

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects

Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Project reference	IWT076
Project title	Cross-Border Coordination to Reduce IWT in the Guatemala-Mexico Green Corridor
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Guatemala and Mexico
Lead partner	Wildlife Conservation Society
Partner(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 (SEMABICCE)
Project leader	<i>Roan Balas McNab – Wildlife Conservation Society</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR3</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 end September).

This report details results obtained during the six-month period between April 1st and September 30th, 2022. We denote activities that have been fully “completed” during the previous 30 months of implementation, with two months of activity remaining prior to project completion.

For project “Output #1, improved protection against IWT”, Activity 1.1 had previously been “completed”, however during the last reporting period 9 FUNDAECO, IDAEH, ACNUR and CONAP park rangers received technical support related to the use of the SMART software during patrolling activities (Annex HY3 1.1). Activity 1.2, has been “completed”, consisting of the IWT protection protocol for Guatemala that is under implementation. During the last six months FUNDAECO, CECON, CONAP, WCS and army/police implemented 144 IWT patrols in Guatemala (Annex HY3 1.3), spanning 11,512 kilometres, and no evidence of illegal timber poaching was registered in the project area, with only one event of illegal hunting detected. Regarding Activity 1.4, CONANP, SEMABICCE, WCS and PPY joined forces to develop the IWT protection protocols for Mexico’s Calakmul Biosphere Reserve (CBR) and the Balamku State Reserve (BKR). The final versions of both protocols are being reviewed by Mexican

authorities (SEMARNAT and SEMABICCE) with the intent of institutionalizing these protocols. In Mexico, CONANP and SEMABICCE implemented 17 IWT patrols, 15 patrols in CBR and 2 patrols in BKR (Annex HY3 1.5) spanning 2,427 kilometres, yielding 23 total events of illegal activity including timber poaching and hunting. Within Activity 1.6, partners from Guatemala and Mexico implemented one joint patrol along the international border with the participation of Mexican National Guard, CONANP and CONAP, spanning 12 kilometers and no signs of illegal activity detected (Annex HY3 1.6).

For project Output #2, “Greater awareness about IWT among authorities”, Activity 2.1, development of an IWT awareness baseline, has been “completed” for Guatemala; in Mexico, Activities 2.1 and 2.2 were merged after approval by LTS/DEFRA, allowing partners to undertake a baseline survey of IWT awareness among Mexican authorities, hold an outreach event to share information on timber trafficking with government officials, and re-survey their knowledge after the workshop. Awareness about IWT was gauged through a questionnaire focused on the local impacts of IWT, species impacted, national and international legislation, and broader impacts including IWT’s global contribution to illicit economies. A workshop entitled “Illegal Wildlife Trade between Guatemala and Mexico” was led by PPY in collaboration with the Foro de Justicia Ambiental and WCS with 23 participants representing SENASICA¹, SDS-Yucatán², SEMAR³, PROFEPA⁴, CONAFOR⁵, SEMARNAT⁶, SEMABICCE, and 6 from WCS, Foro de Justicia Ambiental, PPY and CGOG⁷. We surveyed the 23 participants to establish the IWT awareness baseline for Mexico, and after the workshop conducted a final awareness evaluation to determine how much participants’ knowledge of IWT-related issues improved. As detailed in Annex HY3 2.1, we found that awareness among authorities improved, indicating that the workshop was successful and suggesting that continued outreach is merited. In Guatemala, we conducted an additional IWT awareness survey during Q1- Y3 (April 2022) and the final IWT awareness survey during Q3 – Y3 (October 2022), completing Activity 2.2. (Annex HY3 2.2a, Annex HY3 2.2.b), once again revealing improved awareness by 25% about IWT among governmental partners compared with the baseline survey. A second and final version of our confidential report on the state of IWT in the Guatemala-Mexico Green Corridor was previously developed and this activity is now “completed”. Partners continue to monitor and compile press and social media coverage of IWT in the Selva Maya (see Annexes HY3 2.4 and 2.5, respectively). Of note, we highlight a [high-profile report](#) conducted by Insight Crime (with the support off IWT076 partners) describing timber trafficking along the Guatemala-Mexico Green Corridor, which led to [additional coverage in Mexican media](#) outlets. Partner websites, led by [WCS](#), have updated with new information from our last annual report ([PPY](#), [FJA](#), [FUNDAECO](#), [Balam](#)), and will be updated with final data prior to the final project report to be submitted in January, 2023. We held in-person events to raise awareness about IWT (Activity 2.7). For example, in Guatemala, the Foro de Justicia Ambiental and WCS conducted one event with government authorities including the National Police, CONAP, and PGN. In México, PPY, WCS and Foro de Justicia Ambiental organized a forum about IWT Combating in Campeche, México with the participation of 17 participants of SEMABICCE, including the Biodiversity Director of Campeche State (Annex HY3 2.7). In partnership with CONAP and the Governor of Peten, a formal invitation was sent to the Governor of Campeche to participate in a two-day visit to Petén with the goal of advancing bi-national collaboration to reduce IWT and improve protection of the Green Corridor. Confirmation of the date of the visit is pending. WCS has also continued coordinating with Guatemala’s Ministry Foreign Relations to organize “high-level events” between Guatemalan and Mexican national authorities to addresses trans-frontier IWT. WCS met in person with the Consul of the Mexican Embassy in Guatemala and held a virtual meeting with the Minister Advisor of the Ambassador of Guatemala in Mexico (Annex HY3 2.8). We now expect that the visit to Peten, Guatemala by the Governor of Campeche, Mexico will occur prior to the end of IWT076, and that our second track of high-level coordination via the Ministry of Foreign Relations will lead to a high-level meeting in

