



GuateCarbon

SUPPORTING FOREST COMMUNITIES

Located in the heart of Mesoamerica's second largest tropical forest, the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) is an area rich in biodiversity and cultural history. Established by the Guatemalan government in 1990, the reserve spans nearly 5.2 million acres (2.1 million hectares) and is home to jaguars, pumas, ocelots, monkeys and macaws, as well as many rare tree species and fine hardwoods. It is also known for its ancient Mayan cultural treasures, including the world-renowned archeological site of Tikal.

Yet setting aside these valuable resources for protection is not enough to ensure their long-term survival. Although the reserve has been recognized by UNESCO for the way it balances conservation with sustainable socioeconomic development, the MBR's forest areas remain in peril. Illegal cattle ranching, agricultural conversion, wildfires, hunting and other unregulated activities pose significant challenges to the Guatemalan government and the local people.

The GuateCarbon forest carbon project—which is managed as a partnership between the Guatemalan government and local communities, with the support of international organizations including the Rainforest Alliance—aims to address deforestation in the MBR by developing and reinforcing sustainable activities in the reserve and harnessing the power of the growing international carbon market to provide additional economic incentives for conservation.

A Public-Private Partnership

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Guatemalan government granted forest user rights, through concessions, to 12 community-based organizations and two private companies within the reserve's Multiple-Use Zone, an area where the sustainable harvesting of forest resources is permitted. These concessionaires—whose operations have been certified to the sustainability standards of the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®)—have proven themselves to be exceptional forest managers. FSC-certified forest concessions had nearly zero forest loss over the past 14 years, as compared to a deforestation rate of 1.2 percent in the MBR as a whole, with some areas of the reserve's buffer zone reaching 5.5 percent per year.



Based in the MBR's forest concessions, GuateCarbon is a forest carbon project that is built on the international framework known as REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). The project allows the project proponent to earn carbon credits that can generate payments for the greenhouse gas emissions they have avoided through their sustainable management of approximately 660,800 hectares of forest. The project builds on the Rainforest Alliance's successful track record of providing technical assistance and promoting sustainable forestry among communities in the region for more than a decade.

In return for preventing deforestation and their associated greenhouse gas emissions, communities can receive support

for their continuing efforts to conserve their forests and strengthen sustainable income-generating activities. “The additional revenue will help us improve forest management and conduct surveillance to stop illegal logging and control forest fires,” says Arturo Sánchez, a member of the Árbol Verde community forest concession. “We will also be able to conduct ongoing monitoring to assess forest cover and examine the impacts of our work.”

As they have for generations, the reserve’s residents benefit from a host of non-timber forest resources, such as xate (a type of palm frond) and chicle. The sale of non-timber forest products generates an important revenue stream for women in particular. GuateCarbon provides communities with training to increase the competitiveness of these products and facilitate access to new markets.

To qualify for carbon credits, the project must meet a set of strict legal, organizational, technical and financial requirements. GuateCarbon will be validated against the most widely respected and credible benchmark for forest carbon projects—the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) for its greenhouse gas emissions reductions, and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity (CCB) Standards for its efforts to support communities, conserve biodiversity and address climate change. In addition to reducing a yearly average of over one million tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year, the project will also provide financial support to Guatemala’s National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP).

GuateCarbon Fills a Longstanding Gap

The idea of engaging the MBR’s communities in forest conservation and supporting their sustainable development efforts is not new. Up until now, many of the necessary training and forest management activities have been supported by USAID through nonprofit partners such as the Rainforest Alliance and the Wildlife Conservation Society, as well as through the community-based organization representing the concessionaires: the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP). However, a lack of consistent funding has made it difficult to sufficiently strengthen the technical and organizational capabilities of the actors involved.

GuateCarbon can help to fill this gap by promoting the inherent value of keeping forests standing and ensuring a stable source of financing. “The value of funds generated through the carbon market is that they will exist for the long term—25 years or more,” says Benedicto Lucas, CONAP’s former executive sec-



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ARTURO SÁNCHEZ

member of the Árbol Verde
community forest concession

retary. “They will allow people living in and near the reserve to be equal partners in managing and accessing the forest’s social, economic and environmental benefits.”

