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Friends for Conservation Discuss Management

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Rafael Manzanero

You saw last week when the Friends for Conservation and Development took us into the Chiquibul Forest and the Caracol Archaeological Reserve but today we found them in a conference room. They were hosting a community workshop for 25 village leaders from communities nestled in what are known as buffer zones – which are those areas adjoining forest reserves. They are from San Antonio, Arenal, Benque Viejo, Succotz, Chechen Ha and Seven Miles – Belizean communities that actually buttress the conservation areas with their

in-built indigenous land management practices. FCD's director Rafael Manzanero told us why their input is necessary in devising any management plan.

Rafael Manzanero, Director – FCD

"This workshop for today is basically getting the community members of the villages which are living the forest reserves. As we know the Chiquibul Maya Mountain massive, it comprises of core areas like the Chiquibul National Park but also there are other buffer areas which are the forest reserves and so today's meetings is more bringing the community members in discussing more about their involvement, either direct or indirect in the management of those forest reserves. And so their concern is more related to how can they really be a mechanism where communities really can play a much more active role in the management of those resources.

The idea is that how do we really start a program where communities can become even a much more active custodian and steward of those resources. So we are hopeful of course that the inputs that are coming out from the local level, that it could actually spiral towards a manifestations from the communities but also on the other side that authorities such as the Forest Department really can put some credible importance to such inputs and recommendations coming from the local level.

But if communities are empowered, if communities really see that they are an active participant, they are a credible factor that authorities will up forward in understanding clearly their visions. It does provide for a wonderful opportunity for many of these forest areas to remain in Belize because if not, I would say that for the Maya Mountain Massive as one example, probably the only thing that will be staying in the future will probably only the core areas, all the rest probably can go."

And join us tomorrow, when we'll take you back into Chiquibul but from the air as our news team did a fly-over of the close to three dozen areas in Belize's reserved areas that are under pressure from Guatemalan poachers.

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