

# Chapter Seven: The Golden Stream Corridor

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Each organization could bring something to the table in terms of technical knowledge, community support and financial resources. (Pinelo 2002)

## INTRODUCTION

While collaborative management appears to be possible for the six-watershed Maya Mountain Marine Corridor (MMMC) and the district-wide Toledo Watershed Association/SAGE, smaller-scale partnerships are already in place at the single watershed scale. In the Golden Stream watershed of the Toledo District, several conservation-oriented organizations manage a stretch of contiguous habitat between the Maya Mountains and Port Honduras as a result of an effort to secure the area from development threats and fragmentation through the purchase of various parcels of land along the Golden Stream River. Emerging inter-organizational collaborative efforts suggest a degree of interdependence and interest in managing the area collectively to ward off future threats to the watershed. Successful conservation initiatives and emerging partnerships in the Golden Stream watershed could serve as a stepping stone to multiple-watershed collaborative efforts in southern Belize.

Conservation efforts in the Golden Stream Corridor represent a microcosm of what occurs throughout the Toledo District to protect the region's cultural and natural resources. It is an area characterized by high biodiversity, a complex organizational landscape, and emerging collaborative efforts to manage protected areas. Meaningful cooperation and collaboration across institutional and political boundaries is limited between land owners. An analysis of the interactions among diverse land managers, organizations, and interests along the Golden Stream is helpful in understanding the challenges to collaborative management in the six-watershed MMMC where similar dynamics play out on a larger scale.

