenant Act”.²⁴ The document notes that tax incentives will be developed to induce landowners to establish such covenants.²⁵ The need for “incentives for private sector involvement and the long-term commitment of private lands to conservation” are highlighted elsewhere in the document.²⁶

III. Financial Incentives for Privately Protected Areas

Incentives in Development

The National Protected Areas System Act (2015) allows for subsequent regulations to be made to provide tax-based financial incentives for the owners of PPAs (20.4).²⁷ Likewise, the Act enables the Ministry of Natural Resources to exact fines from PPA owners and managers who fail to comply with the standards set for the management of the PPA by the government and in agreements specific to that PPA (32.3.B).²⁸

Debt-for-Nature Swap

Belize hosted one of the most high-profile ‘debt-for-nature’ swaps to date. In a debt-for-nature swap, a government is absolved of a portion of its national debt by the creditor country in exchange for a land conservation deal. In 2001, Belize was relieved of debt to the United States in a debt-for-nature swap, orchestrated largely by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The transaction was allowed under the auspices of the 1998 US Tropical Forest Conservation Act.²⁹ The US acquired some 4,800 ha of private forest land, which it donated to the Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment (TIDE), a partner of TNC.³⁰ The Belizean government likewise donated 4,500 ha to the TIDE.³¹ The Belize Audubon Society, the Belize Protected Area Conservation Trust (PACT), and the Belize Ministry of Natural Resources also played instrumental roles in the swap. As a result of the ‘debt for nature’ swap agreement, TIDE now manages over 20,000 acres of private protected lands in southern Belize.

UN-REDD+

UN-REDD+ is an internationally-active funding mechanism developed by the UN and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility. REDD+ stands for *reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation*, and rewards countries for the achievement and measurement of avoided deforestation. UN-REDD+ funding was approved for Belize in March 2015, and implementation is in process with the cooperation of PACT.³²

²³ Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment and Sustainable Development. 2016. National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. P. 61-62. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/bz/bz-nbsap-v2-p1-en.pdf>.

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

²⁵ Ibid., 62.

²⁶ Ibid., 43.

²⁷ Government of Belize. 2015. National Protected Areas System Act.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Marsan, J. 2004.

³⁰ Egolf, Suzanna. 2001. "The Belize Debt-for-Nature Swap." *In* Mobilizing Funding for Biodiversity Conservation: A User-Friendly Training Guide. https://www.cbd.int/doc/nbsap/finance/CaseStudy-DebtforNature_Belize_Nov2001.pdf.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Memoire, Aide. 2015. Belize Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDO) Readiness Preparation Project (PI52415), Preparation Mission.

For example, the Laguna Seca REDD+ Project in northwestern Belize, designed by Era Ecosystem Services, is now underway.³³

IV. Organizations for Private Land Conservation

Governmental

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development performs myriad roles in the area of land conservation.³⁴ Within the Ministry, the Belize Fisheries Department is charged with conservation in fisheries and other marine areas.³⁵ The Belize Forest Department is charged with the sustainable management of forests in the country, and supports activities on and off protected areas, as well as on private, state, and communally-held lands.³⁶
- The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation in Belize runs multiple sustainable tourism programs, which are vital in funding public and private conservation efforts.³⁷
- The Belize Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute is the point organization for conservation activities in Belize's reef system, marine areas, and coastal mangroves.³⁸
- The Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) operates as the national conservation trust under a 1996 Act of the same name. Working closely with the NPAS, PACT serves as the point contact for most international agencies and funders of conservation activities in the country.³⁹
- The Belize Nature Conservation Foundation (BNCF) was a product of the US-Belize debt-for-nature swap. Since 2004, the BNCF has funded community organizations, non-profits, and other conservation initiatives through small grants. The BNCF is managed by PACT.⁴⁰
- The Belize Association of Private Protected Areas (BAPPA) was formed in 2003 to support and coordinate private conservation efforts in the country.⁴¹
- The Lands and Surveys Department falls within the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), and is responsible for land-use planning, land registration, and the resolution of tenure disputes.

Non-governmental

- The Association of Protected Areas Management Organization is the country's largest network of conservation NGOs.⁴²
- Ya'axché Conservation Trust works alongside communities to ensure healthy forests, rivers with high species richness, and resilient communities within the Maya Golden Landscape in the Toledo District of southern Belize and beyond.⁴³

³³ Nature Bank. n.s. "Laguna Seca REDD+ Project." Accessed December 2017. <https://www.naturebank.com/projects/laguna-seca-redd/>.

³⁴ See their website: <http://www.agriculture.gov.bz/>.

³⁵ See their website: www.fisheries.gov.bz.

³⁶ See their website: <http://forest.gov.bz/>.

