

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 13, 2024
Punta Gorda Town
Toledo, Belize



2024 Assessment Results of Burned Areas in the Toledo District

Ya'axché Conservation Trust concluded a fire damage assessment of the Toledo District using 20m resolution Sentinel-2 Satellite imagery, ArcGIS Pro Image Classification Tool, and ground truthing drone imagery. The 2024 dry season brought record high temperatures, and little to no precipitation for approximately 2 months which led to numerous, uncontrolled forest and agricultural fires in Toledo. As a result, the fires damaged or destroyed **108, 695 acres or approximately 10.2% of the Toledo District consisting of forest and farmlands**, a significant loss in comparison to 2023 when 33,000 acres or 3.1% of the district's forests and farmlands were burnt.

Data results indicate 116 acres of forest was burnt in the Boden Creek Ecological Preserve, 57 acres in the Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve, 826 acres in the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve, and 3,960 acres in the Columbia River Forest Reserve. Additionally, 7 major contiguous burns were identified in southern Toledo that merit a special note. These fires started in or near specific villages, which caused the immolation of vegetation, farmlands, and forest. These areas burned for weeks at a time and are a direct result of negligent use especially during unprecedented dry conditions, burning of debris, and natural causes due to climate change.

The largest community fire started in the vicinity of Machakilha and burned southward to the Sarstoon River and covered over 3,192 acres. This fire was proximate to a fire south of Graham Creek community that burned about 1,715 acres. The Graham Creek fire also burned southward, reaching the Sarstoon River. Another fire further north was located a kilometer east of Crique Jute and burned 2,672 acres. Another 2,667 acres were burned four-and-a-half kilometers southeast of Blue Creek in the Aguacaliente area, around the Aguacaliente Lagoon. 2,386 acres burned in the community of San Lucas. Approximately 2,067 acres burned three kilometers north of San Pedro Columbia and one-and-a-half kilometer northwest of San Miguel. Four kilometers north of San Jose and one-and-a-half kilometer northeast of Naluum Ca, a fire burned 1,915 acres. Some of the major crops lost during the fires were cacao, coffee, plantains, corn, cardamom, bananas, yampi, cassava, mahogany, cedar, avocados, mangos, pineapples, saamwood, rosewood and quamwood.

These unprecedented fires highlight the urgency for Ya'axché to work even more closely with the Government of Belize, partners, and local communities to build capacities in fire management and ignite collaborative action to minimize forest, wildlife and personal loss and restore burnt areas.

For more information contact Ya'axché Conservation Trust at info@yaaxche.org.

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