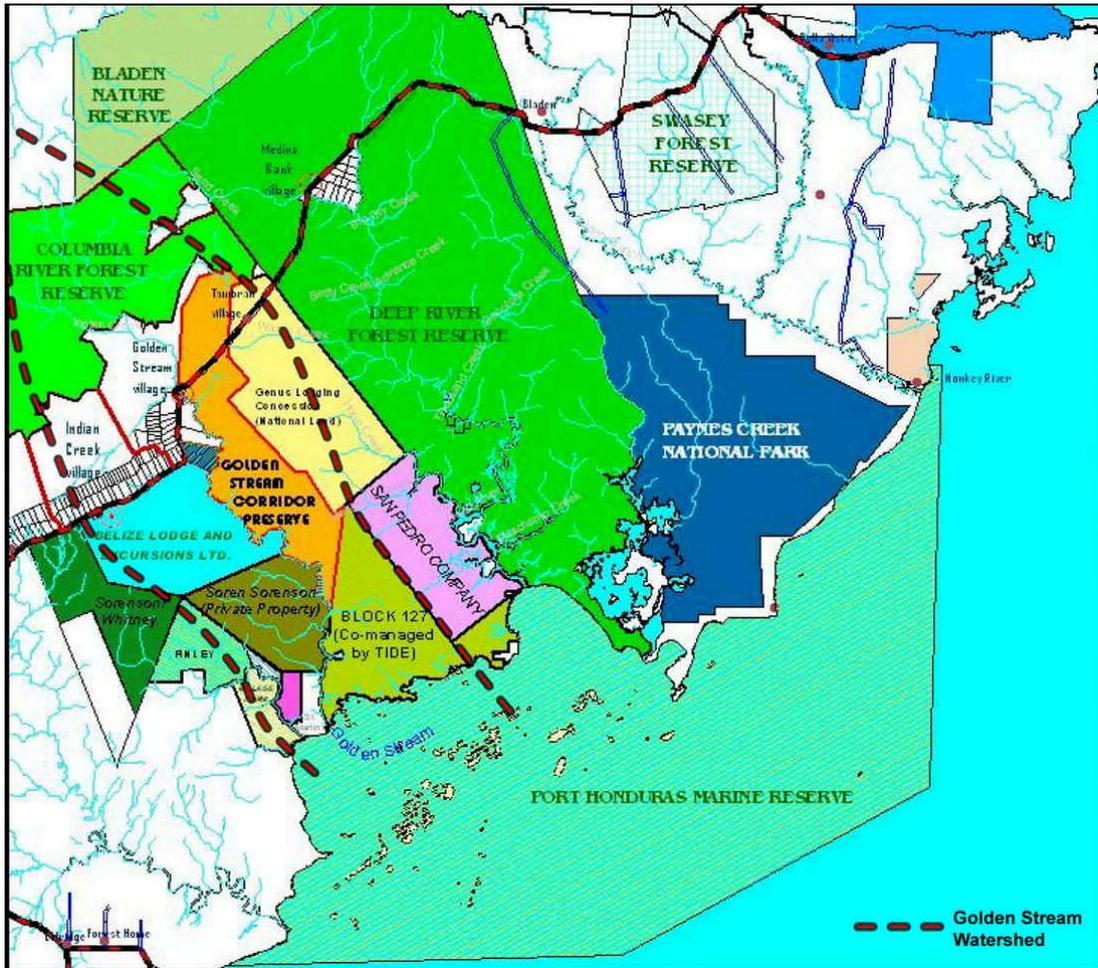
## BACKGROUND

### **Golden Stream as an ecosystem**

The Golden Stream River as it winds its way through tropical forests on its way to the sea is one of the six watersheds that empty into Port Honduras. Labeled a “haven for biodiversity,” the 200,000 acre Golden Stream watershed houses one of the last remaining lowland broadleaf forests in Central America that runs unbroken from the mountains to the coast (FFI 2003a). Rich in flora and fauna, ocelot, howler monkey, and other endangered species are found in the Golden Stream watershed. Where the Golden Stream empties into Port Honduras, productive mangroves line the coast, providing habitat for manatee and other marine life. It is a biological corridor existing within the larger Maya Mountain Marine Corridor; a term used by TIDE and The Nature Conservancy to describe a million acre land management unit in the Toledo District that encompasses the six watersheds draining into Port Honduras (TNC 2003). Of equal significance, the Golden Stream serves as an important link in the northern portion of the proposed Mesoamerican Biological Corridor by connecting the Peten of Guatemala with southeastern Belize.

### **Golden Stream as a concept: The story of the Five Core Parcels**

The Golden Stream watershed as a conservation corridor is a relatively recent phenomena. Interviews reveal that the concept originated in the 1990s with Ken Karas, a former National Geographic filmmaker and Managing Director of Belize Lodge & Excursions Ltd. (BLE). He envisioned the land along the Golden Stream between the terrestrial protected areas and the marine reserve linked through a corridor preserve. The Columbia River Forest Reserve and Bladen Nature Reserve protect the headwaters while the Port Honduras Marine Reserve (PHMR), into which the Golden Stream and other waterways flow, is also under conservation status (see Map 9, p.151). A watershed scale preserve could prevent the fragmentation occurring in other parts of Central America by logging, agriculture, and shrimp farming as well as protect this expanse of tropical forest and coastal habitat.



**Map 9: Land Parcels in the Golden Stream Watershed**

Ken Karas describes why he chose to focus conservation efforts on the Golden Stream watershed:

Because it's the only area in all of Central America that links the coastal regions of Port Honduras all the way through to the mountain divide. Nowhere else along the Caribbean coast is the land contiguous like it is here. [That's] why to me and to our people involved, it is such an important region. (2002)

As originally envisioned, the Corridor was to include five forested and biologically important parcels of land along the Golden Stream that were largely in private hands yet vulnerable to development. The purchase and subsequent protection of these “five core parcels” (see Map 9, p.151) would anchor a habitat corridor running from the mountains to the coast to form a conservation unit referred to as the Golden Stream Conservation Corridor or the Golden Stream Corridor. However, a feasibility assessment revealed that a single company was incapable of purchasing and maintaining such a large area so the project was divided into two components: a for-profit sector that would run a piece like a company and the other part run by a NGO that could find conservation finance to purchase the land (Karas 2002).

BLE’s focus on the biological significance of the region, as well as its vulnerability, attracted the attention of Fauna & Flora International (FFI). Through their Arcadia Fund,<sup>35</sup> FFI purchased the first parcel of land in the Golden Stream for conservation in 1998 known as the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve (GSCP). FFI carries out their conservation activities according to the belief “...that conservation should be achieved through the application of scientific understanding, a genuinely participatory approach, local capacity building and long-term commitment” (FFI 2003c). In the Golden Stream, they are concerned with saving the forest and its component biodiversity from destruction and fostering local environmental stewardship. Their website showcases the 9,554 acre GSCP property:

Golden Stream’s conservation value transcends its intrinsic importance as a haven of biodiversity. Our intervention not only saved the land from conversion to citrus plantations, but also safeguarded the core area of the Port Honduras marine reserve into which the Golden Stream flows. (FFI 2003a)

FFI co-manages the GSCP with their counterpart, Ya’axche’ Conservation Trust (YCT), a local community non-governmental (NGO) created around the time of the purchase. As a “Maya organization”, in the sense that YCT is predominantly run and managed by Maya individuals, YCT has cultivated a working relationship with Maya communities around the GSCP (B.Teul 2002). YCT’s organizational goals are to 1) promote biodiversity conservation; 2) increase capacity for sustainable management of natural resources in the Golden Stream watershed; and 3) enhance the socio-economic development of the local Maya communities that border the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve (YCT 2003).

