

**B'isis Kab'a**  
**(now the Chisec Community Conservation Project)**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Quarterly Report**  
**January – March, 2002**

ISU Office of Sponsored Programs  
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RE: USAID Grant 520-G-00-02-00030-00

**Activities in the 5<sup>th</sup> Quarter:**

In the request for an extension through June 30, 2003, ISU proposed the following activities:

1. Consolidate the work already done on the Candelaria, Bombil Pek, and Jul Iq caves in order to increase the amount of cave protection, resolve existing land conflicts with the hotel and with a nearby property owner, and facilitate smooth inter-institutional relationships with the government.
2. Advance on the management plans and legalization of two communities on the Passion River that protect and/or manage archaeological sites.
3. Add at least six more communities to the planning effort for the Jaguar sanctuary while following up on the legalization of the first four.
4. Consolidate the relationship between SANK and the project, and between SANK and Counterpart.
5. Consolidate a working relationship with FONTIERRAS/INAB under their own pilot project funding

**Activity 1: Consolidation of work with Candelaria, Bombil Pek, and Jul Iq caves**

During the period January – March, 2003, ISU's continued to devote considerable time to the Candelaria cave situation. Coordinating with FIPA (Raul Maas), USAID (Claudia Pastor), the Ministry of Culture and Sports – MICUDE (Nora Lopez), the University of Vanderbilt's Cancuen Project (Tomas Barrientos, Brent Woodfill, David Garcia) the local NGO, SANK (Ernesto Tzi), and Q'eqchi community leaders, a Work Plan was designed in early February, detailing the series of steps needed to be taken to fulfill MICUDE's requirements to have full community participation in the management of the national protected area. With thirteen separate identified steps and varying responsibilities by all parties, the projected date for the final signing of a co-management agreement is currently set for August of 2003. ISU, while not directly responsible for any particular step in the process, serves as a facilitator and center for communications, liaising between the communities and the various institutions involved.

ISU's support for the communities vis a vis legal services was continued through the end of January with a Q'eqchi lawyer from Coban. However, we chose to suspend further

legal actions after a series of recommendations from people including: MICUDE's Nora Lopez, USAID-Guatemala counsel Littleton Tazewell, and various local lawyers who advised that further investment in legal action would not be prudent in light of the Guatemalan legal system and the normal length required to process these types of cases (most suggested a minimum of two years). At the same time, Nora Lopez and MICUDE's department of monuments lawyer, Daisy Pop, committed to include as part of the 13 step Work Plan a provision where the MICUDE legal department would spearhead the legal process. ISU was in complete agreement, as it is the State's competency to prosecute this case. Their willingness and ability to do this, though, remains to be seen, as the biggest tourist week of the year, Holy Week, just passed and hundreds of tourists continued to enter into the illegal eco-camp operating inside the protected area, run by a French citizen and his Guatemalan partner. What's more, rather than be more discreet, the lodge sent employees out to the asphalted highway to distribute flyers inviting tourists into the caves to explore and to the lodge to dine. In the mean time, cardamom prices have been very low and morale in the communities, particularly in Mucbilha I, recedes from their euphoria felt in late October upon the pronouncements by Guatemalan president, Alfonso Portillo, that the Frenchman would be removed to what is now a general incredulity that they will be invested with the responsibility and right to manage the caves. At the same time, the eco-camp continues to play a dividing role in the community of Mucbilha, as targeted leaders in the community are hired by the lodge, giving them a secure, relatively high income and ostensibly, co-opting a powerful ally.

The entrance of Counterpart International in May should provide a fresh jolt of caffeine for the communities, as the immediate priority of their work will be to prepare the communities for tourism on a more intensive scale than the little that ISU has been able to do thus far. Working with Counterpart will be two new Peace Corps volunteers who will work on tourism development and environmental education in these communities.

