



## Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020)

<b>Project reference</b>	IWT076
<b>Project title</b>	Cross-Border Coordination to Reduce IWT in the Guatemala-Mexico Green Corridor
<b>Country(ies)</b>	Guatemala and Mexico
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Wildlife Conservation Society
<b>Partners(s)</b>	Asociación Balam, Fundación para el Ecodesarrollo y la Conservación (FUNDAECO), Environmental Justice Forum of Peten (FJA), Association of Forest Communities of Peten (ACOFOP), Pronatura Península de Yucatán (PPY)
<b>Project leader</b>	Roan Balas McNab – Wildlife Conservation Society
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR1
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://guatemala.wcs.org/en-us/Initiatives/Proyecto-DEFRA-IWT-en-US.aspx">https://guatemala.wcs.org/en-us/Initiatives/Proyecto-DEFRA-IWT-en-US.aspx</a>

**1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to the end September).**

On June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020, we requested modifications of the project’s start date to May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 (originally April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020), and its ending date, to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 (originally September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022), resulting in a total implementation time of 2.7 years. LTS approved this request on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. This half-year report thus details progress towards achieving planned outputs during a five-month implementation period (May 1<sup>st</sup> - September 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020).

**For project “Output #1, improved protection against IWT”,** we have held 4 meetings to plan SMART trainings in Mexico and Guatemala. We expect both events to take place during the next reporting period. We also are coordinating with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to identify shared training options and identify jaguar IWT within the project area (See Annex 1.1). Team members held 2 meetings to develop Guatemala’s IWT protection protocol. The protocol will be ready and approved by December (See Annex 1.2). Despite COVID-19, we immediately implemented field illegal wildlife trade (IWT) monitoring & interdiction patrols in Guatemala. We executed 31 inter-institutional patrols, covering 2,030 kilometres. During one of the five patrols carried out with the Guatemalan Army, 7 Mexican nationals were found flagrantly logging down “*hormigo*” (also known as “*granadillo*”) trees and captured (See Annex 1.3). Our project partner, the Environmental Justice Forum (FJA for its acronym in Spanish), provided technical support for the prosecution of this case (Please see Output 3, below). We have also initiated the development of an IWT protection/patrolling protocol for Mexican protected areas, which will be finalized during the upcoming semester (See Annex 1.4<sup>1</sup>). As part of this process, we facilitated

<sup>1</sup> We are sending an example of a SMART patrol report in the annual report we will include all reports.  
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2 meetings which resulted establishing the “Task Force for the Protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Calakmul Region” to coordinate surveillance and protection actions in Mexican target areas. The task force includes the Secretariat of National Defence, the National Guard, the Ministerial Police, the Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection, the National Institute of Anthropology and History, the CONANP-Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, the SEMABICC-Balam Ku, and Balam Kin State Reserves, the Security Public-Municipal Presidency of Calakmul, WWF-Mexico, and Pronatura Península de Yucatán. The task force’s first activities focused on developing a surveillance strategy, including a schedule of field patrols. Partners also requested training for Mexican armed forces on the identification and processing of environmental crimes. The first phase of the training took place on September 29, 2020 (1.4). Patrolling in Mexico has been limited to one binational patrol, reported by Guatemala (1.5). Additionally, from July 30-31 de 2020, the first annual binational patrol was carried out with forces from Guatemala and Mexico (1.6).

**For project Output #2, “Greater awareness about IWT among authorities”**, we prepared a [baseline survey](#) on awareness of illegal wildlife trade for Guatemala's national authorities (See Annex 2.1). Activity 2.2 and 2.3 have not yet started, with 2.3 (confidential report on IWT in the Mexican focal area) contingent on COVID-related restrictions and border closures (See Section 2b). Activity 2.3, consisting of a confidential report on the state of timber/fauna trafficking in Mexico is planned for the first quarter of 2021, pending progress with COVID restrictions. We have monitored and compiled press and social media coverage of IWT in the Selva Maya (See Annexes 2.4 and 2.5). Partners have started updating websites about DEFRA-IWT support and project advances (See for example: [PPY](#), [WCS](#), and [FJA webpages](#)) (2.6). Due to COVID limitations, Activity 2.7 (IWT outreach events) has been delayed in Guatemala and Mexico. However, WCS, BALAM, and FJA participated in a high-level meeting convened by the UK Embassy in Guatemala with authorities from Guatemala’s Ministry of Foreign Relations, CONAP, and the DIPRONA environmental police, to discuss the roadmap to strengthen binational Mexico-Guatemala cooperation within the context of this project (2.8).