They plan to increase local capacity and conservation awareness through education and training to ensure greater local involvement in and benefits from conservation initiatives.

YCT Director Bartolo Teul believes:

[When] this idea was conceptualized, it was always thought that communities should always be involved. This idea of conservation should not only be done from a biological point of view but rather it should be people centered. (2002)

YCT is willing to explore which activities can still be carried out within the GSCP – such as small scale gathering of thatch or medicinal plants – while protecting the resource. Following Hurricane Iris, YCT implemented a Sustainable Livelihood Initiative which offers training in woodworking and low impact timber extraction techniques (salvage logging) to “strengthen livelihoods and resource management capacity amongst indigenous communities of northeastern Toledo” (YCT n.d. [2003]). While YCT issued a moratorium on large scale extractive activities like hunting, fishing, and logging, they eventually plan to develop a management plan that will reconcile conservation with community needs.

After we develop the management plan we will go back to the community and see if this is what they said. Based on a biological survey we will then see if it is possible to allow certain activities to happen in certain areas. So far there is no agreement with community telling them what they can and cannot do. (B. Teul 2002)

Following the procurement of the GSCP parcel, BLE purchased the adjacent 8,000 acres to create the 7,600 acre Boden Creek Ecological Reserve (BCER) which forms the foundation of their eco-enterprise consisting of eco-tourism, reforestation, and sustainable land use. BLE specializes in providing tourists with a “trans-habitat experience” including a marine and terrestrial component. The company’s website touting itself as a “...unique ecotourism company and adventure travel operator...” beckons the upscale eco-tourist to “...journey through and experience one of the most diverse spectrum of ecosystems in the world from the Maya Mountains to the Barrier Reef and everything in between” (BLE 2002b). For Ken Karas, BLE Managing Director, conservation is a business investment:

Sometimes we can do more than NGOs because we have resources that NGOs don't always have. That's why BLE agreed to help YCT get started. We looked at it as a business investment so that we could preserve the other side of that river. Our economic livelihood is the preservation of those five parcels. If we can't give our guest the ultimate jungle experience, it all falls apart. (2002)

He is concerned with preventing "islands of biodiversity" or habitat fragmentation that he fears will make the land unsuitable for eco-tourism. By protecting tropical ecosystems and generating local employment, BLE hopes to contribute to biodiversity conservation while providing alternatives to "destructive" land use activities in Toledo.

Acres under protection in the Golden Stream watershed expanded when Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment (TIDE) acquired Crown Lands Government Block 127 via a debt-for-nature swap signed by the Governments of the United States and Belize and assisted by TNC (Lazaroff 2001). This 11,000 acre parcel along the eastern bank of the Golden Stream completes the corridor link to the coast and comprises over seven miles of coastal mangrove habitat (Lazaroff 2001). TIDE manages the property "to be held in perpetuity for the people of Belize" because it cares about protecting the Toledo District's natural resources for Belizeans (TIDE 2003b). As TIDE Executive Director Wil Maheia (2002) puts it: "We have the right to take care of our resources." TIDE is also interested in maintaining their status as a conservation leader in the District. They have achieved local, regional, national, and international recognition for their work.<sup>36</sup>

While the original concept was to include all five parcels along the Golden Stream, two of the original five were not purchased. The St. Martin parcel at the mouth of the Golden Stream is owned by a couple based out of Guatemala who are amenable to conservation-friendly use of the land and any management plan for the area (Karas 2002). This is not the case with the Flick parcel, a strategic tract of land south of BCER owned by Soren Sorenson, a developer whose enterprise consists of various for-profit industries: primarily agro-industry, shrimp farming, and logging. The company, primarily concerned with profit maximization in large-scale agriculture and aquaculture projects, plans to develop land under its control and expand current activities. Their land in the South is currently undeveloped yet sited for shrimp farming: an activity perceived by conservation organizations to be a

significant threat to the ecological integrity of the watershed. According to a Sorenson employee:

We [Sorenson's company] have land in the south and we want to do the same. We want to grow cacao and other crops down there and we will also do shrimp farming, cacao, and cattle. (Anonymous 2002)

## **Communities on the Golden Stream**

The remaining mosaic of land use in the Golden Stream watershed is comprised of small-scale agriculture, grazing, and Maya and Creole villages. Kekchi and Mopan Maya communities, located on private, national and leased lands, have traditionally relied on the resources found within the watershed. While they are not recognized as “land owners,” lacking a legal title to the land, they care about management decisions being made in the Golden Stream. Resource dependent communities understand the connection between a healthy environment and clean drinking water and abundant game. Maya occupy lands adjacent to the GSCP and BCER and have traditionally collected medicinal herbs, thatch, and timber from the forests and fished the rivers. The archeological site Nim Li Punit, located near the Mopan village of Golden Stream, represents an important Maya cultural resource. Before the GSCP and BCER were created, activities in the area were largely unregulated. Now, in some cases, hunting is equated with poaching and logging and collection of non-timber forest products is illegal. Villagers who feel they were only marginally consulted during the initial stages of the planning process do not necessarily recognize the legitimacy of the private reserves whose borders might overlap with contested land. As one Maya villager commented:

They tried to get people involved and the people really want to have their input taken. But as time goes by they quit taking the input of the people. They [YCT] had a [Board of Directors] but it fell off. Now they have [a new Board] and they will let me sit on it again. When they come back they change the program in their own way. They don't ask the people. The first time it was Golden Stream and [now it's] Ya'axche'. (Anonymous 2002)

The Maya around Golden Stream care about livelihood issues such as access to resources and jobs. Lacking title to the lands they occupy, they are also concerned about land tenure issues. Some communities are also interested in pursuing small scale eco-tourism ventures on their own as a means to generate income:

We want to cut down on slash and burn by planting [beans] between October and December. We are trying to protect some areas. We also want to do some income generating activities. (Anonymous 2002)

## ANALYSIS

### **An emerging landscape-level conservation initiative**

Natural resource management decisions are unique with regards to scale. Rivers, forests and wildlife cross geo-political boundaries. Local forests and protected areas are part of larger ecosystems. Upstream activities and land use patterns in the Golden Stream watershed impact water and habitat quality in the Port Honduras Marine Reserve, while human activities on one parcel of land affects adjacent parcels. While the original vision for the Golden Stream Corridor – as approximately 49,000 acres of protected habitat running unbroken from the Maya Mountains to Port Honduras – has yet to be realized, the concept of a watershed-scale conservation unit catalyzed the purchase of the GSCP and subsequent parcels along the river. Conceptually, it also marked the creation of a place as an integrated landscape existing along ecological rather than socio-political borders. A diverse set of agencies, organizations, and institutions now control and manage an extensive area along the Golden Stream for conservation. While management decisions regarding individual parcels reside with the individual organization, a holistic approach to conservation will only be as successful as the ability of land owners and managers to coordinate activities across parcels and reconcile them with the larger landscape that lies outside of protected area borders.

Successful conservation initiatives in the small-scale Golden Stream watershed could serve as a stepping stone to larger and more complex landscape-scale initiatives. The Golden Stream watershed is an integral component of two landscape-scale conservation initiatives in the region; the MMMC and the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC) program.

As discussed earlier, the Golden Stream is an integral part of the regional MMMC, a larger scale conservation unit embraced by TNC and TIDE. The Golden Stream Corridor, also referred to as the Southeastern Biological Corridor, has been identified as a potential component of the MBC National Biological Corridors Program in Belize<sup>37</sup> (CBM 2003). Golden Stream organizations, interests, and issues are replicated in the MMMC and the MBC. As posited by a TIDE/TNC consultant, successes and challenges at the Golden Stream watershed level could prove valuable to planning and implementation of these larger scale initiatives:

I'll share my vision. I would say that the whole Golden Stream area will be one of the most active parts, because there's a critical mass. So between YCT and Golden Stream village, this will take off there if it gets funded. (Esselman 2002)

One approach to landscape-scale conservation is to start small and gradually connect existing synergies. A NGO representative suggested, "...the ideal approach would be to start small (e.g., Golden Stream Corridor area) and grow into a larger area (i.e., Port Honduras Watershed area)" (Anonymous 2002).

