

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Punta Gorda

Toledo, Belize



Illegal surveys in the Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve

Ya'axché Conservation Trust has been the co-manager of the Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve (MMNFR) along with the Forest Department since 2015. Since then, the organization has been conducting patrols, research and monitoring and working with the Trio Farmers Cacao Growers (TFCG) Ltd. in the production of cacao in a 936-acre agroforestry concession within MMNFR.

Enforcement rangers conducted a patrol on Wednesday April 17, 2024, within the Reserve where they discovered four (4) cut lines with an area measuring approximately 1500 meters in length by 800 meters in width. Similar discovery was made in 2021 where lines were cut but discontinued when the patrols increased. The Trio villagers cutting the lines indicated to the enforcement rangers that they have received permission from their Toledo East Area Representative and that there are plans to de-reserve that portion of the reserve.

The activity is not only illegal but also jeopardizes the ecological integrity of this conserved landscape. MMNFR is characterized by its rich biodiversity, and unique ecosystem making it a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) for Belize and National Protected Areas System (NPAS). It is important to note that a portion of MMNFR was de-reserved in 2015. As a response, Ya'axché and the Forest Department implemented key management measures to ensure there is no further loss of forest due to increasing anthropogenic pressures.

Ya'axché takes the opportunity to highlight section 18 and 19 of the 2015 National Protected Areas System Act, Revocation of declaration: Any declaration, alteration, re-classification or revocation of a declaration, of a protected area, shall follow

(a) an integrated assessment of the ecological, social and economic status of the area, potential impacts and contribution to the National Protected Areas System; and

(b) such consultative process may be appropriate in the circumstances but must ensure consultation with nearby communities and affected parties of the area and follow a process of public participation.

Ya'axché urges the relevant authorities to take the necessary corrective actions to cease such illegal activity in MMNFR.

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