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PRESS RELEASE

Launch of the Sustainable Development Plan for the Chiquibul-Mountain Pine Ridge-Caracol Complex

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In order to preserve the Chiquibul-Mountain Pine Ridge-Caracol Complex's (CMCC) invaluable ecosystems and the benefits they provide to the people of Belize, the Economic Development Council (EDC) through its Technical Secretariat, the Public-Private Desk in the Office of the Prime Minister, has successfully launched a Sustainable Development Plan for the Chiquibul-Mountain Pine Ridge-Caracol Complex. The 15-year Sustainable Development Plan will serve as the Government of Belize's reference master plan for balanced, environmentally-conscious resource use in this region.

Increasing pressures from unsustainable use and external factors, including climate change and illegal incursions on many of Belize's pristine natural assets, necessitates mechanisms to properly manage and safeguard our nation's rich biodiversity. The CMCC is the largest block of contiguous tropical broadleaf forest in Central America, with unique biological and cultural value. It faces additional pressures from increased human footprint due to the on-going improvements of the Caracol Road, which will inevitably open opportunities for further development.

The Sustainable Development Plan represents the government's proactive approach to ensuring the sustainable use of Belize's biodiversity and preserving the benefits such as cultural heritage, economic opportunities, and water supply of the area. The Sustainable Development Plan's fundamental goal is to facilitate the improved management of ecosystems in the CMCC to maintain their integrity while ensuring the delivery of ecosystem service benefits for current and future generations of Belizeans.

The Plan was developed using state-of-the-art modeling and mapping using the Stanford University Natural Capital Project's InVEST software suite to understand how the natural areas of the CMCC benefit communities, businesses, and the economy of Belize. This allowed for a comprehensive trade-off assessment to be conducted in order to understand the social, environmental, and economic consequences of different development options. Informed by extensive stakeholder engagements, the final SDP's development pathway highlights sustainable development activities that balance the best available scientific data and results with the needs and expectations of local stakeholders.

The result of this scientific and stakeholder-driven process is an innovative master plan that calls for implementing a landscape management approach to the CMCC that builds on six pillars: economic opportunities for local livelihoods, water resources protection, biodiversity conservation, safety and security, land use planning, and inclusive governance. These building blocks will enable us to achieve our vision for the area over the next 15 years.

This initiative was funded by an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) grant project entitled, "Design and Preparation of the Sustainable Development Plan for the Caracol Region" (BL-T1088). The elaboration of this visionary master plan was led by a team of scientists from Stanford University's Natural Capital Project headed by Dr. Adrian Vogl, with the core team composed of Stacie Wolny and Marcelo Guevara. Support from other technical experts was provided by Dr. Elma Kay from the University of Belize Environmental Research Institute, Julian Jimenez from the IDB, and Dr. Kenrick Williams and Alexia Peralta from the EDC in the Office of the Prime Minister.

This Plan represents the culmination of a two-year long successful partnership among the buffering communities of the CMCC, development professionals, policymakers and private-sector stakeholders in clearly identifying the challenges we face and chartering a new era for sustainable growth. Together, all partners will guide the future development of the CMCC.

The Sustainable Development Plan and accompanying summaries are now available for public access on the Economic Development Council's website: www.edc.gov.bz

The Economic Development Council continues to champion efforts towards facilitating dialogue between the private and public sectors to foster economic and sustainable growth in Belize.

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