## **Challenges for collaboration**

Interviewees identified various challenges to greater communication, coordination, and collaboration in the Golden Stream watershed.

### *Lack of a shared vision*

The involvement of multiple participants with different and sometimes conflicting perceptions and values poses real challenges to collaborative natural resource management. The watershed is divided into discrete parcels owned by the private sectors, NGOs, the Government of Belize, absentee landowners, and individuals. The area is home to culturally diverse ethnic groups. International, national, and regional organizations work here. This complex social landscape poses significant challenges to managing the area as a corridor in part reflected by the various ways groups conceptualize the region. The Golden Stream is defined as a biological corridor running from the Maya Mountains to Port Honduras, a collection of protected areas, an ecosystem, a component of the MMMC and a concept.

For others it is defined as the foundation of a livelihood or a source of revenue. One interviewee explains this phenomenon, “The Golden Stream Corridor is a vision from someone outside, not necessarily that of the individual land owners and managers” (Pinelo 2002).

While BLE, TIDE, YCT, and FFI have expressed an interest in managing the Golden Stream as an integrated watershed, individual objectives and agendas may impede effective collaboration. Meanwhile, an over-arching management plan or strategy is lacking. BLE’s primary interests revolve around protection of the “five core parcels” starting with the company’s property and moving out towards the Maya Mountain Forest Reserve and the MBC. They feel eco-tourism is the key to sustainable conservation in the watershed as it provides protection and economic benefits through local employment. Extractive activities such as hunting, logging and fishing are incompatible with their view of conservation. FFI and YCT couple conservation with community development. They take a more “people oriented” approach and are open to allowing certain activities on their land (such as salvage logging and collection of non-timber forest products) if practiced in a regulated and sustainable manner.

TIDE envisions management in the context of the ambitious MMMC as outlined in their Site Conservation Plan. The MMMC is a “landscape management unit ... [that] covers nearly a million acres connecting the Maya Mountains to the Belize Barrier Reef” and encompasses five other watersheds in addition to the Golden Stream (TIDE 2000). TIDE practices an aggressive conservation strategy that encompasses buying back foreign held land, eco-tourism, education, and protected areas management. Chief Forest Officer Oswaldo Sabido differentiates the approach followed by YCT and TIDE:

TIDE following its mentor, TNC, takes a much more corporate approach to conservation than say, YCT, which is trying to develop a more community-based management that involves several communities and a particular ethnic group in Toledo. (2002)

As long as organizations can successfully accomplish their objectives independent of each other it seems unlikely they will choose to engage in a more collaborative approach.

### Resource constraints

While mentioned as an incentive for greater collaboration, limited resources are also cited as an inhibiting factor. Various individuals mentioned time and resource constraints. Government agencies and NGOs lack the human and financial resources to carry out roles and responsibilities. Small organizations like YCT are strapped financially. FFI and YCT have limited staff. While the lowland forests and coastline protected areas are in private hands, the headwaters of the Golden Stream emerge in GOB designated Forest Reserves. Management responsibility for the Columbia River Forest Reserve and the Bladen Nature Reserve is in the hands of the Forest Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment. Given limited financial and technical resources and information, the Department's activity in the Toledo District is constrained, as explained below:

The Forest Department appears to be handicapped due to lack of resources. Over ten years, even though they have qualified people and generate revenue, GOB has not provided financial support. NGOs which have good experience have been helping the Forest Department to do its monitoring. (Bardalez 2002)

This view was echoed by Sabido:

The Forest Department first of all does not have all the answers. Secondly, we are still technically weak in protected areas management, especially with community/participatory management even though an overstretched Forest Department staff is doing its best with the limited resources available. We are also weak in the area of knowing what is happening on-the-ground – in Toledo, for example. But yet we have the obligation and the responsibility of providing the leadership for protected areas management. (2002)

Interviewees also mentioned a lack of time, to build relationships and forge partnerships with other organizations with similar interests. The Director of YCT encapsulated the feelings of most of the interviewees in the Golden Stream Corridor: “Everybody has their own things to do and not much time to work together. When someone tries to call a meeting, no one has time for it” (B. Teul 2002).

