Exploring a Middle Ground for Ecotourism Research: A Stakeholder Analysis of the Indian Creek Trail Project in Belize

by

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Abstract

While ecotourism has become a popular development strategy and is often proposed as a way of combining environmental conservation with economic development, it has been advocated in the absence of recognition of the conditions under which it may be best promoted, initiated, managed and evaluated. Drawing on in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, the aim of this thesis is to assess the potential usefulness of Stakeholder Analysis (SA) as a framework for identifying relevant stakeholders and analyzing their respective interests and levels of power and influence, as well as relations of collaboration or conflict. This will be achieved by presenting the results of a stakeholder analysis of the Indian Creek Trail Project (ICTP) in Belize. The findings indicate that the ICTP both affects and is affected by a constellation of stakeholders with diverse power, interests and legitimacy and varying levels of participation in the project. Rather than facilitating the achievement of common goals and empowering marginalized stakeholders, the ICTP has allowed some, generally more powerful, stakeholders to benefit, while vulnerable and marginalized stakeholders have not actively participated in or benefited from the project. In addition to supporting the usefulness of SA in analyzing development projects, this thesis suggests that the ICTP should engage with marginalized stakeholders more actively if the project is to achieve its goals of empowerment and conservation.

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My friends in Ottawa (and elsewhere) have also provided me with important support and inspiration throughout the course of writing this thesis. I am happy, however, to finally be able to say, yes it is finished, and I can spend time with you all again. Perhaps most of all, I would like to send a special thank you to Megan. Your patience and understanding has been remarkable. This couldn't have been done without you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the early 1990s ecotourism has emerged as an innovative new strategy for combining nature conservation with sustainable economic development (Honey 1999; Boo 1990). Developing countries, in particular, have been strongly encouraged by a diverse set of interest groups – including conservationists, international financial institutions, and tourism companies – to embrace this fast-growing industry (Belsky 1999, 2000, Chang 2003; Duffy 2002; Boo 1990). While a universally agreed upon definition of ecotourism does not yet exist, those at the forefront of ecotourism research and development now provide definitions that incorporate the fundamental goals of *conservation* of natural resources and *local development.* According to authors like Edington and Edington (1997: 163) and Mader (2003) for example, successful ecotourism projects should meet three criteria: 1) provide the customer, or ecotourist, with a rewarding experience; 2) contribute to environmental conservation, and 3) bring economic benefits to participating local communities. In this regard, Honey (1999) defines ecotourism as travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and small-scale. It helps educate the traveler, provides funds for conservation, directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, and fosters respect for different cultures and human rights. The World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA) defines ecotourism as:

> environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996, 20).

These definitions indicate that ecotourism is a complex phenomenon, involving integration of many actors including tourists, resident peoples, suppliers, and managers (Ceballos-Lascurain 1993). They also suggest that through ecotourism, the environment, local populations, and ecotourists can be united in a symbiotic relationship.

While many factors have contributed to the emergence of ecotourism as a popular development strategy, a shift in strategies for protected area management has been particularly significant. Conservationists and park managers have started to recognize the importance of integrating natural resource management with the needs of rural populations surrounding protected areas, and are moving away from strictly "protectionist" activities towards "integrated conservation and development" approaches like community-based conservation (CBC) and community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) (Wells and Brandon 1992). While CBC and CBNRM include diverse approaches including community forestry, community wildlife management, and protected area co-management initiatives, ecotourism has emerged as a shining light of the movement (Boo 1990; Western and Wright 1994; Belsky 1999). This is clearly illustrated by the United Nations declaration of the year 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE). Moreover, Honey (1999: 76) sates that:

> Today, all of the major US-based international conservation organizations are involved in ecotourism at some level, from issuing sets of principles and policy statements to establishing research departments, providing technical assistance and public education, operating projects in developing countries, and conducting travel programs. They have received millions of dollars in funding from USAID to implement scores of programs, projects and studies in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia aimed at protecting threatened ecosystems and preserving biodiversity. Ecotourism is being hailed as a means of 'giving nature value' and achieving sustainable development.

In theory, local communities participating in ecotourism are expected to play a major role and share in the benefits of ecotourism development. In particular, the costs of setting aside local environments for conservation should be offset by the direct provision of revenue and other non-material benefits to communities (Duffy 2002: 102). These benefits should provide an additional form of support for local economic activities, so that they compliment, rather than overwhelm previous local practices (Wallace and Pierce 1996: 846-860). These benefits should also increase local support for conservation projects and reduce the pressure on land to be converted to other uses (Boo1990; Lindberg and Enriquez 1994; Lindberg et al 1996).

Despite the virtuous goals of ecotourism in theory, it has been advocated in the absence of a widespread recognition of the practical conditions under which it may be best promoted, initiated, managed and evaluated. While there exists a substantial literature highlighting its potential benefits, there is also a growing amount of case-study research reporting the failure of ecotourism to achieve its goals. In other words, ecotourism *theory* has often not been successfully put into *practice* (Ross and Wall n.d.). As critics point out, in many cases ecotourism ends up serving the interests of local and global elites because the political nature of decision making often cuts out less powerful and influential interests (Duffy 2002: 103). Consequently, "serious concerns about ecotourism exist, as regards the degree of social fairness involved and that of stakeholder involvement and control" (Epler Wood 2002: 5).

As Fennell and Rowling (2003: 331) assert, the development of sound ecotourism policy and implementation of effective ecotourism projects is contingent on a solid understanding of the activity. In this respect, there is a need "to better understand both

the relative levels of influence and levels of interest on the part of various stakeholder groups regarding economic development and biodiversity conservation" (Fennell and Rowling 2003: 333). In order to develop a better understanding of ecotourism in action, there is a need to develop the necessary frameworks capable of examining the heterogeneity of ecotourism as a complex phenomenon (Fennell and Rowling 2003: 340). As Bottrill and Pearce (1995) explain, the availability and application of a framework with which to examine ecotourism at the site level could be helpful in understanding the gaps between ideal prescriptions and ground-level failure, and encourage and facilitate the achievement of goals for ecotourism at an operational level.

The aim of this thesis is to address this issue by assessing the usefulness of Stakeholder Analysis (SA) as a theoretical and methodological tool capable of analyzing and negotiating the development of ecotourism. This will be achieved by presenting the results of a stakeholder analysis of the Indian Creek Trail Project (ICTP), a community-based ecotourism project in central Belize. Examining the ICTP through the analytical lens of SA will facilitate the identification of relevant project stakeholders, the investigation of stakeholder interests and levels of power and influence, and an understanding of relations of collaboration or conflict between stakeholders as they work to achieve their respective goals. Moreover, SA will help to identify factors that help to facilitate or work to create barriers to the collaborative management of ecotourism projects.

SA now belongs to the long list of paradigms, "buzzwords" and acronyms reigning over the field of international development and is currently used in fields ranging from political science to policy development and international relations. As a

review of the approach by Chevalier (2001) explains, the concept and related methodology have made significant inroads into poverty reduction studies and applied research pertaining to issues of sustainable livelihoods, community-based natural resource management and conflict resolution. The idea of SA has been catching on, in large part, because it involves a recognition of the fact that obstacles to peace, equity, sustainability or growth cannot be dealt with through technological means alone. As Chevalier (2001) and Stonich (1998, 2000) assert, when tackling issues of poverty and environmental degradation, power relations and conflicting interests must be examined and alternative practices explored by all "interested parties" if blueprints for change are to be grounded in reality. SA is thus an invitation to examine the power relations among groups and individuals and their respective interests in a resource or situation. In short, SA is an approach that aims to identify key differences among groups and areas of potential common ground and feasible interventions aimed at a better management of natural resources and related conflicts. Given the need for such a framework in the field of ecotourism, it seems SA would be an ideal approach with which to examine ecotourism projects.

Belize: An Ecotourist Mecca

Cut out of the Yucatán peninsula and gaining independence from Great Britain in 1981, Belize – Central America's northernmost nation – is bounded to the north and northwest by the Méxican state of Quintana Roo, to the west by Guatemalan department of Petén, to the south by the Guatemalan department of Izabal, and to the east by the Caribbean Sea (see figure 1.1 below). Including the over 1,000 islets or "cayes" which dot its Caribbean coast – the country is approximately 280 kilometers long (from north to

FIGURE 1.1: MAP OF BELIZE

Source: CIA 2004

south), and 109 kilometers wide at its widest point. To put the nation's size into context, Belize is just slightly larger than the U.S. State of Massachusetts. With a population of approximately 257,000 (DeVries et al 2003: 11), Belize also has the lowest population density in Central America, and one of the lowest in the world. Travelers and experts around the world, as well as travel journals and research publications have regarded the small Central American country of Belize as an *ecotourist mecca* (Cater 1994; Sutherland 1996; Wheat 1994; Eltringham 2001; Horwich 1990; Price 1995). According to Richard and Sally Price (1995: 98), for example, Belize is an excellent ecotourism destination because of its low population density, extraordinary rich ethnic and linguistic mix and abundant forest and marine resources.

Cultural Setting

Belize is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country, predominated by Mestizos (people of Spanish and Maya descent) and Creoles (people of mixed European and African descent). The Mestizos make up about 49 percent and the Creoles about 25 percent of the population. The other two major population groups are the Maya and the Garifuna, which comprise eleven percent and six percent of the population respectively. There are three Maya ethnic groups in Belize: the Yucatec, the Kekchi, and the Mopan. The Yucatec live mostly in the northern and western areas of Belize. Most of the Mopans and the Kekchis are concentrated in Belize's southernmost region, the Toledo District, where they comprise about 60 percent of the population (or about 15,000 people). The remainder of the population is comprised of East Indians (originally imported to the British Caribbean as indentured servants), Mennonites (originally of Dutch and German descent), Chinese, Taiwanese and Arab (mostly Palestinian and Lebanese) immigrants, and a small but growing number of North American and British expatriates. The official language of the country is English, although Spanish and Creole (a language derived from English) are also widely spoken. To a lesser extent (in terms of population size of the respective ethnic group), Garifuna, Mopan Maya, Kekchi Maya, Yucatec Maya, and German/Deutsch are spoken.