With respect to the caves of Jul Iq and Bombil Pek and the community Porvenir II, where they are located, ISU continues to await the arrival of the survey team to complete the first step in the land-legalization process—to do the legal measurement of the community and register it with the National Land Registry. This step is well-behind schedule, as FONTIERRAS had originally told ISU in December that this work would be carried out in January of 2003. In the meantime, Porvenir II is patient and they continue to be very interested in the work of ISU and guaranteeing the protection of their caves, which are now generating decent income through tourism.

Other activities with these communities included a trip of 19 Q'eqchi leaders to Tikal and Uaxactun, Peten February 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. The principal motive for this trip was the signing of a Letter of Intent by the communities of the Candelaria Caves with the Minister of Culture and Sports stipulating the process and time frame to expect for the eventual creation and signing of a Co-Administration agreement. Present at the ceremony was Adolfo Franco, of USAID Washington. Beyond the presence of the two Candelaria communities, male and female Q'eqchi leaders from the Porvenir II and Cancuen communities of El Zapote and La Union were included on the trip, in light of the fact that all of these communities beyond sharing the same linguistic and cultural identities, they

also are similar in that their communities are home to significant cultural and natural resources that are also tourist attractions. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, USAID supported projects from Chemonics and Wildlife Conservation Society. WCS hosted the group in Uaxactun for the day, giving an exhaustive tour of the range of productive activities in which the community is involved as relates to tourism and conservation of their tropical forest. The exchange with Uaxactun, and indeed between Q'eqchi community leaders, was very fruitful and it was a powerful educational process for all involved.

ISU also supported a 3-week eco-tourism guide-training course given by Rodolfo Ortiz of INTECAP in March. 27 Q'eqchi community members received the course, including five women. In addition, ISU has completed the translation of two informative brochures into Q'eqchi for MICUDE to be distributed in communities that are home to archaeological ruins.

### **Activity 2: Advance on the management plans and legalization of 2 communities on the Passion River**

No action has yet been initiated for this activity, due principally to the fact that our GPS Tech Team has been occupied from January through the present date, sometimes working six days a week, mapping communities in the Jaguar Sanctuary. In addition, the Cancuen archaeological project's field season did not start this year until late March. Brent Woodfill, from the University of Vanderbilt, is our principal liaison with these communities and he has yet to start work in the Cancuen area, due to his current investigation of the Candelaria Caves. As such, this work should be initiated towards the middle of May.

### **Activity 3: Add at least six more communities to the planning effort for the Jaguar sanctuary while following up on the legalization of the first four.**

From January to the present date, the following communities have been added to the initial four that were mapped in 2002, having concluded the participatory mapping of each community, including all individual parcels, houses and current land-use:

1. Sechinapemech
2. Las Ruinas
3. El Triunfo
4. Faisan II
5. Rinconcito del Norte

During the next three weeks, the large communities of Lomas del Norte and Chaquiquiche will also be included in this list. In addition, 2 community members from each village will be trained on how to conduct a socio-economic survey of their respective villages, giving us a panorama of the local economies and use of the forest for all of these communities by the end of May 2003.

Beyond the work in these new communities, participatory socio-economic studies were conducted in all four of the previously mapped communities which include:

1. Bolonco
2. Cerro Alto
3. Agua Subterranea
4. Nueva Babilonia

The results of these studies along with copies of the final maps have been presented in community workshops that last a half day in each village, introducing the entire community to the excellent conditions of their forests (up to 70% of the total area of some communities) and giving them for the first time a valorization of these forests. In this manner, the process to create Community Reserves and Protected Areas is begun and the communities are tasked to analyze their maps and draw onto them the areas that they think should be protected and are feasible to protect. In two weeks, nominated representatives from each of these villages will travel to Chisec where we will conduct an inter-community workshop to unify criteria for the creation of reserves and ensure that there exists a logic with green connections from village to village in such a manner that a viable biological corridor will be created. Once this is completed, a participatory, simple, illustrated Q'eqchi management plan will be prepared for each community and distributed. Simultaneously, the ISU-SANK tech team will revisit these communities to map and demarcate the limits of the newly created protected areas. The final step in the process will be to present the communities with their final maps which will include the polygon(s) of the Community Reserves. The same process will be replicated with the other seven communities once they are brought up to speed.