### Organizational challenges

**Organizational turf.** While groups of environmental organizations have embraced landscape scale or eco-regional conservation planning, contiguous parcels and protected areas remain divided along organizational rather than ecological lines. Various interviews hinted at turf issues. In response to a question about potential problems to collaborative management of protected areas one individual said: “I’m not sure how much the different NGOs are willing to share power or benefits” (Garbutt 2002). Strong institutional identities and personalities strengthen territoriality. It seems that individuals within the GSCP identify more with their institutions than with the geographic region. One individual remarked: “[NGOs] don’t want to share recognition with others [and believe that] only they should benefit” (Anonymous 2002). The following quote highlights the tendency for organizations to define the watershed along institutional rather than ecological lines:

We have staked out what we term the Golden Stream Corridor and it has a collection of stakeholders involved in various levels. Our focus is on the company’s property first and next what we call the ‘five core parcels’ of the Golden Stream Corridor. (Karas 2002)

**Leadership styles.** Different leadership styles create conflict and fragmentation. Leading environmental organizations in the Golden Stream are characterized by strong and vocal leaders; each with their vision for current and future conservation management in the watershed. Outside the language hinting at a need for greater collaboration and coordination in the watershed, no one is really “stepping up to the plate” to consolidate the five core parcels into a functionally integrated corridor.

### Conflict and competition among groups

Criticisms and comments by various interviewees hint at a history of interaction characterized by conflict and personality clashes. While BLE was instrumental in the creation of the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve NGO (now YCT) the relationship seems to have soured. BLE feels that when YCT changed their name they also changed their focus and are now ignoring their responsibility to the five core parcels by focusing on the broader

watershed. On the other hand, YCT questions how well BLE's management strategy as a for-profit organization incorporates local community needs and skills.

Environmental groups perceive Sorenson to be the enemy; using language such as “muscling his way in” or “a walking environmental disaster” to describe him. He is perceived by the environmentalists to be a “shrimper/logger who basically wants to trash the land.” Meanwhile, an employee of Sorenson feels their company is doing things to protect the environment such as preserving riparian buffers and using natural filtration to remove effluents produced by shrimp farming: “We get blamed for polluting but we are doing things that will protect nature...it's in our best interest. The land must give people on earth a living” (Anonymous 2002). Popular perceptions paint TIDE as Toledo's environmental rock star unwilling to share the spotlight with anyone else: “they mopped up marine areas and now they are getting into the terrestrial” (Anonymous 2002). On the flip side, TIDE sees itself as a local success story and attributes the hostility and jealousy to human nature: “It is human nature to hate those that are doing well. I don't expect everyone to like me or TIDE” (Maheia 2002).

### Lack of trust

Interactions between indigenous communities and NGOs and Government organizations are characterized by mistrust. Poorly implemented and managed projects have led some to believe that NGOs are “just like the Government.” Despite numerous projects and millions of development dollars, quality of life for local community residents has improved little. Decision making authority is frequently in the hands of international and national organizations while the local populations affected by those decisions are not necessarily able to participate in decision making processes. As a result, Maya villagers are skeptical of the proclaimed benefits of various conservation and development initiatives in Toledo. Conservation organizations are seen as “locking away resources” while development projects seem to benefit only a minority.

Despite various attempts by NGOs such as YCT to integrate communities into conservation and sustainable livelihood initiatives in the Golden Stream, various interviewees questioned how well indigenous people are represented and integrated into management decisions.

Maya villagers from Golden Stream Village – located across the road from BLE’s upscale tourist complex – feel the promise of local employment and benefits from conservation programs was used merely to “get them on board.” As commented by Golden Stream villagers:

At first they had meetings with us. But after that they did not involve us. They wanted support from the people but after they have it then things are over. (Anonymous 2002)

He [Karas] is a very tricky guy. In each village he gets stones [to build his fence, and] he doesn’t pay. He wants to damage our village and improve his own land. He needs to ask the village to approve it first. (Anonymous 2002)

## **Opportunities and facilitating factors**

Interviews reveal various opportunities to increase collaboration among individuals and organizations. Interactions and partnerships between them suggest a degree of interdependence and interconnectedness.

### *Existing relationships*

There is a richness of linkages among conservation oriented organizations in the Golden Stream largely brought about by the nature of natural resource management at the watershed scale which exceeds the resources, jurisdiction and expertise of any single organization. They range from informal to formal arrangements, involve combinations of local, national, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and bring together the public, private, and nonprofit sector.