Environment and Natural Resources

Besides Belize's rich cultural diversity, the country is blessed with an abundance of natural resources located in both marine and terrestrial settings. In addition to its cayes, spanning the length of Belize and lying just off the coast is what Charles Darwin referred to as "the most remarkable reef in the West Indies," the largest barrier reef in the

Western Hemisphere and second in the world only to Australia's Great Barrier Reef (Wells 1996). The 220 km long "Belize Barrier Reef Complex," as it is referred to, is a part of the larger Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, which includes Belize's three coral atolls[1] (Glovers Reef, Lighthouse Reef and Turneffe Atoll), as well as the reefs off the coasts of México, Guatemala and Honduras (Wells 1996).

While the sea and coastline are the main attractions for tourists, Belize also boasts a densely forested interior. The mainland of Belize can be divided into two main topographic regions, the relatively flat northern lowlands and coastal plains that are part of the Yucatán Platform, and the Maya Mountains with their associated basins and plateaus that dominate most of the southern half of the country, rising to a maximum of 1,124 meters above sea level. The most characteristic feature of Belize is the presence of extensive areas of natural habitat and relatively low but growing levels of human disturbance. According to DeVries et al (2003: 16), approximately 15,867 square kilometers, or 69.1 percent of Belize is under some form of forest cover (including shrublands). As a result of its extensive forests, the country continues to harbor viable populations of a range of species of conservation concern that are under pressure throughout the rest of the Central American region.[2] The landscape of Belize also contains a wealth of archaeological resources including ruins of ancient Maya cities and ceremonial cave systems. The recognition of the importance of these resources has been manifested to a large extent by the declaration of 71 protected areas across the country (see figure 1.2 below). With more ecosystem cover in absolute and relative numbers than

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[1] Belize is home to three of the four coral atolls in the Caribbean (Wells 1996).

[2] Over 540 bird species have been recorded in Belize, of which over 80 are of special conservation concern. Over 150 mammal species have been recorded in Belize. Of these, forty-three are considered endangered,

even eco-friendly Costa Rica, and with the highest protected area cover in Central America, Belize has gained a reputation as a country committed to the conservation and sustainable use of its natural resources (Cherrington 2004: 3).

Economic Setting

Belize is considered a middle-income developing nation, with a per capita Gross National Income (GNI) of US$2,920, compared with GNI per capita averages of US $1,140 in lower-middle income countries, and US $3,680 in the Latin America / Caribbean region (Cherrington 2004: 8-9).[3] According to Cherrington (2004: 9), the national poverty assessment report commissioned by the Caribbean Development Bank (and reproduced in the 1998 UN-sponsored National Human Development Report) indicated that in 1995, 33% of the population was below the absolute poverty line, with 13.4% of individuals in extreme poverty. There were strong differentials along geographic and ethnic lines, with 42.5% of rural inhabitants being poor – more than half that of urban residents. The southern districts of Cayo and Toledo were the poorest areas of Belize, with poverty rates of 19.7% and 47.2% respectively, while more than half of the rural people in each of these districts were poor. The Maya were disproportionately represented among the poor, as were immigrants.

In 2000, GDP stood at US $820 million, while total external debt was US $506 million. As a result of its high debt to GDP ratio, Belize has been under pressure from the World Bank and IMF to resolve deficits in its balance of payments, and has been strongly encouraged to diversify its economy, with tourism being hailed as a potential

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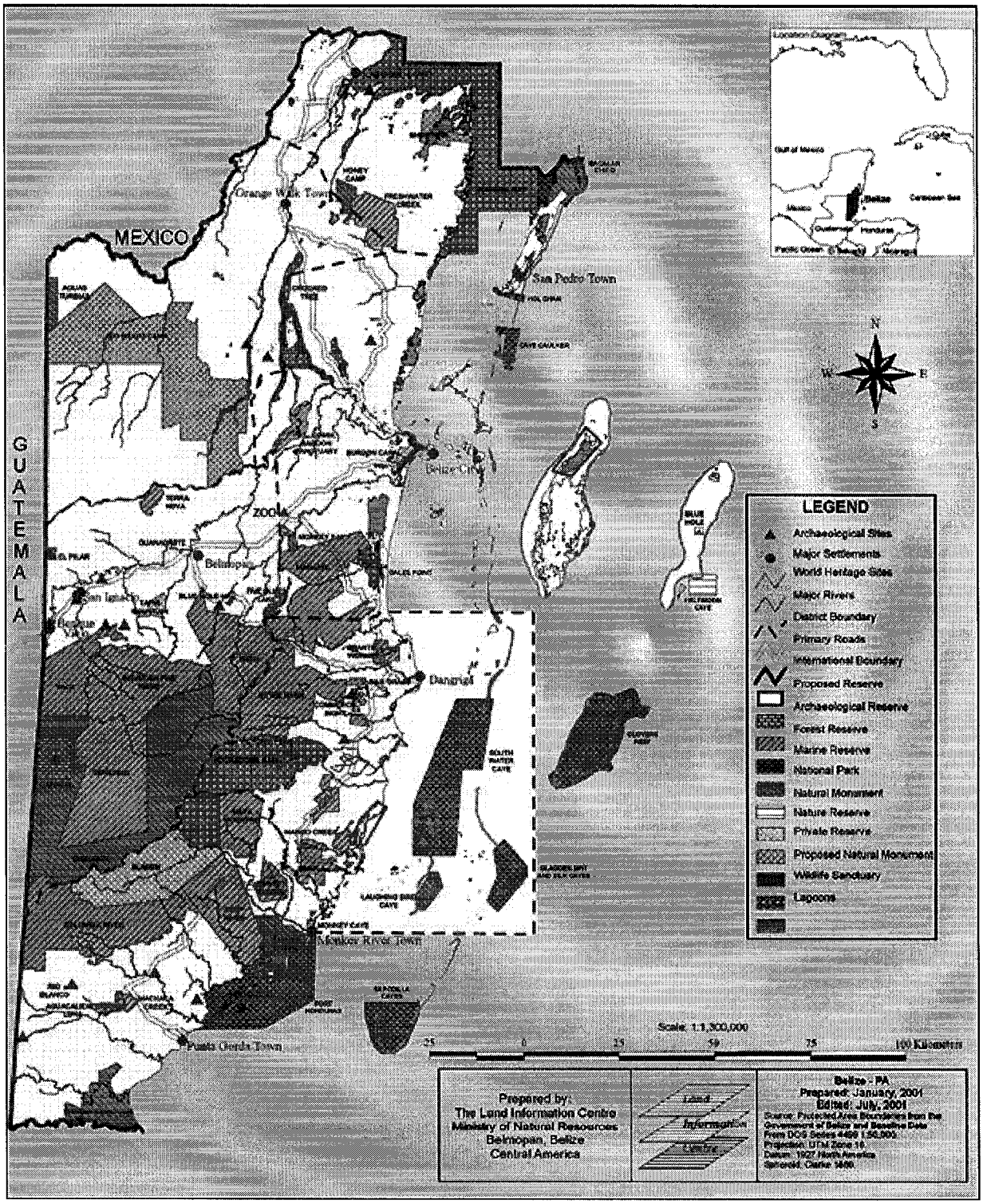
threatened, rare and/or hunted throughout their ranges, with thirteen officially designated as being of international concern.

[3] The official currency of Belize is the Belize dollar and it is pegged to the US dollar at a rate of 2:1, creating an official exchange rate of BZ $2 to US $1.

FIGURE 1.2: PROTECTED AREAS OF BELIZE



Source: PACT 2004

sector for economic growth (Volker and Soree 2002: 105). According to Belsky (1999: 659), imposed structural adjustment mandates have compelled the Belizean government to promote new growth sectors like tourism rather than supporting small-scale farming, food crops, and rural livelihood security. Thus, while the economy of Belize has been primarily based on agriculture since the country gained independence, it has gradually undergone a transformation towards a more service-oriented economy. Illustrating this is the fact that the service sector contributed 59.5 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2001, while the primary sector contributed just 16.8 percent. Tourism, in particular, has experienced a phenomenal increase in recent years. In this regard, 2002 saw the highest number of overnight visitors (arriving by land and air) in Belize's history. The figure for total overnight arrivals in 1998 was 176,054; four years later, after three major hurricanes, and an overall decline in international travel after the World Trade Center terrorist attacks in the United States, Belize's tourism arrivals were reported to be 754,674 (almost three times the population of the country!).[4] Tourism is now the single largest contributor to the country's economic growth and the largest foreign exchange earner for the country, with one out of every four jobs in the tourism industry (DeVries et al 2003:16).

With the importance of ecotourism growing in the Belizean economy, and the lure of perceived gains from the growth and development of the industry increasing, Belize provides an excellent opportunity to study ecotourism in what Mowforth and Munt (1998: 309) describe as "one of the most positively cited laboratories of successful ecotourism." Moreover, although Belize has received a relatively large amount of

[4] According to the Belize Tourism Board (2002), because of cruise ship cancellations to the Middle East in favour of destinations closer to the U.S. after the 9/11 attacks, Belize experienced a 564.4 percent increase

attention in the ecotourism literature (despite its small size) (Pattullo 1996), there has been little in-depth ethnographic research on the issue, particularly with regards to case studies of specific projects and locations. As Belsky attests (1999: 648), "only a handful of studies critically examine the underlying assumptions about 'nature,' 'community,' and 'development' underlying the community-based approach to rural ecotourism in Belize or ask in whose interests they are deployed." As Duffy (2002) argues, however, attempts to create and manage ecotourism developments in Belize have been simultaneously undermined and strengthened by the presence of diverse interest groups ranging from international financial institutions, logging companies, environmental NGOs from Belize and abroad, rural communities, expatriate tourism operators to dealers in illegal goods such as wildlife and drugs (Duffy 2002: 125). Consequently, "Belize is a perfect example of the complex interaction between a range of interests and why it is problematic to examine individual interests in isolation. In this case the interests of local people, multinational environmental NGOs, aid agencies and the Belizean government are intimately intertwined" (Mowforth and Munt 1998: 310).