¹ SENASICA- Servicio Nacional de Sanidad, Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria

² SDS-Yucatán- Secretaria de Desarrollo Sostenible

³ SEMAR- Secretaria de Marina

⁴ PROFEPA- Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente

⁵ PROFEPA- Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente

⁶ SEMARNAT- Secretaria de Medioambiente y Recursos Naturales

⁷ CGOG - Coordinación General de la Oficina de la Gobernadora

Mexico City after the project is completed. WCS, PPY, the FJA, and Asociación Balam are committed to following through on this possibility after the end of the current IWT grant.

For project Output #3, “Increased use of legal frameworks to combat IWT”, regarding Activity 3.1, consisting of technical support by the FJA for judicial processes, we registered one new capture of a Guatemalan engaged in illegal hunting near Mirador-Rio Azul National Park (Annex HY3 3.1), resulting in a fine of Q. 1,000 imposed by the environmental court to be donated to the ARCAS Wildlife Rescue Center in Peten. We are able to report a continued decline in the amount of poaching and illegal timber trafficking continues due to the effective field patrols within Guatemala, as reported in Activity 1.3. Activity 3.2, a report on bilateral mechanisms to increase trans frontier collaboration on IWT was previously “completed”. The consultancy to determine the volumes of tropical timber exported from Mexico (Activity 3.3) has also been completed. The report details that significant 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. This report also identifies opportunities to close normative gaps in Mexico that permit the laundering and subsequent “legal” exportation of illegal timber poached out of Mexican and Guatemalan protected areas. Activity 3.4 has been completed through the provision of the consultancy’s key findings to Mexican authorities through the Mexico’s National Roundtable to Combat Illegal Logging (Mesa Nacional de Tala Illegal) led by CONAFOR, Mexico’s National Commission for Forests. In addition, PPY shared the report’s principal results with Mexican authorities through a presentation provided to members of Mexico’s State Forestry Council; during this event we proposed implementing a timber traceability mechanism to reduce illegal trafficking. PPY continues providing information and evidence to promote attention of the Mexican government in the project focal areas within the Selva Maya of Mexico. An update on advances will be included in the Final Report.

For project Output #4, “Alternative livelihoods propelled to reduce the vulnerability of Guatemalan and Mexican communities to IWT”, PPY “completed” Activity 4.1, including recommendations for gender-relevant livelihoods investments within their socioeconomic study of 9 communities impacted by IWT that are adjacent to Balamku State Reserve; the study recommended alternatives for sustainable livelihoods in 7 Mexican communities impacted by IWT. PPY is following up with Layda Elena Sansores, the Governor of the State of Campeche to increase investments in sustainable livelihoods using the gender-focused livelihoods assessment (Activity 4.2). 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), expecting an additional £.13,819 of investment (Annex HY3 4.5). PPY has developed public outreach (Activity 4.6) to attract private funding, including from other NGOs and foundations, towards rural communities located around Balamku and Calakmul, leveraging £35,600 from the US. Department of Interior to promote sustainable livelihoods in Mexican communities and investments in protection of Calakmul and Balamku reserves (Annex HY3 4.6). 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 continued providing technical and material support to Guatemalan households to increase sustainable incomes at the household level, supporting a) apiculture/beekeeping, b) poultry ranching, c) reforestation, and d) non-timber forest product harvesting, including xate palm fronds and breadnut, as well as a new women’s enterprise consisting of an artisanal oven for bread production in the community of San Miguel (see Annex HY3 4.8). Resolution of the legal status of San Miguel’s residents (Activity 4.9) remains partially “completed” through the formal reversal of CONAP’s 2009 eviction order, reported in the Annual Report submitted in April 2021. Since the last report, WCS has continued working with CONAP and the community to advance negotiations on land tenure and natural resources access for the community, including their rights to undertake subsistence agriculture and honey production and restore forests (Annex HY3 4.9). We expect to report a breakthrough in the Final Report, due January 2023. Regarding Activity 4.10, WCS also continues monitoring income to rural households from IWT076 livelihoods investments (Annex HY3 4.10). We are currently undertaking the final BNS survey to evaluate changes in well-being among Guatemalan households participating in livelihoods projects, and the results will be presented in