YCT, BLE, and TIDE partner with INGOs. TIDE’s on-going relationship with TNC denotes a secure source of funding while FFI provides critical technical assistance to YCT. BLE receives financing from Conservation International’s Conservation Enterprise Fund (CEF) and EcoLogic Enterprise Ventures (EEV) for their eco-tourism component (BLE 2003c). These INGO/NGO partnerships elevate the visibility of the region beyond the local level and provide needed resources.

Partnerships and co-management agreements between GOB and NGOs are an important source of technical, human, and financial resources, given their inability to carry out management roles and responsibilities for protected areas on their own. GOB has devolved management responsibility for Crown Lands Block 127 to TIDE: recognizing TIDE's experience working to protect and manage conservation areas in Toledo. BLE, in conjunction with the Bladen Consortium, rotates some of their rangers in the Government controlled Bladen Nature Reserve.<sup>38</sup>

Linkages between environmental organizations are manifested in more formal arrangements as well; through Memorandums of Agreements (MOA) and conservation easements.<sup>39</sup> Eugenio Ah, the former director of BCER, explains the value of such agreements as a tool to facilitate conservation planning between YCT, BLE and TIDE:

This process is beneficial to both BLE and the NGOs that manage the area. This shows that the efforts of the private sector and NGOs can work together. In terms of forming a common vision as well as a common strategy, to be able to pursue the common end of protecting this area. BLE is very adamant about this. Each stakeholder has their own niche to fill, but we'll be working together. (2002)

YCT signed a conservation easement with TIDE for one of their downstream properties. In essence YCT plays a "watch dog" role by visiting the property once a year to make sure the agency is managing the land in accordance with the easement: for example no new building, roads, logging, or farming. YCT cannot reciprocate because it does not yet have a management plan in place for the property (GSCP) which it manages. However, YCT's Director has expressed that they would sign an easement for their property with TIDE once the management plan for that property in place (B. Teul 2003).

The organizational landscape of the Golden Stream is not static, new partnerships, alliances, and initiatives continue to develop. BLE and TIDE recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement, renewable after ten years, "in which both sides agree to work together to promote conservation and development that will guarantee the long-term sustainable utilization and maintain the ecological integrity of the Golden Stream River and the Port Honduras Marine Reserve"<sup>40</sup> (BLE 2003a). The document outlines the purpose, scope, and termination of the agreement and the obligations of the participating organizations.

As part of this agreement, BLE will contribute a “daily user fee” to TIDE for each guest that participates in BLE’s tourism operations. It is expected that this revenue will be used by TIDE for their marine patrols and conservation work in the PHMR (BLE 2003e). Furthermore, starting in November 2002, BLE, TIDE, and YCT rangers started to conduct joint patrols in the PHMR to reduce poaching and gill netting, with the patrol costs shared by the three parties (BLE 2003e). In 2002 FFI submitted a Global Environment Facility project proposal for integrated ecosystem management in the Golden Stream Watershed. The project seeks to coordinate and strengthen conservation initiatives by addressing local capacity, governance and local livelihoods as they relate to natural resource management in the Golden Stream watershed. If approved, the project will provide a tremendous source of technical and financial support for future collaboration in the watershed.

### Potential for joint gains

Participants express an interest in working together and can imagine joint gains from shared resources, information, and management responsibilities. Others see the potential for more local employment, monetary benefits from user fees, access to carbon credits from carbon sequestration, and the ability to tap funds targeted at collaborative or ecosystem management.

The corridor encompasses a large area of land that individuals and organizations cannot manage alone. Parties identify gaps in baseline data, biodiversity and environmental impact assessments, and management plans. They mention the need for joint monitoring and patrolling. These problems could be better met through pooled knowledge and resources. Greater collaboration can merge the resources and skills of the private and non-profit sector. Ken Karas posits: “Collaboration is to bring together the strengths and resources of the non-profit and the private sector” (2002). John Pinelo, formerly of the Forest Department, puts forth a scenario where each organization could bring something to the table in terms of technical knowledge, community support, and financial resources:

TIDE has a little bit of the technical knowledge and the money but lacks community support. FFI has the greatest technical knowledge of the land but not the money. BLE has the financial resources but not the knowledge and YCT has the community support. (2002)

### Shared concerns and interests

While organizations respond to individual agendas and missions, various organizations in the Golden Stream share common interests. YCT, FFI, TIDE, and BLE support sustainable development initiatives, conservation awareness and capacity building. Both TIDE and BLE embrace eco-tourism as a means to generate revenue and jobs through conservation. BLE is in the process of developing three tourist lodges on their property and plans to include both TIDE and YCT's properties in their eco-tourist destinations:<sup>41</sup>