At the local level, these communities are improving their ability to manage public lands in the reserve and protect the area’s rich biodiversity. “GuateCarbon is a pioneer within the REDD+ portfolio,” says Teresita Chinchilla, ACOFOP’s technical director. “It’s among the first projects to include representatives from community-run forest concessions in all aspects of planning and implementation.”

GuateCarbon’s benefits extend far beyond the revenue generated from the sale of carbon credits. As Chinchilla notes, “We now have a lot more information about forest cover and conservation needs, stronger technical capacity, improved laws and regulations, more unified and committed communities, and enhanced expertise to conserve forest resources.”

The project has received significant international attention, which makes it an important source of potential revenue for the country, as well as a powerful example of what is possible when all of the stakeholders come together to tackle these challenges in a comprehensive way. “The really innovative thing about this is that it’s both a social program as well as a conservation one,” says Sergio Guzmán, GuateCarbon manager. “It creates a model partnership between the government and local communities.”

Ultimately, GuateCarbon demonstrates how a forest’s integrity and diversity can be maintained while also providing long-term benefits to residents, the Guatemalan government (which owns the land), and the forest communities and companies that manage it.

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Photos: Charlie Watson & Rainforest Alliance



GuateCarbon BY THE NUMBERS

GuateCarbon is a voluntary REDD+ forest carbon project that is managed jointly by the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) and Guatemala's National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP), with the technical assistance of the Rainforest Alliance and The Wildlife Conservation Society.

Region: Central America

Country: Guatemala

Department: Petén

Objective: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by deforestation in the Maya Biosphere Reserve

Project Proponents: CONAP, ACOFOP

Project Components:

1. Community Development: Invest in social development initiatives, promote income-generating sustainable forestry activities and strengthen forest protection in partnership with local communities
2. Territorial Governance: Strengthen the government's presence and the rule of law
3. Management: Manage the project and monitor carbon emissions, biodiversity conservation and social development

Greenhouse Gases Targeted:

Carbon Dioxide equivalent (CO₂e)

REDD+ Activities:

Avoided emissions of CO₂e through avoided deforestation

Field Activities:

Sustainable forest management; sustainable production of timber and non-timber forest products; social development projects; support for greater institutional presence in the forest and territorial patrols; social and biodiversity monitoring

Project Initiation: January 2012

Project Lifetime: 30 years, with the possibility of an extension (depending on project performance)

Project Area: 721,006 hectares of which 660,820 is forest. Approximately 477,000 hectares are being sustainably managed by 11 forest concessions (nine that are run by communities and two by industry) that have all been certified against the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®)

Potential Avoided Emissions:
36.9 million metric tons CO₂e

Project Status (as of October 2015):

- Established baseline of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO₂e), resulting from deforestation using the "Methodology for Unplanned Deforestation" (VM0015 v1.1), of the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS)
- Created project description for the VCS and project design document for Climate, Communities and Biodiversity (CCB) Standards
- Engaged in a successful process of obtaining free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)
- Agreed on and constructed a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) – a financial mechanism between the Government and ACOFOP
- The validation under both standards (CCB and VCS) was conducted by AENOR. The project is officially registered as a validated project under both standards.
- The verification process began in September 2015
- Expected to issue Verified Carbon Units by early 2016
- Attained and will continue maintaining Biodiversity Gold Level status

LINKS:

GuateCarbon:
www.guatecarbon.com

GuateCarbon and Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards:
<http://www.climate-standards.org/2014/06/26/proyecto-de-deforestacion-evitada-en-las-concesiones-forestales-y-corredores-biologicos-de-la-reserva-de-biosfera-maya-en-guatemala-guatecarbon/>

GuateCarbon and the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS):
http://www.vcsprojectdatabase.org/#/pipeline_details/PL1384



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