We continue to interface between the Municipality of Chisec, CIPREDA and the communities involved in an effort to provide real incentives for community conservation. The Muni and CIPREDA are expected to sign a contract to begin maintenance of 10 rural roads, benefiting the majority of the communities in the Jaguar Sanctuary. The Muni did not have money until the first week of April, which seems to have caused the mayor to delay with signing the contract. We have insisted and will continue to insist that all of these projects, in addition to any other CIPREDA infrastructure projects to be implemented through a different contract, need to be presented to the communities with a unified, coherent message from all institutions involved: ISU, USAID, CIPREDA, and the Muni of Chisec, so that the incentive is clear and understood by all – that there are a wide range of benefits that can be obtained by the communities through their efforts to protect their natural and cultural resources.

Finally, ISU has worked with SANK to create two educational videos in Q'eqchi. The first is a promotional video about the project, its components, and its goals for the area, that gives the often times 75+% illiterate communities an invaluable tool to visualize the work, why it's important, and how it involves them. The second video, made in coordination with another local NGO in Chisec, AMCODI, is also entirely in Q'eqchi and teaches in a simple, humorous atmosphere the proper way to prepare and burn a field for the planting of *milpa* in the Guatemalan summer, should burning be necessary. These videos have already shown to five separate communities of the Jaguar Sanctuary and their reception has been great---from children to mothers to elderly and especially the Q'eqchi adult men.

#### **Activity 4: Consolidate the relationship between SANK and the project, and between SANK and Counterpart.**

As mentioned earlier, SANK has showed much maturity over the past three months and have been made well aware that this is a community-based, community-owned project that SANK will be responsible to supervise and give follow-up once ISU is gone. To that end, SANK's president and vice-president work directly with our project, with both men now being able to use ArcView and create great maps. SANK's vice-president, Ernesto Tzi Chub, is the coordinator of all community work and has been tasked with the supervision of the tech team. Ernesto's ability to interface with the communities and the many institutions in the area is laudatory, not to mention his natural skill as an excellent translator (as observed during the ceremony in Tikal, when Ernesto translated the words of Adolfo Franco into Q'eqchi for the community leaders present). SANK's president, Pedro Giron, has been a natural wunderkind with ArcView and the use of the plotter and has allowed the project to save hundreds of dollars by his rapid ability to learn. Both Pedro and Ernesto, among the entire Board of Directors of SANK, now share a sense of ownership for the project and, indeed, are preparing to solicit a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to give follow-up community support in the Jaguar Sanctuary. ISU's ability to share and consult with SANK during its initial growing pains have been important. The fact that we have been able to find synergy between the vision of both groups with the participatory community work and the production of educational Q'eqchi videos has consolidated SANK's ownership of the project.

In this same vein, ISU serves as an ideal intermediary between SANK and the imminent arrival of Counterpart in the area. From the outset of this project, ISU has consulted with Counterpart on their initial grant proposal down to current communication on the ultimate structure and work of Counterpart on the ground. It is envisioned that with the groundwork laid by ISU in coordination with SANK, that Counterpart will now be able to hit the ground running, accompanied by SANK into the majority of these communities where SANK already has an image and a strong, respected presence. Beyond the baseline of information and presence in the communities, ISU and SANK will also be able to offer Counterpart a well-equipped office, including a satellite internet connection. In turn, Counterpart appears to be willing to have SANK as a partner in their two-year project, where consultations and decision-making will be horizontal.

#### **Activity 5: Consolidate a working relationship with FONTIERRAS/INAB under their own pilot project funding**

As mentioned earlier, the USAID – FONTIERRAS contract was not signed until the last week of March and due to internal bureaucracy in FONTIERRAS it is taking another month to contract employees and make equipment purchases for the Chisec office. Considering that this is the key to the entire project's success (securing the titling of land at reduced prices for the communities in light of their decisions for conservation), it is imperative that ISU be able to extend in the area for at least through December of 2003 to consolidate this relationship and ensure that the process is moving for these communities.