³⁷ See their website: <http://tourism.gov.bz/projects/>.

³⁸ See their website: <https://www.coastalzonebelize.org>.

³⁹ See their website: <https://www.pactbelize.org>.

⁴⁰ See their website: <https://www.pactbelize.org/partnerships/>.

⁴¹ Castañeda, Anselmo and the Belize Association of Private Protected Areas. 2009. CEPF Small Grant Final Project Completion Report. http://legacy.cepf.net/Documents/Final_BAPPA_policydev_Belize.pdf.

⁴² See their website: <https://apamobelize.org/about-apamo/>.

⁴³ See their website: <http://yaaxche.org/>.

- The Belize Audubon Society (BAS) plays a direct management role in a dozen protected areas throughout the country. It also supports conservation education and outreach in many capacities.⁴⁴
- Since 1997, Fauna & Flora International's Belize chapter has supported conservation in the Toledo district of southern Belize, largely through the Ya'axche Conservation Trust.⁴⁵
- Since 1997, the Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment (TIDE) has been among the foremost non-governmental conservation organizations in the country. TIDE manages terrestrial and marine protected areas within the Maya Mountain Marine Corridor in southern Belize, and notably played a crucial role in the 2001 debt-for-nature swap.
- Since 1988, the in-country non-profit Programme for Belize (Pfb) has played a key role in protecting the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA) and is now engaged in sustainable forest management.
- Corozal Sustainable Future Initiative (CSFI) is a Belizean non-profit conservation organization, originally formed in 1989 and renamed in 2012 to reflect an expansion of its mission. The Initiative is responsible for the management of, and conservation projects associated with, the Shipstern Nature Reserve (see case study). CSFI also supports the management of Honey Camp national park and an adjacent forest concession.⁴⁶

V. Best Practices/Case Studies

Shipstern Conservation & Management Area

This private protected area was designated in 1989 as Shipstern Nature Reserve and is under the management of the Corozal Sustainable Future Initiative (CSFI). It is composed of two non-contiguous parcels in the Corozal District of northeastern Belize. Clive Farrell, a British butterfly enthusiast, bought the land in 1986 and set about establishing a reserve for butterflies there.⁴⁷ In 2012, the area was re-designated, and this time received permanent trust status, as the national policy on private protected areas was still evolving in that period.⁴⁸

Rio Bravo Conservation & Management Area

The Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area is an officially recognized private reserve, encompassing more than 105,000 ha representing, approximately 4 per cent of Belize's total land area.⁴⁹ The project is supported by the Programme for Belize. International conservation NGO The Nature Conservancy recently piloted a carbon sequestration project in the area, in an effort to demonstrate new funding opportunities for protected areas.⁵⁰ Corporate donors in search of carbon credits have contributed these funds, and many local and international organizations contribute logistical support. Research activities frequently take place in the Area, some focusing on biodiversity, and others focusing on the wealth of Maya archaeological sites found within its bounds.⁵¹

⁴⁴ See their website: <http://www.belizeaudubon.org/>.

⁴⁵ See their website: <https://www.fauna-flora.org/countries/belize>.

⁴⁶ See their website: <http://www.csfi.bz/>.

⁴⁷ The Marshwood Vale Magazine. 2016. "Clive Farrell." www.marshwoodvale.com/people/2016/06/clive-farrell.

⁴⁸ Corozal Sustainable Future Initiative (CSFI). N.d. Projects Page. Accessed January 2018. <http://www.csfi.bz/projects/#Shipstern>.

⁴⁹ Programme for Belize. n.d. "Conservation." Accessed January 2018. www.pfbelize.org/conservation/.

⁵⁰ The Nature Conservancy. n.d. "Belize Rio Bravo Climate Action Project". Accessed January 2018. <https://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/latinamerica/belize/placesweprotect/rio-bravo-conservation-area.xml>

⁵¹ Programme for Belize. n.d. "Conservation." Accessed January 2018.

Community Baboon Sanctuary

This privately protected area is named for the Yucatan Black howler monkey, which is referred to as a baboon in Belizean Creole. From 1985-1987, The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) provided landowners funding to help them establish a formal community management area. The landowners formed a voluntary management agreement to establish norms that would enable the movement of the black howler monkey. They also signed reciprocal easements on each other's land to the agreed terms.⁵² Now at an area of some 5,250 ha, this reserve may provide an example for the further use of easements to support the creation of privately protected areas.⁵³

⁵² Marsan, J. 2004.

⁵³ Belize National Parks, Natural Reserves, & Wildlife Sanctuaries. n.d. "Community Baboon Sanctuary." Accessed January 2018. <https://ambergiscaye.com/pages/town/parkcommunitybaboon.html>