Field Site and Methodology

This thesis is primarily based on an analysis of qualitative data that I gathered during a period of field research lasting eight weeks from June – August 2003. The research was conducted in the Sibun River Watershed in central Belize, specifically in the mid-section of the watershed known as the Sibun River Valley (roughly the area from Five blues Lake National Park to Monkey Bay on Figure 1.3 below). The Sibun River is one of Belize's major river systems, which winds its way from high in the Maya Mountains in interior of the country to its coastal mouth just south of Belize City. As the Sibun River

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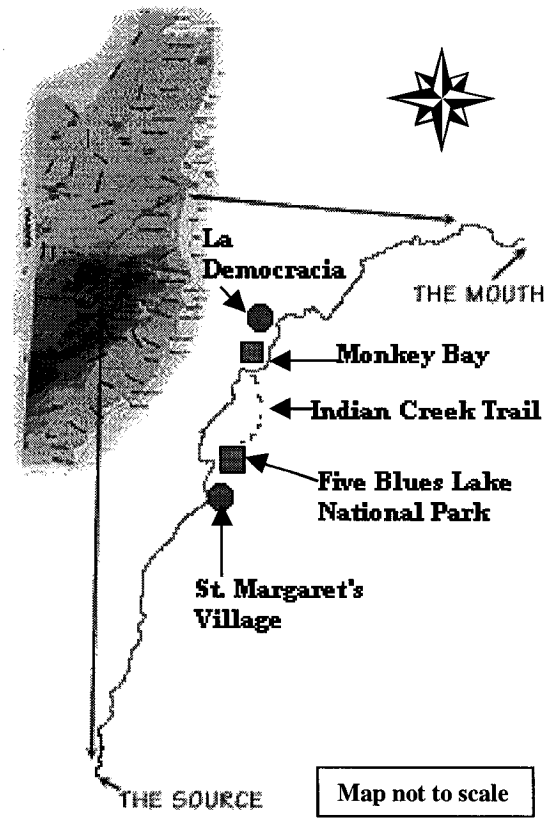
in the number of cruise arrivals.

leaves the rugged Maya Mountains, it travels through the scenic Sibun River Valley. During this stretch of the river (around Five Blues National park) the Sibun flows through a landscape characterized by steep limestone hills covered with thick tropical forest and containing extensive cave systems (karst topography). The river often disappears into caves as it winds its way along its route. Eventually the Sibun River flows onto the country's central plains (around Monkey Bay), where small farms, citrus estates, tourist resorts and communities have been developing along the river.

FIGURE 1.3: MAP OF FIELD SITE



Adapted from: Belize Journeys 2004.

During my fieldwork I was primarily based at Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (Monkey Bay on map 1.2), a 1070-acre private protected area managed by a not-for profit

NGO of the same name. However, while I was based at Monkey Bay, the focus of the research was not on Monkey Bay itself, but on conducting a stakeholder analysis of the Indian Creek Trail Project (ICTP), a community-based ecotourism project recently initiated by Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. The Indian Creek Trail is a three to five day "back country" hiking trail that takes adventurous ecotourists from Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to Five Blues Lake National Park by following the course of the Indian Creek. While hiking along the trail ecotourists must wade through sections of the Indian Creek and Sibun River and trek through tropical broadleaf forest and karst terrain characterized by limestone hills riddled with large caves. The ICTP is promoted as a community-based project since it has involved local community members from two rural villages (La Democracia and St. Margaret's Village) in its development and operation.

Development projects such as the Indian Creek Trail are not neatly bounded entities, but consist of a wide range of stakeholders who interact in a variety of localities and contexts (as discussed in chapter 2). Rather than conducting the stakeholder analysis by meeting with all project stakeholders together in one place (in a participatory fashion), the research was done by interacting with stakeholders individually or in smaller groups (in order to gain insight into their everyday experiences and interactions). Accordingly, the methodology I adopted could be considered a "multi-sited" ethnographic approach (Marcus 1995). As Gill (2000: 21) asserts, "the importance of multisited ethnography lies in the opportunity to follow the changing relationships of diverse people in particular times and places." Conducting the stakeholder analysis of the ICTP, therefore, involved extensive interaction with project stakeholders, including community members, ecotourists and representatives of organizations and agencies. A major component of this

interaction was achieved through participant observation, which included trekking the Indian Creek Trail with groups of ecotourists led by local guides and participating in a village homestay program run by a women's bed and breakfast cooperative in St. Margaret's Village. Notes from these experiences and interactions were recorded daily throughout my period of field research.

In addition to participant observation, I employed methods of semi-structured interviewing and informal group discussions through focus groups (primarily with groups of ecotourists). Key interviewees were determined according to their relation to, and knowledge of, the ICTP and by their association with involved organizations and agencies. Participants were asked for permission to electronically record the discussions (using an MD-recorder) in an effort to accurately document their knowledge and experiences in relation to the ICTP. When it was not feasible to record electronically, notes were written out by hand. The interview recordings and notes were transcribed for later reference. The data collected through participant observation, interviews and discussions provided the most important data source for this project. These methods helped to capture the perspectives of the participants themselves, allowing me to better understand the characteristics of, and relationships between, the project's stakeholders.

While primary research comprised an important source of data, I also relied on secondary-source documents gathered in Belize and Canada. Pertinent documents in Belize were compiled and reviewed, and included content analysis of the ICTP management plan, as well as analysis of unpublished documents relating to the project and relevant website material produced by ICTP stakeholders. Many important documents were reviewed in the library at Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, a collection

of more than 500 documents relating primarily to the natural history of Belize and the Sibun River Watershed.

The fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in several stages. The first phase involved the identification of a problem or project on which to focus the analysis. After the Indian Creek Trail Project was selected as the focus of the stakeholder analysis, the second stage became identifying the ICTP's principle stakeholders. This was achieved by consulting with relevant "experts," including project staff, representatives of key organizations, and participating local community members among others. Other means of identifying stakeholders included using written records such as the project's management plan and oral accounts of the project.[5] The third phase of the fieldwork involved creating profiles of ICTP stakeholders based on four factors: ongoing relations of collaboration and conflict, legitimacy, interests, and power.[6] This step facilitates a greater understanding of a particular project (like the ICTP) by illuminating the resources particular stakeholders bring to the table (in terms of power and legitimacy), the interests stakeholders have in the project, as well as any history of collaboration or conflict between groups.[7] This information directly contributed to the final objective of the stakeholder analysis, which focused on identifying potential ICTP management options that would satisfy the needs and goals of all stakeholders and avoid any future conflicts or problems.

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[5] These methods were adapted from those identified in *Stakeholder Identification* by Chevalier (2003a)
[6] This technique was adapted from Social Analysis (Collaboration/Conflict, Legitimacy, Interests, Power) by Chevalier (2003b)
[7] These concepts will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter dealing with theory.

Limitations of this Study:

The writing of this paper has marked the beginning of an academic journey into the fields of ecotourism, natural resource management, and stakeholder theory and methods. The last two years have been an incredible learning experience, one that I hope continues into the foreseeable future. It must be acknowledged, however, that these are emerging and dynamic fields of study. Stakeholder analysis, in particular, is an approach that is still evolving and being refined, both in terms of its theory and methodology. There is, therefore, little consensus regarding what actually constitutes a stakeholder analysis or guidelines on how to carry out the research and analysis, although progress is being made in this area (see, for example, the Social Analysis System by Chevalier 2003f).

It is also important to note that stakeholder analysis can be used in diverse ways and it should not be assumed that the approach is suitable in all circumstances. As with any research activity, SA is subject to variable agendas, some of which may prefer concealment to transparency. Stakeholder analysis often involves sensitive and undiplomatic information about the characteristics of and relationships between diverse stakeholders. In some circumstances, therefore, putting everyone's cards on the table may not be possible nor advisable, as the information could play into the hands of power stakeholder at the expense of others. The fact that SA can be put to radically different usages, from manipulative stakeholder relationship management in a business context to stakeholder enabling and empowerment in NRM systems, cautions against the use of the approach as a magic bullet aimed at resolving all problems of inequity and unsustainability (Chevalier 2001).[8]

[8] For more on this issue see Chevalier (2001).

It must also be recognized that this was my first time in Belize, and the research for this project was conducted over a relatively short period of time (approximately two months) and with a very limited budget (since this was a self-funded project). In-depth ethnographic fieldwork is an exercise that often takes a considerable amount of time, particularly in order to develop important and knowledgeable contacts and sufficient rapport and trust with research subjects. Since this paper deals with numerous stakeholders that interact in a variety of locations, it proved difficult to work with all groups over significant periods of time. This reality was complicated my limited budget, which required me to spend time in the field volunteering in order to compensate my hosts for room and board. While my volunteer work did allow me to interact with some stakeholders quite regularly (with Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and ecotourists, for example), it made it difficult to consistently interact with others. This was particularly true in the case of community stakeholders in St. Margaret's Village, whom I was only able to interact with sporadically throughout the period of the research. While I certainly did the best with the resources at my disposal and I am confident in my findings and conclusions, this thesis could undoubtedly have been improved if the fieldwork had been conducted over a longer period of time and with a larger budget.

Structure of thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter two includes an in-depth literature review of ecotourism, particularly as it relates to the field of international development. While the literature review covers ecotourism in general, an emphasis is placed on the Belizean literature and focuses on examples from Belize. Following the literature review, the theoretical foundation for this thesis will be laid out and discussed

at length. Chapter three will outline the political economy of ecotourism in Belize by exploring the development of the country from colonialism to the present. Chapter four will move on to a case study, outlining the results of a stakeholder analysis of the Indian Creek Trail Project. And finally, chapter five will provide a conclusion and closing remarks.

Chapter 2: Exploring the Nature of Ecotourism in Development

Reviewing the Literature

A review of the ecotourism literature quickly reveals that much of the work published on the topic can be distinctly divided along ideological lines into two groups, which Lea (1988) outlines as functional and political economy approaches. As explained in the previous section, the recent interest in ecotourism as a development strategy is closely linked to a resurgence of neoliberal ideas about the causes of underdevelopment and the policies needed to overcome those difficulties. As Duffy (2002: 49) states:

> The theoretical arguments about the nature of development and underdevelopment recur in debates about the ability of ecotourism to provide a new development strategy. As such, [studies] of ecotourism can be related to broader analyses of the effects of international economic and political systems on the developing world.

