



Organización de los Estados Americanos  
Organização dos Estados Americanos  
Organisation des États Américains  
Organization of American States

## **MESOAMERICA 2020: Conservation Partnership of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Organization of American States (OAS)**

### **MESOAMERICA 2020 Anniversary Event**

**Suggested Remarks by Belize Ambassador H.E. Patrick Andrews:  
September 21st, 2015**

- The Permanent Mission of Belize to the OAS is pleased to celebrate the 1st Anniversary of Mesoamerica 2020, an initiative created in response to serious challenges facing countries in the region such as biodiversity loss and the preservation of key ecosystems which are the foundation of sustainable development and the livelihoods of our people.
- Mesoamerica is unique and privileged in terms of its vast biological diversity in part attributable to its geographic position at the junction of two of the world's great biogeographic realms: the Nearctic of North America and the Neotropical of South and Central America and the Caribbean, as well as its role as a land bridge between the continents.
- In the case of my own country, the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (BBRRS), inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996, is comprised of seven protected areas and is not only the largest reef complex in the Atlantic-Caribbean region but also one of the most pristine reef ecosystems in the Western Hemisphere. It provides important habitat for a number of threatened marine species, harbouring a number of species of conservation concern as well as endemic and migratory birds which reproduce in the littoral forests of cayes, atolls and coastal areas.
- Likewise, the Central Belize Corridor is a critical segment of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor as it connects the northern block of protected forests in Belize (including the Rio Bravo) with the southern block, the Maya Mountain Massif.
- Mesoamerica 2020 underlying principles of cooperation and solidarity through multi-country initiatives that understand biodiversity and ecosystem conservation beyond geographic boundaries complement key efforts undertaken by the OAS and Member States in Mesoamerica such as the Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala.



- Since 2003, Belize and Guatemala have been implementing confidence-building measures to enhance communication, integration, and cooperation as neighboring countries. Key bi-national biodiversity conservation actions to be implemented in this area will not only build upon the valuable efforts already undertaken by both countries and the OAS in the Adjacency Zone, but will also strengthen the culture of peace that we seek to build day to day in this important area.
- We are delighted to learn that through said conservation actions Guatemala and Belize will join efforts to increase wildlife security through the development of a landscape-wide compliance strategy in the Southern Maya Mountain Massif, home of species of concern such as the yellow-headed parrot, scarlet macaws, xate palm, mahogany and rosewood. The Maya Mountains have been the focus of several recent expeditions, each of which has revealed new species never before recorded in Belize, and some new to science. By bringing together different stakeholders including local communities, private logging companies and government agencies, the project will contribute to tackling serious challenges facing both countries such as uncontrolled and unsustainable wildlife and timber harvesting and trafficking.
- Furthermore, under the Mesoamerica 2020 partnership, the USFWS is providing technical training and support for the rollout of the “Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool”, or SMART - a groundbreaking tool for measuring, evaluating and improving the effectiveness of patrols to help protected area and wildlife managers better plan, evaluate and implement their activities, and promote good governance.
- Belize is already implementing the SMART system in its marine protected areas. By working with the Forest Department to develop a standardized national data model for its terrestrial protected areas, Belize will be one of the first countries in the world to expand this state of the art system to its entire protected areas system, from the peaks of the Maya Mountains to the Belize Barrier Reef.
- As we celebrate the Independence of my country Belize today, it is our hope that the joint efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the General Secretariat of the OAS, continue to deliver tangible conservation results as we celebrate today on its first Anniversary, for many years to come.