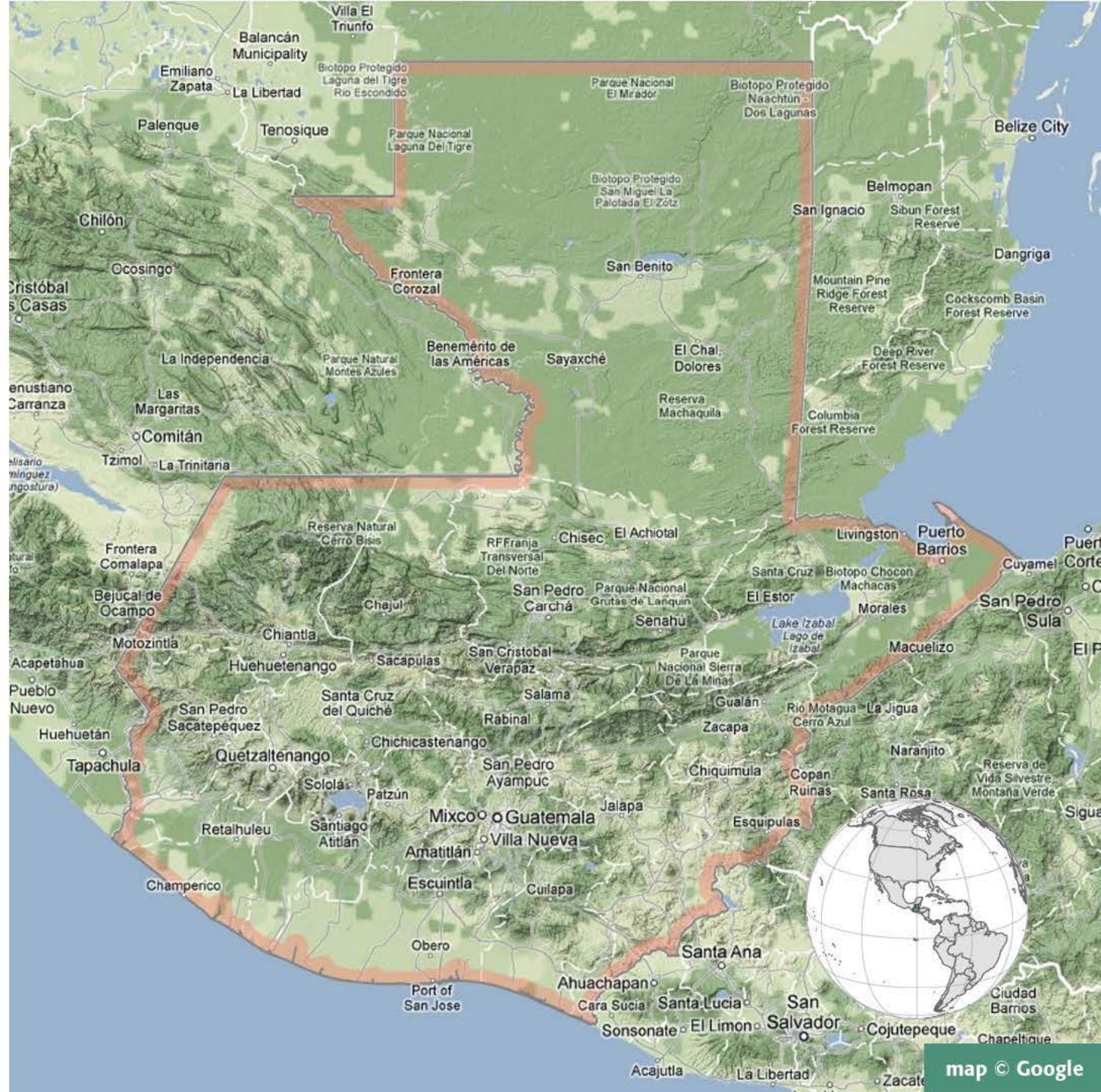




# Guatemala



Guatemala is located in Central America, bordering Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. The south-west coast rests along the Pacific Ocean, and the eastern shores nestle into the Gulf of Honduras between Honduras and Belize.





With more than 8,000 plant species, 250 species of mammals, 221 bird species—including the national bird, the quetzal—and nearly 14 million people, Guatemala's diversity is phenomenal.





Though Spanish is the official language of Guatemala, it is not spoken by the entire population. There are 23 indigenous languages that are officially recognized, including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca.