According to Lea (1988: 10), writers applying a functional approach are concerned with classifying tourism in terms of its many functional parts without any political overtones. In other words, it is a mode of analysis "which attempts to put forward a neutral viewpoint in a situation where it is very difficult not to take sides" (Lea 1988: 10-11). The emphasis of the approach is on the economic importance of the industry and upon ways to improve its efficiency and minimize its adverse impacts. Ecotourism is therefore seen as a way that countries can generate substantial employment opportunities while opening themselves up to global markets, attracting foreign capital for infrastructure and technology improvements while reducing the financial burdens of national governments. Ecotourism is also promoted as a means to generate funds through entrance and concession fees that can be used to maintain protected areas and parks. Furthermore, community-based ecotourism is thought to promote environmental and

cultural sensitivity in both travelers and host communities, resulting in the creation of strong advocates for the protection of natural and cultural diversity (O'Neill 2002: 519-520). In this respect, the functional approach tends to be optimistic, seeing most problems as capable of resolution through good management and appropriate policy measures (Lea 1988: 11).

Functionalists portray ecotourism as a "potentially" powerful tool to boost economic development while simultaneously promoting conservation. As Wearing and Neil (1999: 132) state, for example, "ecotourism appears to present us with one of the few activities where the link between economic development and conservation of natural areas is potentially clear and direct." In this sense, ecotourism is promoted as a type of "imagined community" (see Anderson 1983) through which diverse groups – including international financial institutions, NGOs, tourism businesses, national governments, local communities, and individual tourists – can achieve common interests (like nature conservation). For example, it is often stated that ecotourism provides a resolution to conflicts over the reservation of land for protected areas because it enables local communities to derive financial benefits from the environment, thereby increasing a community's "stake" in nature conservation (see Lindberg et al 1996). Moreover, ecotourism is thought to attract a new breed of "ecologically sensitive" traveler keen to visit natural attractions and contribute to conservation efforts (Wearing and Neil 1999; Palacio and McCool 1997; Fennell 1999; Weaver 2002). Depicting this position clearly, Whelen (1991: 4) states:

> Ecotourism done well can be a sustainable and relatively simple alternative. It promises employment and income to local communities and needed foreign exchange to national governments, while allowing the continued existence of the natural resource base.... It can empower local

> communities, giving them a sense of pride in their natural resources and control over their communities' development. It can educate travelers about the importance of ecosystems they visit and actively involve them in conservation efforts.

Many of the writers who have taken this approach are those who have worked within conservation and development organizations in an effort to promote ecotourism. In fact, a significant number of the articles, books, and reports on ecotourism have been commissioned and published by agencies like WWF (Boo 1990; Lindberg and Enriquez 1994; Lindberg et al. 1996), The World Bank (Wells and Brandon 1992; Brandon 1996), the United Nations (Epler Wood 2002), IUCN (Ceballos-Lascurain 1996), The Ecotourism Society (Lindberg and Hawkins 1993) and Conservation International (Ziffer 1989). For these writers (who are often referred to as the "gurus" of ecotourism) it is fundamentally assumed that ecotourism is, at least potentially, a means of "sustainable development." A statement by Ceballos-Lascurain (2003: viii) in the preface to *Global Ecotourism: Policies and Case Studies* illustrates this position very explicitly:

> Of course, since ecotourism is a human invention, as all human inventions it is imperfect. Many critics of ecotourism point out its imperfections and shortcomings, stating that there is no place in the world where ecotourism is happening in a 'pure' form. I agree. But I believe in ecotourism, not 'eco-purism'...and hopefully many persons and human groups around the world will continue trying hard to achieve a satisfactory level of ecotourism, one that will truly contribute to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of our planet and play a part in achieving a higher plane of sustainable development and human happiness.

As Pleumarom (1996: 10) points out, even though proponents of ecotourism admit that it is not a "cure-all," they claim that "under 'well-managed' conditions, it 'can' produce positive results" (Pleumarom 1996: 10). Within the context of Belize, for example, Horwich and Lyon (1998: 343) outline several negative impacts of ecotourism

developments (such environmental damage, inflation, and social disruption), but conclude by emphasizing that:

> [d]espite these drawbacks, effective ecotourism remains as a viable tool that can interest and motivate rural people to protect the wildlands where they work and live. Given attainable economic incentives, true local involvement in the management of lands, and a proper framework, many rural people have shown that they will take a responsibility to protect their lands.

Like much of the research on rural development projects in general (see Ferguson 1990: 10), the focus and discourse of ecotourism remains technical and managerial in an effort to illustrate "what goes 'wrong,' why, and how it can be fixed." In *Ecotourism: A Guide For Planners and Managers*, Ceballos-Lascurain (1993: 13) states that "[e]cotourism, as a logical component of sustainable development, requires...careful planning (both physical and managerial) and strict guidelines and regulations that will guarantee sustainable operation." Furthermore, the guide outlines "state-of-the-art planning and management approaches for getting the most out of ecotourism" (Lindberg and Hawkins 1993: 5), and discusses the importance of defining ecotourism (Western 1993), planning for protected areas (Boo 1993), developing and implementing guidelines for "wildlands" and neighboring communities (Blangy and Epler Wood 1993), managing tourist behaviour (Wallace 1993), economic issues (Lindberg and Huber Jr. 1993), the design of ecotourism facilities (Anderson 1993), encouraging local participation (Brandon 1993) and the linkages between ecotourism and community development (Horwich et al 1993). Similarly, Wearing and Neil (1999) examine definitions of ecotourism, policy and planning, tourist characteristics and management, the role of nature interpretation, community involvement, and marketing strategies. While many case studies are examined and scrutinized, the purpose for the analysis is to enable

ecotourism to perform better, to avoid failures and to maximize successes (see Lindberg and Hawkins 1993; Wearing and Neil 1999 Epler Wood 2002; Luck and Kirstges 2003).

In contrast, the political economy approach, which is based largely on dependency theory,[9] sees ecotourism as a direct threat to developing countries, local cultures and natural environments. This theoretical orientation emphasizes the unequal distribution of benefits from ecotourism rather than its efficiency and positive outcomes. Within the context of tourism, dependency and political economy approaches have been strongly influenced by the work of Stephen Britton, who was among the first to stress the need "to place tourism firmly within the dialogue on development" (1982: 332) and investigate why tourism often perpetuates uneven and unequal relationships between the First and Third Worlds. The main premise of this school of thought is that tourism has evolved in a way "which closely matches historical patterns of colonialism and economic dependency" (Lea 1988: 10). In this regard, developing countries are seen to be at a disadvantage in the world marketplace because of their underdevelopment. Thus, although ecotourism promotes community-development and locally owned enterprises, the reality is that local actors in the developing world often cannot compete with more powerful international players. The lowering of trade barriers and opening up of national economies to foreign investment and international tourism is therefore perceived as ultimately undermining the sustainability of smaller, locally owned businesses and natural environments in developing countries (Britton 1982, 1987, 1989; Cater 1987; Lea

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[9] As Mowforth and Munt explain, dependency theory is best understood as a "riposte to the laisse-faire (free market economics) approach to economic development and international trade" (1998: 45). Scholars utilizing this approach argue that western capitalist countries have grown as a result of the expropriation of surpluses from the Third World, especially because of the reliance of Third World countries on export-oriented industries.

1988; Brohman 1996; Lanfant and Graburn 1992; Pluemarom 1994, 1996; Duffy 2002; O'Neill 2002; McLaren 2003; Wheeler 1994).

From this perspective, the a-political discourse of ecotourism is understood as a means of manipulating peoples' perceptions by promoting the idea that ecotourism is able to (and intended to) empower marginalized communities and protect fragile environments. Pleumarom (1996: 1), for example, argues that ecotourism is becoming "something like a new Green Revolution" as it is increasingly introduced in developing countries as a development package, involving capital, expertise, technology and management systems. From Pleumarom's point of view, ecotourism is little more than "another neutralizing technique, as it directs our attention away from an analysis of economic and political structures which are counter productive to local political organization and development options that put people's and ecological concerns at the forefront" (1996: 10). Similarly, Duffy (2002: 2) claims that "the ideological content of ecotourism has been masked; interest groups seek to depoliticize their position by claiming that it would enable the South to develop economically without...environmental degradation." Duffy (2002:10) argues, in contrast, that the promotion of ecotourism as a development strategy is extremely political since it does not constitute a threat to the dominant economic and political patterns that characterize the post-Cold War world. Instead, ecotourism is part of the central legitimizing argument for the movement towards a 'liberal peace,' in which neoliberal ideas about politics and economics have become globalized. As a result, Duffy (2002: 99) concludes that:

> While [ecotourism] claims to be capable of providing all sorts of benefits to [local] communities, in the end it is part of a wider system that actually frustrates their development and their capacity to engage in genuine participation in local, national and global political and economic

> processes. In this way, community-based ecotourism cannot be separated from broader national and global political factors that impinge on its everyday management.

Given the arguments advanced by political economists within the context of ecotourism, it is perhaps not surprising to find many comparisons of ecotourism to global processes like colonialism and imperialism (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Sutherland 1998; Hall 1994; Wearing and Wearing 1999; Munt 1994). Wearing and Wearing (1999: 45) contend, for example, that tourism "perpetuates global inequality historically based upon 'imperial domination,' with the multinational companies of the advanced capitalist countries retaining the economic power and resources to invest and control developing nations' tourism industries." Likewise, Munt (1994: 53) asserts that a colonial emphasis on discovery and expropriation has been rediscovered through ecotourism, or what he terms "ego-tourism." According to Munt (1994: 55), many new and independent tours have a distinctly neo-colonial aura, whether it be luxury photo safaris or treks and expeditions for the young and adventurous; "an army of global porters trot behind or ahead to ensure that these new ethical tourists are regularly refreshed." In this regard, Munt equates the widely cited S's of tourism – sun, sea and sand – with the S's of subjugation, subservience and servitude (1994:55).