the Final Report (Activity 4.11). For Activity 4.12, FJA continues monitoring the number of Guatemalan households receiving livelihoods project support also charged with, or convicted of, trafficking flora or fauna. As reported during Y2 we have no arrests of beneficiaries to report during this semester. Regarding Activity 4.13, during the semester, PPY reported funds leveraged in Mexico to increase sustainable livelihoods investments in target communities with funds from the US. Department of Interior (DOI) (see Annex HY3 4.6). Finally, 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”, Activity 5.1 has been completed through the development of our binational, civil society-led network to counter IWT threats along the Guatemala-Mexico Green Corridor. Regarding Activity 5.2, a total of 7 partner-specific or topic-specific meetings have been organized to coordinate project activities and to identify new opportunities (Annex HY3 5.2). Within Activity 5.3, we have already “completed” our goal of two exchanges with the Selva Maya Executive Coordinating Group (GEC), and we have planned a final meeting at the end of November 2022 to update the GEC regarding recent advances within IWT076 and to lay the groundwork for continued coordination post project. We have completed Activity 5.4, consisting of exchanges between park guards in Guatemala and Mexico. These exchanges have been very important to build camaraderie among the park rangers and to promote improved information exchange and coordination. We had hoped to undertake a final exchange during the 2022 dry season, but the exchange was suspended due to the early entry of the rainy season. We expanded upon Activity 5.5, the development of a bi-national MOU among civil society partners pledging long-term collaboration to address IWT between Guatemala and Mexico. The final MOU added new partners from Guatemala and Mexico, including the Fundación Defensores de la Naturaleza, Asociación de Rescate y Conservación (ARCAS), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Mesoamerica and WWF Mexico Programs, and Natura Mexicana. Finally, Activity 5.6, the white paper on lessons learned and best practices to promote bi-national collaboration to eradicate transfrontier IWT has been initiated and will be submitted to DEFRA within the Final Report due in January 2023.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Climatic variability: the last six months of implementation of the project were during the dry season, with the 2022 dry season being comparatively weak. This resulted in periodic rain (good to reduce the threat of fire), but also complicated field patrols since ground conditions were quite soggy. Poor field conditions impacted field vehicles of partners, particularly FUNDAECO, due to the extremely remote location of Mirador-Rio Azul National Park (>100 km of very poor and extremely muddy terrain), leading to increased expenditures on vehicle repairs. Despite these conditions, patrolling was conducted in the area.

We do not expect any changes in the IWT076 budget or implementation timetable.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS-LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS:	No
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Formal Change Request submitted:	No
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Received confirmation of change acceptance	No
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Change request reference if known:	
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4a. 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: £

4b. 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 re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget 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.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

As previously mentioned, WCS requested permission from LTS/DEFRA to modify our agreements with PPY and the FJA, consisting of a [REDACTED] reduction in support for PPY, and an equal increase in support to the FJA. This modification was undertaken as part of a plan developed with both partners to undertake the IWT awareness evaluation in Mexico reported above in Activity 2.1. This amendment to our work plan was approved by LTS/DEFRA at the start of Year 3, in April 2022.

Finally, WCS received 5 questions from independent reviewers regarding our Year 2 Annual Report. WCS prepared a written response to these questions, and on August 3rd, 2022, held a virtual meeting with Kelly Forsythe of NIRAS/LTS to discuss the responses and provide additional context. We attach the written responses as "Annex A".

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response 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 NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. Please DO NOT send these in the same email.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**