BLE is developing three satellite stations on the property for tourism [Fig Tree, Jungle Camp and a marine site]. This is a collaborative effort where groups [YCT and TIDE] use development to help conserve the area in terms of user fees for Port Honduras. If they use the YCT land as well this will be another way of contributing. (Ah 2002)

Non-profits like YCT and TIDE stand to benefit from the revenue generated from BLE's guests while BLE requires access to a broad array of ecosystems if they are to provide their guests with the "trans-habitat experience."

The MOA signed by TIDE and BLE highlights their attempts to capture the benefits from greater collaboration in conjunction with strengthening conservation efforts in the region. The relationship between TIDE and BLE is increasingly interdependent given that each organization manages strategic components of the corridor: BLE holds a long term lease on Moho Cay situated within the PHMR where plans are underway to open the upscale Belize Island Lodge. TIDE manages PHMR and Block 127, both important components of the Golden Stream watershed. As neighbors in the Golden Stream watershed, it is *in their best interest* to coordinate ranger and tourism activity as well as share expertise, knowledge, and skills and monitor each other's activities. According to the MOA, both parties agree to cooperate on the following:

- BLE agrees and accepts to charge, collect and allocate funds generated vis-à-vis a daily and differentiated user fee charge from guests staying at Belize Island Lodge on Moho Cay and/or partaking in day excursions within the PHMR and/or other marine locations within the southern Toledo District, with a view to contribute to TIDE's conservation efforts in the PHMR...

- ...share and coordinate their respective ranger activity in order to provide protection for the PHMR and the areas belonging to BLE and TIDE surrounding the Golden Stream River.
- BLE hereto agrees to utilize the expertise of TIDE for its Environmental Impact Assessment for the development of the ecotourism project... [on Moho Cay]. BLE also agrees to share with TIDE, for feedback and comments, its current management plan for BLE's Boden Creek Ecological Reserve as well as any future management plans....
- BLE and TIDE hereto agree to work out arrangements to use TIDE trained guides as part of BLE activities in the PHMR... [and vice versa for TIDE's tourism activities in BCER]. (BLE 2003a)

### Interest in moving forward

Various interviewees indicate positive interactions and are cautiously optimistic about moving forward. New activities, initiatives, and partnerships continue to emerge between YCT, BLE, TIDE, and other organizations. Existing relationships continue to evolve. YCT's Director states:

Now [YCT and BLE] are beginning to talk. We realize we are neighbors and we need to work together. [Karas] owns a block of land on the other side of the river that he is putting into protection.... (B. Teul 2002)

In a similar vein, Karas says:

I would like to see the initiative of the Golden Stream Corridor go forward. No one can dominate; each one has its voice and the option to pull out if it's not working. (2002)

Recently, communities have also shown a renewed interest in participating in the corridor initiative:

[In] the beginning there was good response [from the communities]. There was a time when there was a drop in people's interest in our work. But the interest is going back up especially after the hurricane; people are seeing that it's important that we protect our natural resources. We do see an increase in participation now. (B. Teul 2002)

## CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the constraints and opportunities for collaboration in the Golden Stream watershed leads to the following conclusions:

- While many parties express an interest in greater communication and cooperation, *all* the parties have never sat down face to face to discuss managing this area as a whole. Communication has been limited to clusters of NGO leaders while communities and industry have only marginally participated. Future decision making processes in the Golden Stream Corridor could be strengthened by the inclusion of a broader spectrum of participants and their interests, skills, and experience.
- The Golden Stream is defined as a biological corridor running from the Maya Mountains to Port Honduras, a collection of protected areas, an ecosystem, a component of the MMMC, and a concept. For others it is defined as the foundation of a livelihood or a source of revenue. Varied perceptions and values among participants pose serious challenges to managing the area as an integrated ecosystem. Building a shared objective could promote greater unity among potential collaborators.
- A change in the status quo could create the sense of urgency or ‘window of opportunity’ that could move organizations towards greater cooperation, communication and collaboration. While many interviewees share common concerns about the region’s vulnerability perhaps it has not reached crisis level yet. The highway is *almost* completed and Sorenson is still *planning* to develop his land for shrimp farming.

