



Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Half Year Report (due 31st October 2021)

Project reference	IWT076
Project title	Cross-Border Coordination to Reduce IWT in the Guatemala-Mexico Green Corridor
Country(ies)	Guatemala and Mexico
Lead organisation	Wildlife Conservation Society
Partners(s)	Non-governmental partners include 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), and the Centre for Conservation Studies – University of San Carlos Guatemala (CECON/USAC); Governmental partners include Guatemala’s National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP), Guatemala’s Public Ministry (MP), Mexico’s National Commission for Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), and the State of Campeche’s Secretariat for Climate Change and Biodiversity (SEMABICC)
Project leader	<i>Roan Balas McNab – Wildlife Conservation Society</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://guatemala.wcs.org/en-us/Initiatives/Proyecto-DEFRA-IWT-en-US.aspx

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).

IWT076 implementation continued largely as planned during the 3rd semester of the project, with some obligatory adaptations as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect local communities and national institutions in Guatemala and Mexico. This half-year report details progress obtained during the six-month period between April 1st and September 30th, 2021. We denote activities that have fully “completed”.

For project “Output #1, improved protection against IWT”, Activity 1.1 has been “completed”, however PPY facilitated additional technical support to CONANP to resolve technical issues related to the use of the SMART software (Annex 1.1). Activity 1.2, is well-advanced, with the first iteration of the IWT protection protocol for Guatemala developed and under implementation; we will generate an updated, final version of this protocol by project’s end. During the last six months FUNDAECO, CECON, CONAP, WCS and army/police implemented 150 IWT patrols in Guatemala (see Annex 1.3), spanning 10,826 kilometres, and yielding 6 events of illegal timber poaching, and 41 total events of illegal activity including illegal hunting and sacking of archaeological sites. Within Activity 1.4, CONANP, WCS, PPY joined forces to produce the first version of the IWT protection protocol for Mexico’s Calakmul

Biosphere Reserve (CBR), attached as Annex 1.4.1. WCS and PPY staff visited the CBR and worked intensively for a week with CONANP and other Mexican government staff to develop the protocol and visit zones impacted by IWT (Annex 1.4.2). In Mexico, CONANP and SEMABICC implemented 12 IWT patrols (Annex 1.5) spanning 1,630 kilometres, yielding 14 events of illegal timber poaching, and 26 total events of illegal activity. Partners from Guatemala and Mexico implemented 2 joint patrols along the international border (Annex 1.6), reaching 6 total joint patrols during the first 17 months of the project.

For project Output #2, “Greater awareness about IWT among authorities”, Activity 2.1 consisting of the IWT awareness baseline has been “completed” for Guatemala; PPY has yet to establish the IWT awareness baseline for Mexico. Please see Section 4 for more details. WCS undertook a site visit to Mexico to gather information and develop a second version of confidential report on the state of IWT in our target sites in Guatemala and Mexico (Annex 2.3); this activity is now “completed”, but we will continue to update the report as new information emerges. Partners continue to monitor and compile press and social media coverage of IWT in the Selva Maya (see Annexes 2.4 and 2.5, respectively). Partner websites, led by [WCS](#), have also been updated with new information ([PPY](#), [FJA](#), [FUNDAECO](#)), or finally established ([Balam](#)). COVID-related concerns have led us to limit in-person events to raise awareness about IWT (Activity 2.7). FUNDAECO implemented one event with park staff in Mirador-Rio Azul National Park (Annex 2.7.1), and PPY a virtual outreach event on July 15th, 2021, as part of the 4th Ordinary Meeting of Technical Wildlife Advisory Council of the State of Campeche (Annex 2.7.2). Partners will undertake at least one virtual, bi-national event during the upcoming semester. Finally, in partnership with CONAP, partners have maintained contact with Guatemala’s Ministry Foreign Relations to promote at least one “high-level event” between Guatemalan and Mexican authorities that addresses transfrontier IWT. One important step forward has been the advancement of a draft bi-lateral agreement between the environmental ministries of both countries, including CONAP in Guatemala and CONANP in Mexico, detailing cooperation on diverse issues related to biodiversity conservation, including IWT (Annex 2.8).