Within the context of Belize, many scholars (such as Munt and Higinio 1993; Cater 1994; Pattullo 1996; Everitt 1987; Sutherland 1998; Duffy 2002) have utilized a political economy approach to illustrate how the influence of foreigners and expatriates in the development of both the Belizean tourism industry and environmental movement (and the conjunction of the two through ecotourism) "begins to indicate the parameters of a neocolonial critique" (Munt and Higinio 1993: 65). Indeed, a widespread concern of

many commentators regarding Belize has been the exclusion of local residents from the process and benefits of ecotourism because of a dominance of foreigners. Cater (1994: 73), for example, observed that of the 350 delegates that attended the first Caribbean conference on ecotourism (held in Belize in 1991), at least one-half were either US-based or expatriates. A year later at the 1992 First World Congress on Tourism and the Environment in Belize City, Martin Mowforth found that more than 40 percent of the 300 delegates were from the USA and Canada, and many of the 29 percent who were Belizean were expatriate Americans (Mowforth and Munt 1998: 309). Moreover, foreign involvement in the Belizean tourism industry is such that 65 per cent of the members of the Belize Tourism Industry Association (an umbrella organization initiated by USAID to represent private business interests) are expatriates (Cater 1994: 73).

A significant result of foreign involvement in the Belizean tourism industry and the influx of foreign currency has been the inflation of the prices of land, property and local produce, often to the extent that locals can no longer afford the cost of living in tourist areas (Patullo 1996; Cater 1994; Sutherland 1998). For example, the amount of foreign interest in buying land has raised prices in some areas to that extent that a two-bedroom home on the island of Ambergris Caye commanded a price of US$135,000 in 1992 (Patullo 1996: 121). As McMinn and Cater (1998: 686) illustrate, in 1992 beach front lots on Ambergris Caye sold for $75,000 - $130,000, while typical annual salaries on the island ranged from $2,600 - $8,700. Moreover, it has been estimated that over 90 per cent of all coastal development in Belize is now foreign-owned (Cater 1994: 75).[10]

[10] According to McMinn and Cater (1998:677), Belize's close proximity to the U.S., relatively stable political history and language (English), combined with the fact that it is possible for foreigners to own property freehold means that the country "is somewhat atypical of most developing nations in terms of the

The fact that such land has been sold freehold indicates a possible permanent alienation of this land from Belizean nationals and is somewhat reminiscent of colonial land distribution patterns, when the majority of the most valuable and land was controlled by white settlers. Commenting on this situation, Everitt (1987: 51) states that it is "clear that economic imperialism is rife in Belize despite independence, and ranges throughout the economy which also sells its produce to the United States." Like citrus fruit or bananas, tourism has emerged as another cash crop in the national economy, one that is increasingly dominated and controlled by foreigners. Thus, because of foreign (mainly Canadian and U.S.) interests in control of the country's most successful tourist facilities in independent Belize, tourism is seen to have emerged as a symptom or contributory factor in the creation and aura of neocolonialism (Everitt 1987).

Sutherland's ethnographic history of Belize, *The Making of Belize: Globalization in the Margins* (1998), also portrays the development of environmentalism and ecotourism in the country as being reflective of neocolonialism. Sutherland (1998: 120) implies, for example, that the environmental movement was "exported" to Belize from abroad and states that Christian missionaries of the past have been replaced by "new missionaries," (environmentalists and their NGOs) who "have obtained 40 percent of the landmass in Belize and reserved it for animals, fish, and Mayan archaeological sites." To back up her argument, Sutherland uses the example of the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (the first experiment in community-based conservation in Belize), pointing out that its creation in 1984 required the relocation of indigenous Maya to a village that was reconstructed outside the park's boundaries, Maya Centre. In this regard, the

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extent of 'residential' or second home based tourism" and "expatriate involvement in relatively small scale tourist accommodation development."

establishment of the sanctuary led directly to a significant reduction in the Maya community's access to resources within the reserve (including spiritual and religious sites), significantly altering livelihood strategies as agriculture and hunting became illegal in their former lands. Sutherland (1998: 119) remarks that, "[t]oday these same Maya sit forlornly on the edge of the park, where they were moved, selling trinkets to tourists."

From the above discussion, there is clearly a large and significant body of literature comprised of two fundamentally different interpretations regarding the promotion of ecotourism as a form of "sustainable" development. Representations of ecotourism from the functional perspective have provided conservation and development practitioners with an effective "counter narrative" to contest top-down, coercive development and conservation policies and projects (Campbell 2002). Studies based in political economy have also highlighted a number of important characteristics associated with the promotion of ecotourism in the developing world. These include: the influence of development assistance from multilateral and bilateral donors such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and regional development banks in promoting ecotourism development (Brohman 1996; Lanfant and Graburn 1992; Pleumarom 1994; Duffy 2002; Mclaren 2003); the interconnections between excessive foreign ownership, vertically integrated transnational tourism corporations, and exclusion of local residents from the benefits of tourism (Britton 1987; Brohman 1996; Cater 1994; Pattullo 1996); the relative costs and benefits of tourism development along with the creation and/or exacerbation of social and spatial inequalities and conflicts between stakeholders (Sutherland 1998; Duffy 2002; Cater and Lowman 1994; Brohman 1996; de Kadt 1992; Smith and Eadington 1992; Tsartas 1992; Mowforth and Munt 1998; McLaren 2003).

What this literature review illustrates more than anything else is a need to advance the discussion of ecotourism beyond ideological questions of whether it should be considered a "good" or a "bad" thing.[11] In this respect, both the functional and political economy approaches can be seen to be lacking. For example, while there has been strategic value in the functional narrative of ecotourism as a "imagined community," particularly in terms of policy formation:

> Success in creating a more just world is measured not by the effectiveness with which a policy idea is sold, or the passing of legislation or regulations which pertain to it, but in the effects on peoples' lives (Li 2002: 266).

Thus, the concern of many scholars is that simplistic (mis)representations of ecotourism as an "imagined community" – the notion that ecotourism allows states, funding agencies, environmentalists, local communities, private tourism businesses and "ecologically noble tourists" to achieve *common* goals – glosses over reality by creating a "global ecotourism imaginary."[12] As Pleumarom (1996: 3) explains:

> A major assumption underlying the eco-tourism concept is that cooperation between the industry, governments, NGOs and local communities will translate into successful planning and implementation of eco-tourism. This view can be rebuked as simplistic and unrealistic as it fails to take into account the greatly divergent interests and motives of the various participants in tourism.

Consequently, crucial questions regarding the structure of the international political economy and the widening gap between the North and South are being sidestepped (Pleumarom 1996: 4), creating a fear that certain stakeholders have appropriated efforts to meet their own agendas, while claiming widespread benefits for communities, local

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[11] As Van den Berghe (1995: 17) states, "tourism is neither as good nor as bad as many people suppose, but much more complex and interesting than simple, categorical judgments can capture."

[12] All communities are to some extent imagined, in that members carry images of other group members and ideas of what binds them together (Anderson 1983: 13). However, whereas most communities are predicated on common personal interests (economic, linguistic, political, or residential) or salient

peoples, and ecosystems. In order to address this concern, the mainstream ecotourism discourse must engage with, and account for, the inequalities, contradictions, and complexities that have been illuminated by studies in political economy.

On the other hand, political economists can be criticized for overly emphasizing the neocolonial and capitalistic nature of ecotourism, lamenting the oppression of "local communities" by the dominant interests of international corporations, financial institutions, environmental NGOs and national governments (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Watts 2000). Indeed, it seems that many scholars using this approach simplistically assume that ecotourism - as an expression of global environmentalism and/or capitalism - oppresses the interests of "local communities." As Watts (2000: 32) states, "a striking feature of so much of the alternatives school is the constant uncritical appeal to the local, to place, and to the cultural (where cultural is synonymous with a self-consciously local sense of community)." In this respect, the approach often forgets that "the 'local' is never purely local but is created in part by extra local influences and practices over time" (Watts 2000: 32). As Nash (1996: 85) asserts, "it cannot be assumed that everywhere [tourism] conforms to the same imperialist model that has been prevalent in anthropological studies of acculturation or development." As Medina (1999) states, future research on ecotourism in Belize must therefore examine "the strategizing that often takes place across multiple global-local connections, as 'local' actors of all classes and 'global' forces with divergent agendas compete to control resources and revenues."

Recent studies based in political ecology have provided useful insights by examining the understandings of community, environment, and conservation that have

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dimensions of identity (ethnicity, religion, or occupation), the global ecological imaginary is based mostly on an assumed convergence of environmental visions of the future (Conklin and Graham 1995: 697).

shaped the design, practice, negotiations, and out-comes of community-based conservation projects (Watts 2000; Stonich 2000; Belsky 1999, 2000). Stonich (2000) illustrates, for example, that an emphasis on "communities" can invoke a false sense of tradition, homogeneity, and consensus within communities. In reality, few communities adhere to this ideal and "a number of studies have shown that internal differentiation within communities often presents formidable obstacles, as well as potential incentives, to effective participation and conservation" (Stonich 2000: 18). In accordance, studies by Mowforth and Munt (1998: 240), Drake (1991: 136) and Kinnaird et al (1994: 6) explain that conflicting interests and power differentials at the local level can serve to complicate the outcomes of ecotourism projects. In her study of community-based ecotourism in Gales Point, Belize, Belsky (1999: 661) asserts, for example, that attention was never devoted to analyzing community, or how community history, institutions, and social processes might affect outcomes on the ground:

> The conservationist imaginings of the Gales Point community did not acknowledge differences within the community, how these differences could affect ecotourism and the use of natural resources, local politics, strategies for pursuing multiple interests within and beyond the local community, or the complexity of layered alliances that extend across numerous levels of politics. Gales Point was perceived homogeneously, and ahistorically as an entity wantonly despoiling nature because of material and cultural deprivations; foreign tourists and consultants with "good" conservation values and surplus income could demonstrate for residents how maintaining the landscape and wildlife for the benefit of ecotourists is in their interests.