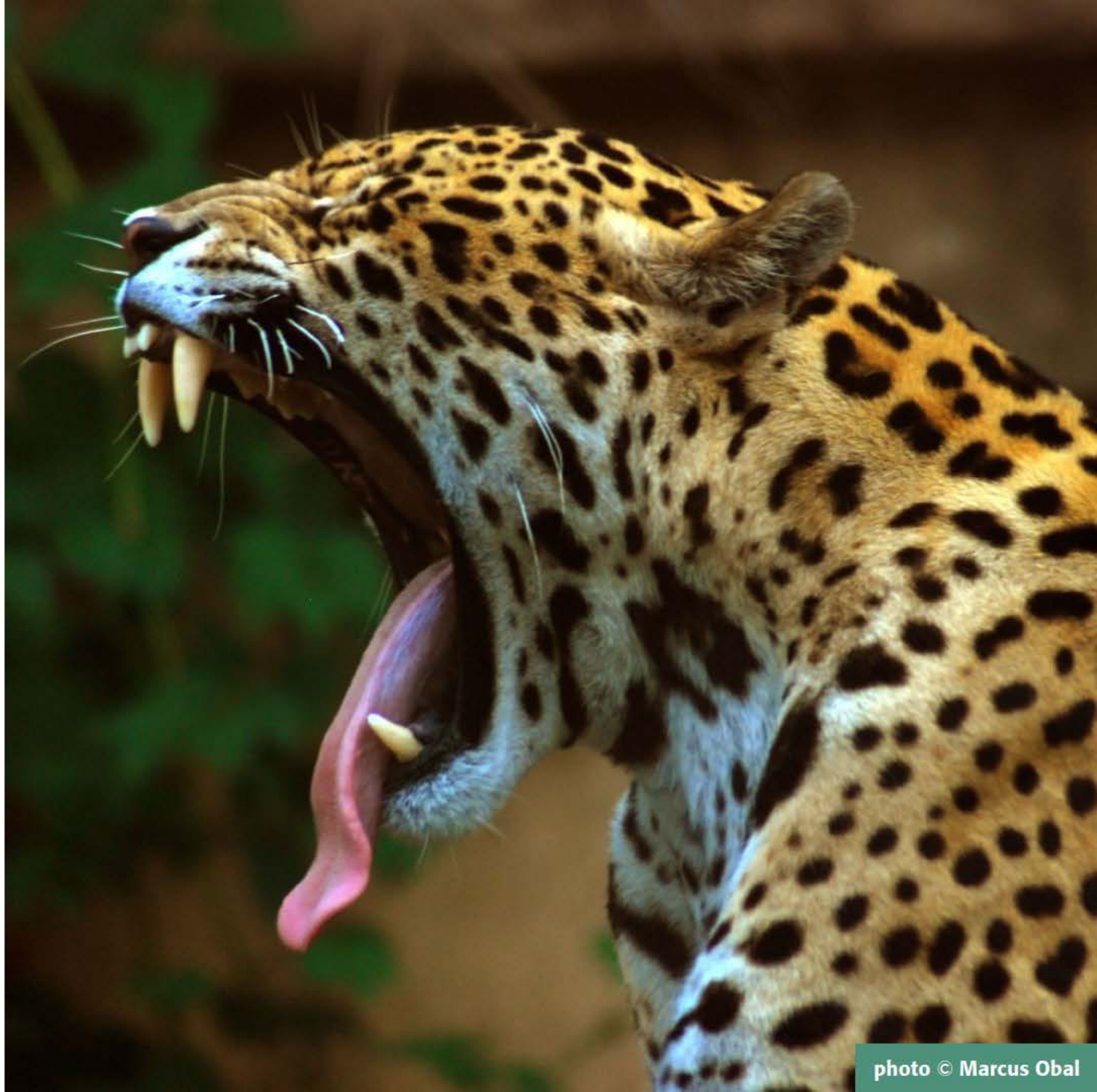


Guatemala is part of the cradle of ancient Maya civilization. The Maya city of Tikal, located in the dense rainforest, is thought to have had 20,000–25,000 inhabitants. Advances in art, astronomy, mathematics, language, and architecture were just some of the impressive achievements of the Maya civilization. Because of this cultural history, Tikal is now a National Protected Area, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an important tourist destination.