For project Output #3, “Increased use of legal frameworks to combat IWT”, in Activity 3.1, consisting of technical support by the FJA for judicial processes, we have no additional results to report due to no new captures of illegal traffickers in Guatemala. As reported in Activity 1.3, patrols in Guatemala have continued, revealing a sustained decline in the amount of poaching in the Guatemalan focal area. Activity 3.2, a report on bilateral mechanisms to increase transfrontier collaboration on IWT has been “completed”. During the last semester, a consultancy to determine the volumes of tropical timber exported from Mexico (Activity 3.3) has advanced towards completion (Annex 3.3). The report details that massive volumes of timber have been exported from Mexico “legally”, with Asia as the principal destination for species such as “Granadillo”, one of the main species harvested illegally from Mexico’s CBR and the MBR of Guatemala. The report also details options for closing some of the loopholes that allow Mexican ejidos and legal timber operations to “launder” timber poached out of protected areas. Project partners shared the key findings of this report with Mexican authorities (Activity 3.4) through a presentation provided to members of Mexico’s National Roundtable to Combat Illegal Logging (*Mesa Nacional de Tala Ilegal*); see Annex 3.4. Led by CONAFOR, Mexico’s National Commission for Forests members of the “Mesa” are now interested in focusing the attention of the Mexican government on the Selva Maya of Mexico where the project operates, a considerable step forward given the complex links between [timber poachers and organized crime](#), including members of drug trafficking cartels. Coordination with CONAFOR consists of our first advance within Activity 3.5, the development of new regulations, administrative procedures or legal frameworks in Mexico that reduce the ability to sell poached timber on national and international markets.

For project Output #4, “Alternative livelihoods propelled to reduce the vulnerability of Guatemalan and Mexican communities to IWT”, in Activity 4.1, PPY “completed” their evaluation of alternatives for sustainable livelihoods in 7 Mexican communities impacted by IWT, including a focus on sources of sustainable income for women (Annex 4.1). PPY is planning to present the results of this evaluation to Mexican authorities (Activity 4.2) in early 2022, after new State-level authorities take possession (see Section 2a). Activity 4.3 has been “completed”, consisting of a similar evaluation for Guatemalan communities. Activity 4.4, the

development of a management plan for honey production with Guatemalan beekeepers has also been “completed”. WCS and partners continued coordinating with other donors and local partners to leverage additional funding sources to strengthen livelihoods investments (Activity 4.5), yielding an additional £ of investment (Annex 4.5). Whereas PPY will target Mexican government authorities to seek public investment in rural sustainable livelihoods (Activity 4.2), during the next semester PPY is also planning to undertake public outreach (Activity 4.6) to attract private funding, including from other NGOs and foundations, towards rural communities located around Balamku and Calakmul. Activity 4.7 has been “completed”, consisting of the Basic Necessities Survey (BNS) and income baseline for Guatemalan households supported by IWT076 and IWTCRR funding. WCS has been providing continued technical and material support to Guatemalan households to increase sustainable incomes at the household level (see Annex 4.8). Resolution of the legal status of San Miguel’s residents (Activity 4.9) was partially “completed” through the formal reversal of CONAP’s 2009 eviction order, reported in the Annual Report submitted in April 2021. WCS continued supporting multi-institutional meetings, working with CONAP and the community to develop a zoning plan that will form the basis of a legally binding memorandum of understanding. The MOU will ensure land tenure for the community including their rights to inhabit the area, undertake subsistence agriculture and honey production, and restore forests, among other rights. We document recent advances in Annex 4.9. WCS also continues monitoring income to rural households from IWT076 livelihoods investments, with some preliminary results reported in Annex 4.10. We plan to implement Activity 4.11, the final BNS to evaluate changes in well-being among Guatemalan households participating in livelihoods projects during the final project semester. The same holds for Activity 4.12, determination of the number of Guatemalan households receiving livelihoods project support also charged with, or convicted of, trafficking flora or fauna. PPY has yet to report funds leveraged in Mexico to increase sustainable livelihoods investments in target communities. Finally, as reported in our Year 1 Annual Report, WCS and PPY “completed” Activity 4.14, consisting of the distribution of supplies to help partners and rural community members mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