If this does not happen, it's very easy that ISU, USAID, and SANK will end up with mud on all of our faces.

### **Additional Activities:**

1. **Training:** During the final week of February, ISU contracted a USGS trained GIS technician, Mario Rodriguez, to teach Pedro Giron and Ernesto Tzi how to process GPS field data and produce maps needed for the host of communities where we are working. In addition, ISU continued to train 2 members from each community in compass and GPS use, as well as the principals of basic mapmaking. Finally, 8 Q'eqchi community members were also trained as socioeconomic researchers.
2. **Digitalization of Topographic Maps:** Upon completing the week of training with Pedro and Ernesto, Mario Rodriguez was tasked to digitalize the remaining areas of the municipalities of Chisec and Coban that our project had not yet digitalized to cover the entire extension of the Jaguar Sanctuary. Within two weeks, we will have four completely digitalized IGN 1:50,000 topographic maps that will give us and SANK an incredible, three-dimensional, geo-referenced image of the area to work with and analyze for more precise community management plans. These maps can be shared with the Municipality of Chisec and Coban as invaluable tools for Municipal planning and development, not to mention other institutions working in the area on community development and environmental issues. Mario and USGS-Guatemala representative Manolo Barrillas also imparted a short training session on the methodology and program used to digitalize maps, donating the software to SANK as well. This will be invaluable for SANK in the future, allowing them to digitalize localized maps in Chisec at virtually no cost.
3. **ISU-SANK-Counterpart Exchange National Park Sierra de Lacandon:** From April 14 to April 16, eight members of the NGO SANK and of the ISU-SANK team, accompanied by the Chief of Party for Counterpart, David Garcia, participated in an exchange with The Nature Conservancy supported Guatemalan NGO, *Defensores de la Naturaleza*, in the National Park Sierra de Lacandon to observe their work amidst this globally significant reserve of natural and cultural resources. Visits to the archaeological sites of Piedras Negras and Yaxilan were led by employees and Park Guards of *Defensores* and allowed for all involved to witness a different approach to conservation in Guatemala.

### **Conclusions**

At the end of the reporting period, we can measure the progress in terms of the deliverables we proposed for the extension of the "Chisec Community Conservation Project" to be finished by June 30, 2003. Below, the deliverables are copied from the proposal and commented on in bold.

### **Deliverables of the Project Extension**

1. 12 community technicians trained in GPS and navigation. **(10 trained)**

2. 6 new communities within the network of the Jaguar Sanctuary with communal reserves. Liaison consolidated with Lachuá National Park. **(5 communities mapped, 2 others underway. Relationship established with IUCN project in Lachuá National Park)**
3. SANK equipped and trained to conduct future resource management planning activities under contract. **(2 SANK technicians trained in the use of ArcView and plotter, as well as fixed tech team of 6 GPS field workers, more than capable of taking on future work under contract)**
4. Tourism committees legalized and operating in Candelaria Caves, Bombil Pek under agreements with the Ministry of Culture and Sports. **(Pending 13 point Work Plan to be completed in August for the communities of Candelaria Caves. Bombil Pek still seeks involvement of FONTIERRAS to advance the land legalization process)**
5. 1:10,000 maps of all participating communities showing their boundaries, parcels, and land uses including protected areas. **(9 completed maps to date of communities in Jaguar Sanctuary)**
6. 3 small projects funded and completed to facilitate community tourism activities. **(Pending coordination with AGIL and Counterpart and their survey of prioritized needs, ISU is able to support these projects.)**
7. Resolution of dispute between hotel and Candelaria communities and between Mucbilhá and a private property owner across the highway. **(A menagerie of death threats, non-cooperation, avoidance, ominous legal support and divide-and-conquer strategies within the Q'eqchi communities by outside actors, have limited ISU's ability to resolve this.)**
8. Smooth transition into activities funded under Counterpart agreement with USAID **(ISU project continues to be present in all meetings between Counterpart and SANK, helping to facilitate and consult on this transition.)**