Belsky's (1999: 662) research illustrates that community-based ecotourism in Gales Point has had many unanticipated consequences including exacerbating intra and inter community conflict, community-state rivalries, creating a violent backlash against conservation, and instigating a privatized approach to tourism development with

unknown social and ecological consequences. Thus, without critical analysis and understanding of concepts like "community," the process of collaboration and coalition building engaged in by various stakeholders in development and conservation situations can be obscured. In this case, the structure of power relations among stakeholders is extremely relevant because those relations can not only impact the outcome of coalition building, but can also preclude collaboration from taking place (Stonich 2000: 18).

Similarly, an uncritical adherence to the idea of the "local" obscures the identification of social relationships between legitimate stakeholders that can simultaneously exist "inside" while extending "outside" of local communities (Stonich 2000: 18). As Michael Watts (2000: 22) explains, issues pertaining to contemporary resource use and conservation entail the intersection of global and local interests and forces, resulting in globalized local sites that provoke challenges for social theory, practical politics and public policy. Thus, issues of development and conservation are inherently *local* in the way that the actions of individuals, households, communities, and various non-state organizations take place in specific locations (Watts 2000: 21). On the other hand, the use of and control over natural resources is profoundly *global*, involving actors, agents, processes, and organizations that are clearly transnational in scope, serving constituencies that are decidedly not local (Watts 2000: 22). Studies of NGOs, for example, have raised concerns over issues of representation, accountability, and evaluation (Stonich 2000: 19; Hilhorst 2003). In the current international development context that includes restricting the role of the state and enhancing civil society, the prevalent strategy of aid donors has been to work through NGOs. While some NGOs may attempt to be truly representative of the people they claim to serve, other may act as

agents of powerful local and extra-local stakeholders and interest groups, blurring the boundary between the local, national and global (Stonich 2000: 19). In this sense, although the "local" has its own reality specific to a particular place and time, this reality is almost always connected to wider spatial, social and temporal processes and tied to external actors at many levels including the national, international and transnational (Stonich 2000: 17). Thus, the importance of conceptualizing the "local" in terms of flows and linkages within and among diverse spatial scales and global processes is now being recognized in studies of ecotourism (Belsky 1999, 2000; Stonich 1998, 2000).

Tourism, therefore, should not be understood oppressing "local" peoples and forcing them into positions of subservience. In many instances tourism development is often desired by "local communities" as a means to promote "local" interests, and can, in some instances, become a tool of "local" resistance to "outside" interests. As one indigenous leader explains:

> [Tourists] are our greatest audience. Overseas tourists can apply international pressure, and [national] tourists can provide internal political support.... It is very important that we have some influence over this industry, especially in national parks (as quoted in Wearing and Wearing 1999: 49).

In this regard, Mayan groups from the southern Toledo district in Belize have lobbied the government for the establishment of a Mayan eco-park, thereby using the discourse of ecotourism as an attempt to secure funding from national and international conservation organizations and as a means to promote their claims for indigenous land rights.[13]

With this in mind, Sutherland's (1998) critique of the Cockscomb reserve in Belize, which accords agency only to the environmentalists who created the reserve, can

be seen as oversimplifying both the process of creating the reserve and its outcomes. Attention to the ways the relocated families and their co-villagers in Maya Center adapted to the reserve's creation, and how the Maya themselves see their role as "trinket sellers" would have facilitated a more sophisticated understanding of the reserve's impacts (Medina 1999). In this respect, survey research by Lindberg and Enriquez (1994) and Lindberg et al (1996: 559) demonstrates that ecotourism has provided the Maya Centre community with economic benefits and consequently, local support for nature conservation has increased in the area. The increase in incomes has been partly a consequence of sales by a Maya women's group which produces handicrafts for sale, providing opportunities for women to earn cash incomes and creating new possibilities for the organization of gender relations (Boo 1990; Lindberg and Enriquez 1994; Horwich and Lyon 1999). Maya Center has also become a model for other rural communities who have begun to seek ways to augment their own incomes by working to establish reserves that might allow them to attract their "own" tourists (Horwich et al 1993; Horwich and Lyon 1999).

A "Middle Ground" for Ecotourism Research: Applying Stakeholder Analysis

According to O'Neill (2002: 525), there is a clear need in the context of studies on ecotourism for a theoretical perspective capable of forging a "middle ground that intellectually, politically, institutionally bridges the span between local struggles and global reform, between local alternatives and global constraints" (O'Neill 2002: 525). In accordance, Britton (1991: 451) argues that tourism has been examined "within descriptive and weakly theorized ways.... This problem is of fundamental importance as it

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[13] The Mayan people have a history of exclusion and repression in Belize and presently occupy a government reservation in the southern Toledo district, dating from the colonial period. For more

has meant an absence of an adequate theoretical foundation for our understanding of the dynamics of the industry and the social activities it involves." Future research in this field, therefore, must be designed "to understand, in a theoretically informed way, *how* the process of interaction between tourism and sets of place characteristics operate, and develop over time, in different contexts" (Cater 2002: 266).[14] As Stonich (2000: 23-24) states, there is a need to conceptually and methodologically integrate the diverse consequences of tourism "into a single analytical framework and to disaggregate these impacts by relevant social actors within the existing structure and relations of power." Such an approach, according to Stonich (2000: 24), would focus on:

1) identifying the major interest groups or stakeholders;
2) examining the motives and behaviors that affect the use of resources by diverse interest groups;
3) exposing and confronting actual and potential conflicts among stakeholders; and
4) identifying potential winners and losers as a result of current or planned development and conservation initiatives.

In an effort to work toward a more balanced theoretical understanding of ecotourism in development, this thesis draws on an emerging critical literature focussed on exploring the nature of the international development process. Rather than simply contributing to technical discussions of why particular projects succeed or (more often) fail, this literature takes "development" itself as its object of analysis and explores the ideas, knowledge practices, and organizational dynamics of international and national projects and policies (Escobar 1995; Peet and Watts 1996; Stonich 1999, 2000; Ferguson

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information see Duffy (2002).

[14] Also see Stronza (2001) for a discussion of theory in future ecotourism research.

1990; Li 1996, 2001; 2002; Belsky 1999, 2000; Zerner 2000; Mosse 2001; Walley 2004). In particular, James Ferguson's classic account, *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990) offers an important model for conceptualizing development projects. In addition to addressing how ideas of development have been premised on particular power-laden assumptions about First and Third World countries, Ferguson examines the social consequences of the institutional development apparatus. He argues that the technocentric orientation of development ideas and institutions disguise the political effects of development projects, including such unintended consequences as the expansion of state power and control in local settings. While drawing upon these insights, this work focuses on a different kind of project and utilizes a somewhat different analytical and methodological orientation (as discussed below). Consequently, it explores a range of issues left unexamined in Ferguson's account.

As a new type of international project, community-based ecotourism has been consciously created to counter critiques leveled against an older generation of projects. Specifically, community-based ecotourism is intended to address charges that national parks, which generally have been based upon exclusionary preservationist models, disregard the economic welfare of poor citizens and are authoritarian in their orientation. Consequently, ecotourism projects seek to encourage "sustainable development" by promoting the participation of affected communities in conservation initiatives. Ferguson's insights into the social implications of technocentrism continue to hold relevance for the ways in which participation and communities are conceptualized within this new generation of projects. However, the focus of this thesis shifts from the

development "apparatus" examined by Ferguson to the social dynamics and interrelationships of a particular ecotourism project in central Belize.

In this regard, ecotourism will not be perceived as an imagined community of actors working together to achieve *common* goals, but rather as a "middle ground" through which stakeholders with *diverse* power, interests, and legitimacy engage in processes of negotiation, collaboration, and resistance. The concept of the "middle ground" was developed by White (1991) to describe European-indigenous relations in North America's Great Lakes region in the 17th to 19th centuries and refers to a process of confrontation, negotiation, and creative innovation, through which indigenous peoples and European settlers developed systems of communication and exchange. White argues that this middle ground was a pragmatic, mutually constructed accommodation that did not fit a simple rubric of domination, subordination, or acculturation (Conklin and Graham 1995: 695). In this regard, a "middle ground" is seen as a political space, "an area of intercultural communication, exchange, and joint political action" (Conklin and Graham 1995: 696). Illustrating the relevance of this concept to the study at hand, Mosse (2001: 159-160) explains that development projects, regardless of their focus, are not bounded entities formed around consensual goals and ideas (even though they may be represented as such), but 'political' systems in which different perspectives contend for influence and authority. Thus, from this perspective projects can be understood as "a negotiated, but frequently unstable, operating consensus among the different players and perspectives" (Mosse 2001: 160), or, in other words, a middle ground.

According to Conklin and Graham (1995), middle grounds are often forged on the basis of assumptions, misperceptions and strategic misrepresentations. In the Amazon,

for example, a middle ground between Western environmentalists and Amazonian indigenous peoples was formed in an effort to "save" the rainforest and was based on the notion that indigenous views of nature were consistent with Western conservationist principles (the image of "the ecologically noble savage"). Both groups came to frame their discourses in terms of this assumption in order to establish common ideological ground and mutual interests in opposing the "destruction" of the rain forest by keeping land under indigenous control (Conklin and Graham 1995: 696). However, the simplistic images of the "ecologically noble savage" glossed over the fact that indigenous groups and environmentalists had extremely different agendas – namely conservation (for environmentalists) versus land rights and self-determination (for indigenous groups). Despite their differences, environmentalists and indigenous groups had strategic reasons for entering a middle ground. For example, their alliance with indigenous groups gave Western environmentalists important ideological and political legitimization for their involvement in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation, without which their protests against deforestation could have been construed as "self-interested first-world imperialist meddling in third-world affairs" (Conklin and Graham 1995: 698). On the other hand, indigenous peoples primarily engaged international environmental groups because they had comparatively little power with which to promote their interests at the national level. By appealing to Western conservationist ideals and imaginings of indigenous peoples as "ecologically noble savages", indigenous groups were able to secure powerful international allies (Conklin & Graham 1995: 701). By unpacking the power, interests and legitimacy of the relevant actors it is possible to move beyond the somewhat

simplistic notion that indigenous groups and western environmentalists have worked together to "save" the rainforest.