For project Output #5, “Increased trans-frontier collaboration between civil society and government to reduce IWT in the Selva Maya Green Corridor”, the development of the IWT076 bi-national network to combat IWT (Activity 5.1) has been “completed” as reported in the Year 1 Annual Report. There is potential to expand this network through the addition of additional NGO partners, especially through the incorporation of new actors within the bi-national MOU still pending signature (see Activity 5.5, below). On June 14th and August 18th 2021, WCS led 2 virtual meetings with all project partners, with the latter including government; we also held 6 additional, partner-specific or topic-specific meetings during the last semester (Annex 5.2). Within Activity 5.3, we have already “completed” our goal of two coordination exchanges with the Selva Maya Executive Coordinating Group (GEC), but plan to reinforce the coordination with additional meetings during the final 14 months of project implementation. Activity 5.4 consists of exchanges between park guards in Guatemala and Mexico; FUNDAECO, CONAP, CONANP personnel held an exchange from July 31st - August 5th, 2021, in Arroyo Negro, Guatemala focused on biological monitoring for Guatemalan and Mexican parks guards (Annex 5.4). We have now “completed” the 3 planned exchanges, but plan to undertake a 4th and final exchange during the 2022 dry season. We advanced Activity 5.5, a bi-national MOU to be signed between project partners, pledging long-term collaboration to address IWT between Guatemala and Mexico. Two partners have reviewed the document and provided edits/suggestions, and we have extended an invitation to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Mesoamerica and WWF Mexico Programs to participate as well. We now plan to sign the document in January of 2022, as the new high-threat timber poaching season begins. Activity 5.6, the white paper on lessons learned and best practices to promote bi-national collaboration to eradicate transfrontier IWT is planned for the final project semester.

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.

- **Climatic stability:** quite unlike the initial five-month period of project implementation in 2020, project personnel in Guatemala and Mexico have had a respite from severe climatic variations. Last year, a record drought precipitated severe wildfires across the MBR; only 2 months later two tropical depressions passed over the Maya Forest, complicating field patrols and some activities with rural communities. An important lesson learned is to plan flexibility in schedules due to the expected variations in climate, especially when projects extend for a number of years.
- **State government elections in Mexico:** PPY encountered delays in coordinating with high-level personnel from SEMABICC due to a four-month suspension of official activities during State of Campeche elections. State elections occurred on [June 9th, 2021](#), and project partners including PPY were obligated to suspend coordination with SEMABICC personnel 1 month prior, in compliance with Mexican regulations designed to avoid favoritism in public elections. As of September 30th, 2021, project partners were still awaiting the formal confirmation of the SEMABICC leadership.

We do not expect any changes in the IWT076 budget or implementation timetable due to the information above.

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 pandemic continued to wreak havoc in both Guatemala and Mexico during the last semester, with the Delta variant spreading across the region, resulting in significant impediments to in-person activities. COVID-related impacts and subsequent adaptations by project personnel include:

- **Loss of a cherished WCS Guatemala staff member:** We are very saddened to report that in early July, 2021, the WCS Guatemala team lost Maria Eugenia Bautista, our lead Finance Manager and Administrator due to COVID. This unfortunate loss occasioned delays in some of our administrative procedures, including the timely provision of final disbursements of sub-grants to project partners. In response, the WCS team informed our national NGO partners that their expenses would be reimbursed to ensure field activities continued as originally planned. WCS subsequently prioritized pending disbursements for the most urgent partners (Fundaecco, PPY), and then provided the remaining disbursements to Balam, ACOFOP, and the EJF. Partners have now received full disbursements after a two-month delay, and project spending has remained on track as planned.
- **Continued implementation of COVID-19 protocols:** WCS and partners continue to implement COVID protocols in both Guatemala and Mexico, including the use of distancing, masks, and vaccinations for key staff. We continue holding smaller meetings with partners and rural communities, but require mask-wearing and/or well-ventilated and preferably outdoor venues. Thanks to DEFRA's COVID Rapid Relief Fund, project partners including community leaders maintain adequate supplies of masks and gel helping us to maintain the risk of project activities at an acceptable level. To date, WCS has lost two of our national staff to COVID out of 40 total staff; sadly, both of the infections/losses resulted from a lack of caution in personal/family settings, not from the workplace environment.
- **Continued suspension of in-person IWT076 team meetings:** Project partners agreed to suspend the annual in-person team meetings originally planned for Chetumal, Mexico each year. Instead, we have continued to coordinate project activities virtually using the Zoom platform, increasing the rate of meetings substantially. As during Year 1, savings from Travel and Subsistence destined for team meetings have been repurposed to support travel costs associated with IWT field activities, particularly IWT patrols along the border with Mexico.

As above, we do not expect any changes in the IWT076 budget or implementation timetable due to the information above.

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: £

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?

WCS has supported national partners as much as possible during the COVID pandemic, ensuring flexibility and adaptation throughout the project. That said, continued delays by PPY in presenting expected project outputs in Mexico might require us to develop a proposal to LTS/DEFRA requesting permission to modify our agreement with PPY, including a potential reduction or repurposing of financial support to other national partners that are delivering outputs as expected. We will coordinate with PPY, develop a plan, and if required present any proposed modifications to LTS/DEFRA by late November, 2021, at the latest. This would allow any amendments approved by DEFRA to be implemented at the start of Year 3, in April, 2022.

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. 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.**