**For project Output #3, “Increased use of legal frameworks to combat IWT”**, the FJA coordinated with Guatemala’s environmental prosecutor to strengthen the prosecution resulting from patrols reported in Output #1. Seven Mexican nationals were captured for poaching highly valuable timber species in the MBR, immediately adjacent to Mexico. The suspects were formally indicted and the First Criminal Court for Crimes against the Environment sanctioned the seven individuals with fines totalling £7,500 (3.1). The FJA has also initiated a report identifying opportunities for increased binational collaboration via international agreements in both countries. The report will be available to governmental partners by the end of the fiscal year (3.2). WCS and PPY have drafted terms of reference for the consultancy on the state of illegal timber trade in Mexico, with initiation planned for November, 2021 (Annex 3.3). Activities 3.4, and 3.5 are contingent on advances with 3.3, and remain pending.

**For project Output #4, “Alternative livelihoods propelled to reduce the vulnerability of Guatemalan and Mexican communities to IWT”**, PPY has initiated a gender-focused alternative livelihood assessment for Mexican communities (See Annex 4.1), based on the [Prototype Questionnaire](#) for communities of the Poverty-Environment Network. Activity 4.2 is planned for Year 2. We developed a draft alternative livelihoods assessment for Guatemalan communities (4.3). Activity 4.4 (management plan for apiculture) has initiated via a consultancy. We have already had success in leveraging DEFRA-IWT investments in Guatemalan livelihoods, attracting support from two projects within the MBR Multiple Use Zone: The Overbrook Foundation financed 150 daily wages for landscape restoration in San Miguel, and ACOFOP/WCS teamed to undertake a vital repair of the water tank and distribution system in

the rural village of Cruce a la Colorada, benefitting 550 people (See Annex 4.5). Activity 4.6, consisting of outreach to leverage increased livelihoods investments in Mexico, is planned for Year 2. WCS developed a mixed protocol to undertake socioeconomic monitoring of Guatemalan households receiving project support. The protocol includes Basic Necessities Survey ([BNS](#)) and Most Significant Change ([MSC](#)) methods (Annex 4.7), and IRB review by WCS is underway; we expect to begin surveys in November, parallel to initiating livelihoods investments in Guatemalan households (4.8). WCS, ACOFOP, CONAP, and other partners have held three meetings to promote the resolution of the land tenure conflict faced by the community of San Miguel, obtaining inclusion of the topic within a meeting held by CONAP's Executive Council on July 21<sup>st</sup> (Annex 4.9). Activities 4.10, 4.11, 4.12, and 4.13 are planned for Year 2 and Year 3 of the project. Finally, WCS provided additional leveraged support to communities for basic foodstuff during the national pandemic lockdown in May, and FUNDAECO used DEFRA-IWT support to provide emergency food and protection supplies to two Guatemalan communities (Carmelita and Uaxactún) and one in Mexico (Ejido Arroyo Negro) (Annex 4.14).

**For project Output #5, "Increased trans-frontier collaboration between civil society and government to reduce IWT in the Selva Maya Green Corridor",** we have developed a contact forum to exchange threat-related information among Guatemala and Mexican field teams (See Annex 5.1). Additionally, project partners have held three remote meetings (July 8<sup>th</sup>, September 10<sup>th</sup>, and September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020) to launch and coordinate project activities (See Annex 5.2), and on June 26<sup>th</sup>, WCS presented the DEFRA-IWT076 project to the "Selva Maya Operational Coordinating Group" including authorities from Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize to ensure coordination with governmental authorities (Annex 5.3). Due to COVID limitations, park guard field exchanges between Guatemala and Mexico have yet to be conducted (5.4). WCS drafted a memorandum of understanding to be signed by partners in both countries (Annex 5.5) to sustain the trans-frontier partnership after the project lifespan. Activity 5.6 is planned for 2022.

