

USAID CONSERVATION OF CENTRAL AMERICAN WATERSHEDS PROGRAM



BOCAS DEL TORO WATERSHED

Prime Contractor

Chemonics International Inc.

Associated Partner

World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

Client

USAID/EI Salvador - Central America
and Mexico (E-CAM)

Duration

2007-2009

USAID Project Manager

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OBJECTIVE

The objective of the USAID Conservation of Central American Watersheds Program is to improve the management of two of Central America's most important watersheds—the Gulf of Honduras in Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize and Bocas del Toro in Panama and Costa Rica. USAID is working to protect their unique biodiversity by supporting the application of sustainable finance solutions for protected areas, providing assistance in the implementation of existing management plans for critical biodiversity areas, and engaging the private sector in economically viable activities that are consistent with the sustainable use of natural resources and conservation of biological diversity.

CHALLENGES

Some of the most biologically diverse and economically productive areas in Central America are found within the Gulf of Honduras and Bocas del Toro watersheds. Because of their natural beauty and productivity these two regions make an important contribution to local and national economies. The burgeoning tourism sector has been driving the growth of many related service industries and real estate development; while, export-driven agriculture has continued to be the stalwart of these regions' economies. However, economic progress has come at a price. Unplanned development, mass tourism, and unsustainable agricultural practices are having severe environmental consequences.

USAID is working with key public sector, private sector, and civil society groups at the national, regional, and local level to mitigate the greatest environmental threats to these economically critical yet fragile watersheds. The Program is implementing a results-based approach focused on three components:

- Increased sustainable finance for areas of critical biodiversity importance
- Improved implementation of existing management plans for areas of critical biodiversity importance
- Enhanced private sector participation in sustainable natural resource management and conservation

RESULTS

By establishing financial mechanisms to increase revenues for protected areas, assisting environmental ministries, protected area co-managers, local communities, and private sector groups to implement protected area, watershed, and land use management plans, and establishing public-private alliances to invest in tourism linked to conservation, USAID has achieved the following results:

- Eight (8) regulatory reforms or municipal agreements elaborated in targeted areas for local generation and retention of environmental revenues. As a result of these reforms, USAID has leveraged \$525,000 from the public sector for financing conservation activities.
- Seven (7) protected area management plans and one (1) watershed management plan implemented in the Gulf of Honduras and Bocas del Toro watersheds for a total of 428,231 hectares under improved management.
- \$593,000 generated from public-private partnerships to fund tourism linked to conservation of critical areas of biodiversity

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Conserving lobster populations in Belize and Honduras while increasing income generation for lobster fishermen

The Caribbean Coast of Belize and Honduras represents one of the most important lobster production areas in the Caribbean and is the most important export fishery in the region, with a majority of the production destined for the United States. However, lobster fisheries in this region are severely overexploited and catches have been dwindling in recent years. To address this issue, USAID is working with lobster fisheries cooperatives to implement a sustainable lobster fisheries business model in Honduras and Belize. This business model is reducing unsustainable and illegal lobster catches, while simultaneously generating income for lobster fishermen through the sale of sustainably harvested lobsters to select international markets. Through the application of this business model, USAID has helped the Honduran fisheries cooperative APESCA generate over \$125,000 from the sale of over 100 tons of sustainably harvested lobster.



Transforming agricultural practices of agribusinesses in the Gulf of Honduras watershed

Agribusiness is a pillar of the regional economy of the Gulf of Honduras watershed while simultaneously one of the primary sources of contamination and degradation of water quality and coral reef ecosystems. To address this threat, USAID is creatively improving the environmental performance of agribusinesses in Guatemala and Honduras. By assisting agribusinesses in the application of agricultural best management practices, USAID has improved the management of over 15,000 hectares in the Gulf of Honduras watershed and reduced agrichemical use by over seven hundred tons, resulting in agribusinesses saving over \$370,000 this year alone. Additionally, USAID has supported initiatives developed by agribusinesses and protected area co-managers who have worked to declare over five private natural reserves buffering protected areas and who have initiated environmental, educational, and health programs in over twelve communities bordering agricultural plantations in the Gulf of Honduras watershed.