

## ***Funding Deal Conserves Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve***

**NEW YORK, New York**, March 30, 2012 - Conservation partners from Guatemala, the USA and the **Principality of Monaco** have signed an agreement that will protect 80,000 acres of intact forest at the heart of the five-million-acre Maya Biosphere Reserve in northern Guatemala.

Signed on March 9, the agreement will help reduce deforestation and degradation of the region while providing education, health, and fire prevention for the community of Carmelita at the center of the reserve in Guatemala's northern Peten region.



***Illegal logging in Peten, Guatemala*** (Photo by [Carbon Decisions International](#))

The community is located at the gateway to the archaeological site of El Mirador. This concentration of ancient Mayan cities that archaeologists call the cradle of Mayan civilization is threatened by human activities, including illegal logging, farming, and ranching in protected areas, as well as drug trafficking, poaching and looting of Maya artifacts.

"Drug trafficking money is fueling a massive ranching industry, which has virtually destroyed the Maya Biosphere within the past five years," says FARES (the Foundation for Anthropological Research and Environmental Studies).

Now, instead of facing further devastation, the community has attracted the protection of conservation groups from Guatemala and abroad.

In exchange for protecting the surrounding forest, the Carmelita community will receive support for education, health and fire prevention. The deal includes the enforcement of bans on hunting of jaguar, puma, ocelot, margay, tapir, howler monkey, spider monkey, scarlet macaw, ocellated turkey, harpy eagle, and other endangered wildlife.

While the Mirador Basin has been plundered and looted for decades, a powerful group of international and local conservationists and foundations is turning the situation around.

Signatories to the new agreement include: Carmelita Cooperative, the Carmelita Community Development Council, Asociacion BALAM with the support of the Guatemalan Protected Areas Council, the Association of Forest Communities of Peten, the Rainforest Alliance, **The Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation**, and the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society.



On April 20, 2011, **Prince Albert II of Monaco** visited Mirador to witness the conservation progress led by Dr. Richard Hansen of FARES and to show his support for PACUNAM in the Mirador Project.

**Ocellated turkey, El Mirador, Guatemala** (Photo by [Geoff Gallice](#))

"We have to save this place," the Prince said during his visit, before signing a cooperation agreement with PACUNAM. His foundation, **The Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation**, adds the Mirador conservation initiative in the Maya Biosphere Reserve to its nine other forestry projects.

The Mirador basin is one of the most biodiverse sanctuaries for wildlife in the Western Hemisphere. The reserve was created in 1990 to protect the largest area of tropical forest remaining in Central America and is part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

WCS's work in the region is made possible through the support of the New York-based Prospect Hill Foundation and the Governance and Transparency Fund of the UK Department for International Development.

Another signatory is PACUNAM, which stands for Fundacion Patrimonio Cultural y Natural Maya, a Guatemalan foundation made up of 13 corporations and families wishing to preserve the country's natural and cultural heritage through sustainable development. PACUNAM is the Global Heritage Fund's conservation partner in Guatemala.

For Mirador, PACUNAM has secured US\$3 million in funding for conservation and sustainable development. A key goal of the GHF Mirador project is to assist the Guatemalan government in securing permanent protection and UNESCO World Heritage Site designation for the park.

In 2009, Wildlife Conservation Society and the nonprofit Conservation International formed a partnership with Guatemala's Protected Areas Council to implement the country's first community-based conservation incentives payment system.

This contract among local communities, the Guatemalan government, NGO partners, and donors was intended to help stem deforestation and provide annual economic incentives to be designed and managed by local communities.



**A Mayan pyramid at El Mirador** (Photo by [Geoff Gallice](#))

agreements address pressing development needs and provide real incentives for the people living in and around the reserve to protect its animals and conserve its forests."

The archeologists at FARES say the Mirador Basin contains the earliest and largest Preclassic Maya cities known in Mesoamerica. "These cities are filled with massive constructions including pyramids, temples, palaces, causeways, and other remnants of a highly evolved and complex society," the foundation says.

Money started to flow into the community and by 2010, the Mirador had 80 full-time rangers and funding for enforcement.

The Carmelita agreement is the third such agreement in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, with other successful examples in the Uaxactun Community Forest Concession and the community of Paso Caballos in Laguna del Tigre National Park.

"Conservation agreements are a win-win for both the people and wildlife of the Maya Biosphere Reserve," said Julie Kunen, director of WCS's Latin America and Caribbean Program. "The

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