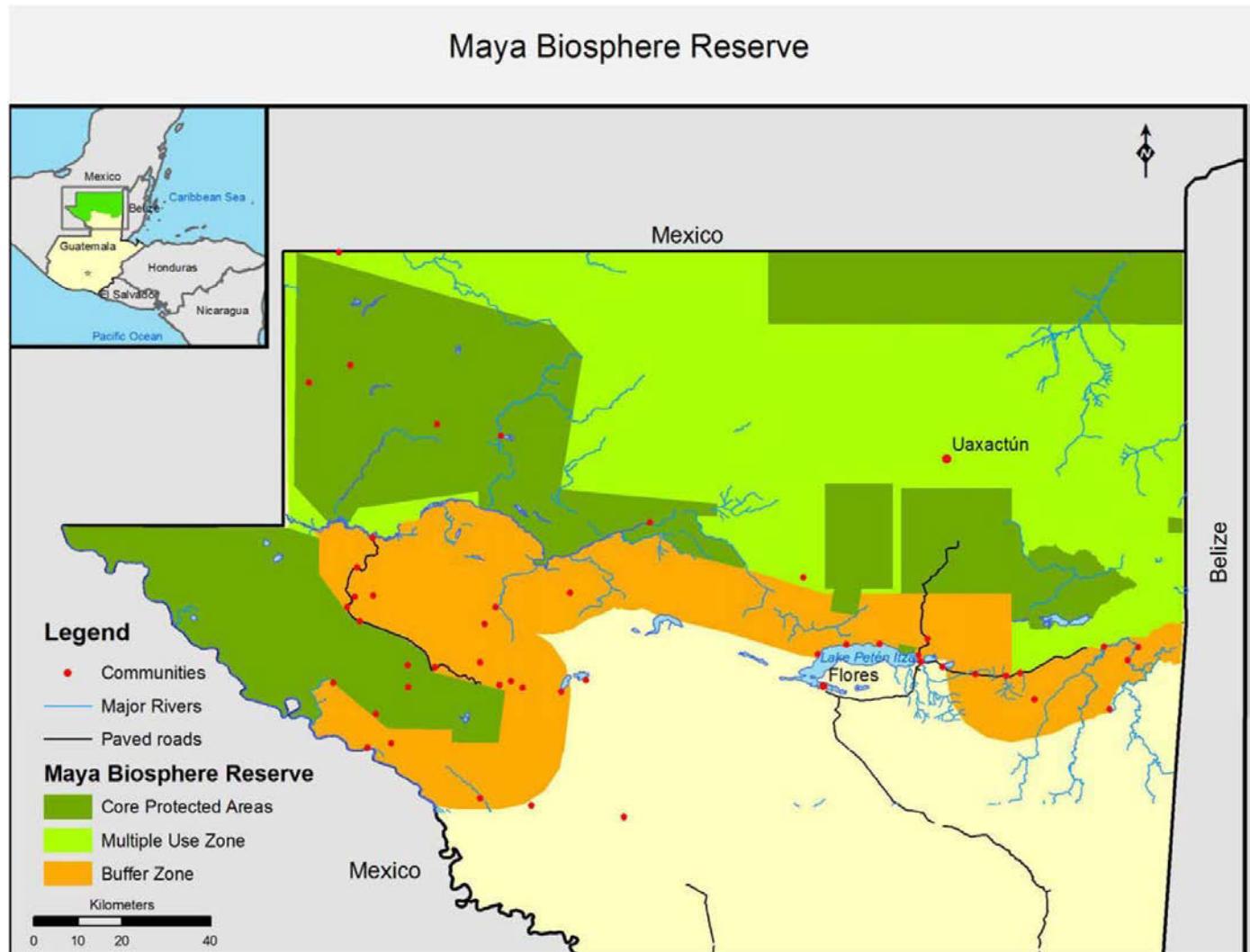


It is part of the Selva Maya, Central America's largest protected area and most biologically diverse expanse of tropical forest. The Maya Biosphere Reserve is home to over a dozen important archaeological sites and such rare wildlife as jaguars, brocket deer, ocellated turkeys and scarlet macaws.



The Maya Biosphere Reserve has been classified into three different zones:

- Protected Areas (dark green)
- Buffer Zone (orange)
- Multiple Use Zone (light green)





The area in the buffer zone is privately owned land. Much of it has been cleared to make room for agriculture and cattle operations.





Protected areas, such as Tikal, are areas where no trees can be harvested and sold. Some protected areas are very large and the government does not have enough park rangers to patrol the land and ensure that people are not coming in and illegally deforesting the park.





Communities in the Multiple Use Zone can harvest wood and other non-timber forest products. In order to do so, these communities must be certified. This means that they are following a strict management plan that allows resources to be harvested, while the forest remains intact, and people and wildlife are protected. Using the forest in a way that is sustainable provides an important income and the sale of the certified products also provides an incentive for community members to protect their resources.

# SMARTWOOD

## CERTIFIED FOREST

[www.smartwood.org](http://www.smartwood.org)



This forest is certified as well-managed by SmartWood in accordance with the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council, A.C.