**2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

- During a 9-week period from mid-March through May 2020, the Maya Biosphere Reserve was impacted by severe forest fires precipitated by a 5-year drought. Fires struck right as national stay-at-home curfews were implemented across the country due to the COVID-19 crisis. The severity of fires obligated project partners in Guatemala to focus on fire suppression, mobilizing equipment, supplies, and food to field teams. Although project resources were not used, significant delays ensued. That said, the crucial component of increased field presence through IWT patrols in vulnerable areas was implemented as planned, leading to the capture and sentencing of the 7 Mexican nationals engaged in timber poaching.
- During the first week of June, tropical storm Cristóbal generated severe floods in various parts of the peninsula, including the Calakmul region in Mexico. This situation reduced the incidence of illegal logging by reducing access to the area. At the same time, national authorities focused attention on mitigating the impact of floods on rural communities, reducing their attention to IWT patrols. Current field access has improved, and we expect support from national authorities in Mexico to be at full force by November. This will not significantly affect the project's activity schedule.

- In September, SEMABICC's named a new Director of Environmental Heritage, changing the individual currently acting as the official liaison for the project. Currently, the communication channel has been re-established.
- In Guatemala, due to the COVID-19 economic slowdown, the Government of Guatemala dictated reductions in CONAP's field personnel and operational resources. This reduction in resources for patrolling and manpower continues, and may only be partially resolved by mid-Spring, 2021.

**2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

- The COVID-19 health contingency remains extremely impactful in Guatemala and Mexico, with repercussions throughout diverse IWT076 components. We expect limitations to continue in both countries through at least the third quarter of 2021, implying the urgent need for greater investment in personal protective equipment (PPE), and rapid testing to ensure field activities proceed safely.
- In Mexico, state institutions such as SEMABICC and CONANP are prohibited from participating in events with more than 15 people. In addition, internet signal quality is variable and generally does not support the platforms used for virtual meetings. That said, with sufficient planning, we have been able to undertake planning meetings, and future training events (i.e. SMART patrolling) will be done through a virtual platform.
- Subgrants to national partners constitute 56% of the planned expenditure for Fiscal Year 1, and we expect the vast majority of funds to be expended as planned by our partners. That said, minor amounts of our partners' resources may still be in hand at the end of March, 2021, particularly related to the planned project team meetings, and other large meetings such as outreach events.
- In regard to WCS's 44% of the planned project budget during Fiscal Year 1, we expect at least 90% of our assigned resources to be executed by the end of the fiscal year. Some uncertainty exists due to the difficulty of predicting the future severity of the pandemic, for example, with activity 2.3 consisting of a confidential report on the state of timber/wildlife trafficking from the Mexican perspective. To develop this report, a field visit to Calakmul and surrounding communities by partners from Guatemala and Mexico is contingent on both adequate PPE and strict adherence to safety protocols (already developed); the activity also requires that national border crossings are opened. Similar challenges face our planned in-person project team meetings (5.2), heretofore undertaken virtually, and the previously mentioned awareness raising outreach events (2.7), and the field exchanges between Guatemalan and Mexican park guards (5.4).

**2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

**3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: We may be in the range of £, perhaps a bit less.

**3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully.** Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

**If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget, so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to IWT Challenge Fund management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

Given the uncertainty due to COVID-19, some field activities are still ramping up, and remain highly contingent on personal safety, particularly when engaging with rural communities. We intend to undertake a detailed financial projection during the first week of December and communicate to LTS/DEFRA by December 10<sup>th</sup> regarding the potential underspend. Under the most “complicated” scenario, our maximum potential underspend could reach £, yet chances are high that our final underspend will be within the range of £.

**If you were asked to provide a response to this year’s annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.**

**Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email to [IWT-Fund@ltsi.co.uk](mailto:IWT-Fund@ltsi.co.uk)**. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: IWT001 Half Year Report.**