The above case clearly points to a need to examine the characteristics and relationships between development stakeholders. In this respect, Belsky (1999: 642) states that "attention to multiple interests and identities within rural communities and their relationships to broader actors and institutions is critical in meeting the formidable challenges facing community-based conservation efforts in Belize and elsewhere." A detailed and realistic understanding of stakeholder profiles - including power, interest and legitimacy is therefore critical if blueprints for change are to be grounded in reality (Chevalier 2001).

In order to address this situation, this thesis will apply *stakeholder theory and methods* – often referred to as stakeholder analysis (SA). Ramirez (1999: 102) describes the essence of SA succinctly: "stakeholder analysis refers to a range of tools for the identification and description of stakeholders on the basis of their attributes, interrelationships, and interests related to a given issue or resource." For the purpose of this evaluation a "stakeholder" will be considered any individual, group, or organization that can affect, or are affected by the achievement of a course of action, actual or proposed (Ramirez 1999). They may include government agencies, NGOs, donor organizations, and corporations as well as various categories of the local population (Stonich 2000: 149). SA has been identified as "particularly relevant for application to natural resource management and environmental issues" (Grimble & Chan 1995:116).

According to Chevalier (2001), SA constitutes a middle-range "social actor" alternative to the positivist methodologies (or functional approaches) often prevailing in

studies of NRM practices. In this respect, SA represents a challenge to the functional approach to ecotourism outlined above, an approach that does not adequately consider the distribution of costs and benefits among different stakeholders: the winners and losers. Moreover, the functional approach often ignores the fact that different stakeholders perceive environmental problems differently, and therefore seek different solutions and use different criteria to assess the desirability or worth of an intervention. In contrast, SA involves recognition of the fact that when addressing issues of poverty and environmental degradation, power relations, conflicting interests and social relations involving all "interested parties" must be addressed.

At the same time, however, stakeholder theory is a response to conventional research methods in the social sciences such as political economy, and more recently, political ecology, class-centered perspectives that are widely used in research on the social aspects of NRM issues (with recently-gained concessions to gender and ethnicity). Given their emphasis on macro-level studies of deep-seated power structures that social scientists alone can apprehend and rethink, there is a widespread dissatisfaction with the use of these methods alone (Chevalier 2001). Given SA's focus on people's intentions and self identified interests or stakes, the method emphasizes processes of social construction; biophysical properties and economic interests are assigned not to objective systems but rather to agents and socially-positioned perspectives on social and natural reality (Chevalier 2001). In effect, SA brings something new to social science research. It is an exercise in what might be called "ethnopolitics" (Chevalier 2001), an analysis that seeks an actor-driven assessment of the power structure affecting NRM systems. In this sense, SA is an attempt to highlight local actor perspectives on conflicting interests and

alternative strategies aimed at promoting equity and sustainability in natural resource management. Within the context of ecotourism, this theoretical and methodological approach holds great potential for aiding the development of future policies and projects based on a solid understanding of the stakeholders involved in, and impacted by, the industry.

In order to demonstrate the usefulness of stakeholder analysis within the field of ecotourism, this thesis applies SA to a particular ecotourism project in central Belize – the Indian Creek Trail Project. The exact approach taken is based on the "theory of stakeholder identification" proposed by Mitchell et al (1997) and later elaborated by Chevalier (2003b), and focuses on an examination of three stakeholder attributes: power, legitimacy and interest, as well as any relations of collaboration or conflict between stakeholders. Power will be defined as *the potential to achieve outcomes* and will be assessed in terms of economic assets, ability to coerce, political authority, prestige, social ties, access to information/communication, and knowledge and skills that stakeholders can access or control (Chevalier 2003c). The analysis will help to illuminate the ability of particular stakeholders to influence the outcome of a project. Examining the interests of stakeholders will help to evaluate the gains and losses that may result from an existing situation or a course of action. The kinds of interests that will be examined include the gains and losses that may affect sources of stakeholders' power such as economic wealth, political authority, the ability to use force, information, the means to communicate, legitimacy, and social ties (Chevalier 2003d). And finally, legitimacy will be analyzed using the three 'R' factors — rights, responsibilities, and resolve. Legitimacy is when other parties recognize the rights and responsibilities of other stakeholders and the

resolve (or determination) that they demonstrate when exercising them. Assessing the legitimacy of stakeholders will also help to determine how the three 'R' factors affect the ability of stakeholders to handle a problem or participate in a proposed course of action (Chevalier 2003e).

On the basis of these attributes, this approach to SA results in a typology of stakeholders "to whom management should pay attention" (Mitchell et al 1997). All three of the above factors must be considered simultaneously, as power gains authority through legitimacy and urgency through interest. Moreover, they can also intersect or be combined in multiple ways, such that stakeholder salience will be positively related to the cumulative number of attributes effectively possessed (Mitchell et al 1997: 865-873). Stakeholders with two or more attributes, for example, are likely to be noticed and participate, for example, while those with less than two will tend to be ignored in many circumstances. This is significant within the context of ecotourism, since it is often marginalized rural stakeholders that are perceived and "targeted" as the beneficiaries of projects. As Ramirez (1999: 107) explains, however, stakeholders lacking power and legitimacy in the eyes of other stakeholders may be unable to participate or even take advantage of projects designed specifically to benefit them. This suggests that marginalized actors that are easily identified as stakeholders will need support from others in order to effectively participate in many projects (Ramirez 1999: 111). However, while SA is committed to the goals of empowerment and equity (ensuring that the interests of disadvantaged groups are articulated and addressed), increasing the participation of "beneficiaries" or "target" groups alone will not guarantee success. For projects to be successful, the interests of the whole range of stakeholders who can

influence or be influenced by the project need to be taken into account (Grimble and Chan 1995: 115).

According to Grimble and Chan (1995: 114), the use of SA allows policy makers and project planners to "base their decisions on a real understanding of how different stakeholders might benefit or lose from the policy or project, to highlight potential problems that could be expected to threaten the success of (or add support to) a project, and to focus on ways of minimizing these potential problems and conflicts of interest." Furthermore, Stonich (2000: 149) states that, "sound stakeholder analysis can identify the subgroups within the population affected by the proposed development and/or conservation project, help determine overlapping relations of power among these groups, and make clear the extent to which existing community institutions are representative of all or particular interest groups." The approach is therefore an attempt to:

> treat power and politics with appropriate respect by identifying the various groups involved in the processes: assessing their influence; tracing the linkages among them; and [exploring] ways to negotiate conflicts and mobilize support. The probability of effective interventions would rise if contending forces were candidly addressed during the process of policy design and implementation through this kind of applied...analysis (Stonich 2000: 184).

SA is thus an invitation to examine the relations among groups and individuals and their respective levels of power, interests and legitimacy in a resource or situation. The approach helps identify key differences among groups and areas of potential common ground and feasible interventions aimed at a better management of natural resources and related conflicts. For projects to work, the power, interests and legitimacy of the whole range of stakeholders who can influence or be influenced by the project or policy need to be taken into account, and compromises sought. What is at stake here is a commitment to

stakeholder participation in the realm of ecotourism and community-based natural resource management, towards a critical social research agenda with a pragmatic focus on problems to solve (Chevalier 2001).

Chapter 3 - Historical Context of Ecotourism in Belize

The Colonial Period

The area of Belize was originally claimed by the Spanish to be part of the territory comprising Guatemala. Like the Peten forest in northern Guatemala, however, Spain did not formally settle Belize as they concentrated their military and economic activities in centres such as Merida (in Yucatan) and Antigua (in southern Guatemala). According to Platt (1998: 126), the Spanish ignored the lowland area of Belize primarily because the land was considered marginal at best for agriculture and because military dominance over the Maya in the lowland forests remained tenuous until the end of the seventeenth century.

Although the origins of British settlement in Belize have remained somewhat obscure, it seems that British buccaneers and pirates used the many cayes off the Belizean coast as convenient bases from which to attack Spanish ships laden with gold, silver and other valuable goods such as logwood.[15] Great Britain was keen to topple Spanish monopoly and domination in the Americas, condoning and even commissioning piracy of Spanish ships in the Caribbean (Setzekorn 1981: 130). In this endeavor, the Belizean coastline provided a perfect location from which British buccaneers and pirates could conduct their operations as it contained numerous tree-covered estuaries protected by coral reefs, small islands and sandbars, as well as plenty of fresh water and sources of food (Caiger 1951: 48). By 1670, however, Spain and Great Britain agreed to abandon and outlaw piracy; a move, when combined with the growing economic importance of the timber trade (particularly logwood), which encouraged the transition of many British

[15] The dye obtained from logwood - in heavy demand in the European woolen industry - became the raison'etre of British settlement in the Bay of Honduras for at least a century (Bolland 1986).

settlers from piracy to wood cutting. In this regard, British loggers were encouraged in their efforts to settle in Belize by "great stories of the...virgin forests...beyond the Rio Hondo, in the Belize river district, where swift streams and creeks lay at the edge of the clearings ready to carry the timber down to the sea" (Caiger 1951: 58). Thus, throughout the seventeenth century, small British logging settlements began to be established along the Belize River. Because logwood grows in low-lying swamps and the logging technology of the times relied on the presence of rivers to transport logs, the first settlements were located along watersheds and tended to remain small (Platt 1998: 126).