## EXTENSION REQUEST

### Justification

With regard to all the activities, it is important to note that the current ISU extension was envisioned to be a project of social and technical support for local Q'eqchi communities, working through the local NGO SANK, whereas SANK would be able to learn and manage the entire process, carrying on with the project after the termination of ISU in the area. For this to work, a strong relationship with FONTIERRAS and SANK had to be created locally where the two would see each other as allies in the facilitation of land legalization and protection of natural resources.

At the time of this writing, FONTIERRAS has yet been able to begin this relationship that we had hoped to have had in place by the end of January. (The contract between USAID and FONTIERRAS to work in the Chisec area was not signed until the last week of March.) According to FONTIERRAS' staff in their Guatemala City office, they plan to find a place for their office in Chisec during the last week in April. Suffice to say, we have yet to have any meeting with FONTIERRAS that has not taken place in Guatemala

City. On the other hand, SANK has come a long way and has proved itself more than capable to handle the technical aspect of the project (community and land-use mapping, socio-economic surveys of communities, drafting of community management plans, etc.)

Because of the delays, the project has not expended the full amount of money allocated under the extension. At the time of writing, ISU accounting informs us that, as of April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003, the project still had nearly \$149,000.

### **Goals and Activities of the Extension**

Another extension of the ISU project would allow for the following activities to be advanced or consolidated. All activities consolidate the original goals of the ISU project:

1. Support for SANK as an **independent** resource management and conservation NGO. In this activity, the project activities, after a period of preparation, will be turned over to SANK as a subcontract. ISU will maintain a function that might be described as coordinator/liason/networking/planning assistance for the remainder of the project. ISU will also continue to be the overall administrator of USAID funds. This activity significantly advances the original goal of developing a locally-based resource management and conservation NGO in the Chisec area.
2. Cement the relationship between SANK and FONTIERRAS with coordination, mutual planning that takes into account past activities, strategic planning and possible logistic support and occasional extension (through volunteers) support.
3. SANK/ISU will give the communities of the *Jaguar Sanctuary* more follow-up with their mapping process and the negotiation of lower prices for the land, in light of these communities' commitment to protect their natural resources.
4. Cement the relationship between SANK, as an independent NGO making their own decisions and Counterpart through supplying bridge funding to SANK and continued support for strategic planning.
5. Provide a continued presence with the communities of Candelaria and their efforts to secure the Co-Administration Concession from the Ministry of Culture and Sports - MICUDE (tentatively scheduled for late August of 2003). This activity is necessary to bring closure to this aspect of the original ISU workplan.

### **Deliverables of the Extension**

1. Although ISU has nearly completed the deliverables in the extension from January thru June of 2003 and will exceed them in most activities, this extension will complete the last of them, with the exception of the Passion River communities. The work with these communities depends on their close relationship with the Cancuen project. As the Cancuen Project's cave activities are now concentrated in Candelaria, ISU finds it unfeasible to continue with work on the Passion River unless the active relationship with Cancuen is renewed during our stay.
2. SANK will be capable of independent planning and action in the area of resource management and conservation planning.
3. The 12 communities involved in the Jaguar Sanctuary aspect of the project will have completed their conservation planning and will be receiving attention from FONTIERRAS/SANK that will allow them to perceive tangible benefits from

their own conservation activities, such that the activities have a chance of being sustainable.

4. The relationship with Counterpart and SANK will be running smoothly and SANK will be capable of holding its own in its relations with other international NGOs in the area of Chisec conservation.
5. The Candelaria Caves communities will have their co-administration concession with MICUDE and their management plan will receive official acceptance.
6. Evaluation of the overall project will be conducted by outside reviewers.

#### **Time of the Extension Request**

We plan to terminate this project at the **end of December 2003**.

#### **Budget**

The budget allocations for the remaining unspent funds are attached as an Excel document.