SW-FM/COC 161





Uaxactún is one such community, located in the rainforest north of Tikal National Park. Uaxactún has been certified by the Rainforest Alliance to meet the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an international organization that promotes responsible management of the world's forests. With the help of the Rainforest Alliance, community members sell wood to several companies, including Gibson guitars, and export weekly shipments of jade palm leaves (*xate*) for flower arrangements.





After a tree is selected for harvest according to the forest management plan, it is brought to a saw mill where it is cut down to the needed size.





This is wood from a mahogany tree, which is reddish-brown in color and darkens over time. Mahogany has been long favored by musical instrument manufacturers for its beauty, durability and the rich tone it produces. Huge, slow-growing mahogany trees were once widespread from Mexico through South America. But ongoing demand for the wood has significantly decreased the population of the trees. Unless they are carefully extracted, mahogany logging causes extreme environmental degradation—for every tree cut, another 25 are destroyed. Community forestry operations in Guatemala are changing the way trees are harvested and ensuring that mahogany and other tree species are protected. Just how does a mahogany tree become a wood product? First, the bark of the tree is removed. Then, it is cut into even sized planks.





Once the wood is cut, the planks are laid out in the sun to dry, removing any excess moisture. The wood is sorted, lower quality pieces which cannot be exported are not wasted, but are used locally.





Wood is not the only resource which can be harvested in the forest. The jade palm (*xate*, pronounced sha-tay) is highly valued for its ornamental use in flower arrangements. Thirty million xate fronds are delivered each year to the United States and Canada for Palm Sunday services.





*Xate* exports contribute over a million dollars annually to the Guatemalan economy, and wild *xate* harvesting generates about 10,000 jobs, especially for women. While the actual harvesting of *xate* is done almost exclusively by men, called *xateros*, the process of selection and sorting is done almost entirely by women. The increased demand for *xate* has resulted in serious challenges to the sustainability of the plant. Not only have the palms become threatened by over harvesting, but the workers who collect them have been venturing farther into the forest in search of *xate*—often collecting other threatened plants and seeds as they go.





In July 2005, the Rainforest Alliance established standards for the harvest of *xate*. Before then, harvesters sold their *xate* to intermediaries for a much lower price. Most of the leaves had defects, so they ended up in the exporters' dumpsters. The Rainforest Alliance has encouraged *xateros* to cut only quality leaves and leave more on the palm, which allows the plant to regenerate faster. For communities in the Petén such as Uaxactún, this has meant better living standards for local families. They now sell their leaves for twice as much as they did previously, without the need for an intermediary. Women, who until recently had no cash income now earn between \$6 and \$7 per day harvesting, selecting and packaging the *xate* for export.





After the *xate* is harvested and sorted, it is packaged and shipped by truck to a refrigerated warehouse. It will then make the rest of the journey in a refrigerated truck to ensure the quality of the *xate*. The *xate* has a special label, which explains that it is certified by the Rainforest Alliance.





Even the children in Uaxactún are getting involved. They are learning about how *xate* grows while collecting seeds of different *xate* species and creating a *xate* nursery.





**Forest communities, like Uaxactún, help decrease carbon dioxide emissions in our planet by keeping their forests intact and not destroying them. Deforestation causes 24 percent of carbon dioxide emissions and 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions globally.\* The Rainforest Alliance is helping forestry communities, and sustainable managed farms and tourism operations, earn money in the carbon market for avoided deforestation and their ecological services.**

**\* According to the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change**





The Rainforest Alliance is also working with teachers in the Maya Biosphere Reserve to help them teach their students about the importance of protecting forests.





Students are learning about the amazing rainforest that surrounds their community and the wildlife that depends on it for survival. They are also learning about how their community, and their family, are helping to protect that forest by harvesting wood and other products like *xate* in a sustainable way.





**In the community of Carmelita, members of the forestry cooperative have steadily increased the profits from their sustainable forestry business and have invested more than a third of their earnings in community development, improved technology and sustainable management methods.**





"I used to think that the way to protect the forest was to say, 'stop, don't touch.' We put people in jail and confiscated the illegal wood. But the forest just kept getting smaller and smaller," explains Carlos Crasborn, the 23-year-old leader of the Carmelita cooperative. "I realize now that a more effective way to conserve the rainforest is to show the people who live there that they can make a better living by managing the forest sustainably than they would if they cut it down. This is something we are accomplishing in Guatemala, and that we would like to repeat in and around Central America's other biosphere reserves in order to ensure the survival of this region's endangered wilderness."