Although the development of British logging settlements in Central America encountered some opposition from the Spanish government, which resulted in limited raids and skirmishes between British loggers and Spanish forces (Bolland 1986: 13), various treaties between the two countries kept conflict to a minimum. The 1763 Treaty of Paris, for example, granted the British the right to cut and export logwood from Belize, but still asserted Spanish sovereignty over the territory. Under the Treaty of Versailles in 1783 the terms were similar: the British were allowed to cut only logwood in a limited area between the Hondo and Belize Rivers. As the logwood trade declined due to the developments of synthetic dyes, British efforts shifted to mahogany exploitation, requiring the British settlers to petition for a new agreement. With the signing of the Convention of London in 1786, Britain relinquished its claim to the Mosquito Coast (the northeastern coast of Honduras and Nicaragua) and in return, the Baymen, as the British settlers in Belize were called, were allowed to cut logwood and mahogany as far south as the Sibun River, but were still prohibited from building forts, establishing any form of government, or developing agriculture (Bolland 1986: 13). The area covered by Belizean

woodcutters in search of mahogany and logwood continued to expand, until by 1821 the territory occupied by English settlers had grown to over three times greater than that allowed by various treaties (Setzekorn 1981: 152). In defiance of Spain, British loggers had established camps far south of the Sibun River. In fact, "in June 1825, Mr. Marshall Bennett publicly decreed the boundaries of the settlement to be the Hondo River on the North, the Sarstoon on the South, and Garbutt's Falls on the west: her present international borders" (Setzekorn 1981: 152). As Spanish influence in the Caribbean waned during the eighteenth century, permanent logging operations owned by British-born timber barons and manned primarily by slaves imported from Africa and the Caribbean[16] became common in Belize. Mahogany resources eventually became the justification for formal annexation of the area in 1862, at which point a de facto British colony had been in existence for some time. Although the Spanish disputed the British claim over the territory, the area eventually became British Honduras, a legal colony of Great Britain.[17]

During the initial, informal stage of the colony, mahogany extraction remained somewhat arbitrary. Cutting rights for specific areas of land called "works" were often allocated on the basis of wealth and political influence (Platt 1998: 127). In this regard, a small group of logging barons, who were also merchants involved in the importation of

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[16] As Bolland (1986: 16) explains, as the timber trade shifted from logwood to mahogany cutting, "British settlers needed more money, land, and slaves for larger scale operations." By the mid-eighteenth century, African slaves made up the majority of the population in Belize and by the early 1900s, constituted about three-fourths of the population.

[17] According to Bolland (1986: 13-14), a Spanish attack on the settlement was beaten off at St. George's Caye in 1798, and this was Spain's last attempt to control the territory or dislodge the British. Although British settlers ceased to recognize Spanish sovereignty over Belize, Britain's own claims over the territory remained ambiguous until British Honduras was formally declared a colony in 1862 and achieved Crown colony status in 1871. Because of these ambiguities Guatemala has claimed territorial rights over Belize on the grounds that it inherited the sovereign rights of Spain. This dispute remains an issue and a source of conflict between Belize and Guatemala to this day.

consumer goods, used their power to develop an economic monopoly in the territory (Bolland 1986: 19-21).[18] Consequently, most of the reasonably accessible tracts of land containing mahogany stands were bought or claimed by such individuals - including nearly all of northern Belize and the richest mahogany stands in southern Belize - before the establishment of a formal governing forest department in 1922[19] (Platt 1998: 127). According to Sutherland (1998: 20), "this power was held by the settler elites until the latter part of the nineteenth century, when it was usurped by the big trading companies based in England." By 1875, the Belize Estate and Produce Company (BEPC) (earlier known as the British Honduras Company) had emerged as the predominant landowner in the colony, owning about half of the colony's privately held land, thus becoming "the chief single force in Belize's political economy for over a century" (Bolland 1986: 20).

Since the Belize Estate and Produce Company was primarily concerned with the exploitation of the colony's lumber resources, it discouraged agricultural development of the land (Setzekorn 1981: 204). In this regard, BEPC along with wealthy families who had become involved in the import-export business (importing foodstuffs and exporting timber) actively opposed the development of infrastructure into the interior of the country that would have facilitated agriculture. As a result, not a single road was built to link Belize City with any part of the country until the mid-nineteenth century because the timber industry relied on rivers for transportation (Setzekorn 1981: 200). Furthermore, the privileging of timber extraction over agricultural development particularly

[18] Bolland (1986: 19) asserts that by 1787, twelve of the Old Baymen held four-fifths of the available land in Belize under the 1786 treaty, or about 2,000 square miles.

[19] By the time a formal governing forest department was created in 1922, nearly all of northern Belize and the richest mahogany stands in southern Belize were in private hands. As a result, most government-owned forests found in Belize today are located in the south, and much of that is restricted to the less accessible lowland areas and highland regions were mahogany is less common (Platt 127).

discriminated against the indigenous Maya, as the British viewed the slash and burn agriculture of the Maya as a threat to their timber reserves. As Bolland (1986: 75) attests:

> Maya villages and *milpas* were destroyed on [Belize Estate's] lands in the Yalbac Hills in 1867 because the Maya were perceived as a nuisance to mahogany cutters and a potential labour force for agricultural plantations rather than as the pioneers in small farming that they in fact were. The governor issued a regulation in 1867: "No Indian will be at liberty to reside upon or occupy, or cultivate any land without previous payment or engagement to pay rent whether to the Crown or the owner of the land," and the following year Governor Longden agreed that the Maya should not be allowed to own land at all. In the 1930s, the Belize Estates Company drove the Maya from their villages of San Jose and Yalbac and treated its workers in the mahogany camps in ways reminiscent of slavery.

Timber harvests continued to increase throughout the colonial period, spurred on by the introduction of new technologies, particularly heavy machinery, which permitted timber extraction from even more remote areas. High demand and dropping international prices resulted in the cutting of all easily accessible trees, even young trees, and a serious depletion of timber resources (Bolland 1986: 20). By the 1920s, signs of over-exploitation of both primary and secondary timbers were becoming evident, as the management of the industry remained a largely haphazard affair (NARMAP 16: 1996).

Concern over the country's declining timber resources eventually led to the creation of the Forest Department in 1922, shortly before a permanent forest estate was formally established to protect remaining public lands. The creation of the Forest Department facilitated a more structured approach to forest management by working from firm forest policy guidelines and represented a determined attempt to create a modern industry. As Platt (1998: 127) asserts, much of this policy was based on experience that had been gained by British colonial administrations in other tropical

colonies, particularly India, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this regard, timber exploitation had been a high priority in many British colonies, leading British colonial governments to develop strong forestry departments and encourage scientific investigation of forest and ecosystem dynamics. These experiences taught the Belizean colonial government the value of conservation practices such as leaving stands of forest intact to maintain rainfall levels and prevent erosion (Platt 1998: 127). Accordingly, various pieces of legislation were specifically aimed at promoting sustainability and preventing overexploitation. The 1954 Forest Policy of British Honduras, for example, included recommendations that land be set aside to conserve forest both for "sustained yield management" and for protection of watersheds and climate (Platt 1998: 127). Moreover, other laws were explicitly conservation oriented, such as The Forest Ordinance of 1927, which established a legal basis for the creation of protected areas, legitimizing public Forest Reserves and calling for conservation to coincide with development of the forestry industry (Platt 1998: 127-128).[20]

Despite policies aimed at protecting timber resources, the main species of interest to loggers (mahogany and pine) continued to decline as forestry products continued to account for 82 percent of Belize's total exports by 1935 (Fernandez 1989: 33). By the 1950s, three hundred years of continuous selective logging had taken its toll on the forests of Belize, as particular species had been virtually exhausted (Platt 1998: 128). As a result of this decline, the colonial government made a decision in the late 1950s that would greatly affect the future management of natural resources in Belize: it cut back dramatically on its investment in forestry and reduced the overall importance of the

[20] The establishment of the Forest Reserves, as part of the drive towards modernization of the forest industry in the 1920s, marks the beginning of the protected area network in Belize (NARMAP 1995: 28).

Forestry Department in the colonial budget, despite recommendations for continued management (Platt 1998:128). This action had significant repercussions for the future of Belize, as programs aimed at replenishing depleted stocks of timber species were ended, scientific studies continued only on a sporadic basis, and efforts to oversee the use of public lands decreased dramatically. The gutted Forestry Department became too small to perform many of the management and conservation functions for which it was originally created. As a result, many activities and restrictions mandated by law, such as enforcement of cutting limits, could not be pursued because of a lack of resources - a problem that continues to this day (Platt 1998: 128).

Independence, Tourism and Environmentalism

In the 1960s, a series of significant changes took place in Belize. In 1964, a new constitution gave Belize the right to internal self-government, marking the way to independence and stimulating a movement towards economic diversification in order to reduce economic dependence on a single market (timber). This shift in government policy led to increasing pressure on the forests and natural resources of Belize as the government placed a strong emphasis on the development of land for agriculture. The most significant trend was the establishment of large-scale, permanent fields of cash crops such as sugarcane in the north and citrus and banana plantations in the south of the country.[21] This economic transition was encouraged by the implementation of a land reform program in 1966 that imposed a penalty on all undeveloped parcels of land in excess of 100 acres. Through this program the government acquired more than a million

[21] By the seventies, the shift from forestry products to agricultural and fish products was well underway: sugar had become the country's principal export commodity by 1975, accounting for more than 75 percent of the total domestic exports (Fernandez 1989: 35). Between 1978 and 1983, about 70-90 percent of total export earnings were comprised of sugar/molasses, citrus and fish (Bolland 1986: 72).

acres of land in lieu of unpaid taxes, much of it from The Belize Estate and Produce Company.[22] As Belize made its transition from a forestry-based economy to agriculture in the 1960s, the Belize Estates and Produce Company began selling its properties along the Sibun River as most timber of value had been extracted and property taxes had become a burden (Kather 1992: 120). Belize Estates broke its properties into parcels of land that were sold to investors, primarily from the United States. In 1974, Joshua Brown, a cattle rancher from Arkansas, purchased a 1070-acre property along the Sibun River known as Monkey Bay from Belize Estates. Brown planned to convert Monkey Bay into a cattle ranch and worked towards this by clearing pastures and establishing a network of service roads and water retention ponds on the property.

Importantly, the 1960s and 70s also witnessed the beginnings of both organized local concern for nature conservation and of the interest and influence of the international environmental NGO community in Belize.[23] This was clearly represented by the creation of the first Belizean conservation NGO, the Belize Audubon Society (BAS) - first as a member of the Florida Chapter and then as an independent organization in 1973. Throughout the 1960s and 70s the Belize Audubon Society played an active role in promoting environmental conservation in Belize, particularly through the use of the Crown Lands Ordinance to establish Crown Reserves at Rio Grande in 1968, Guanacaste

[22] Until the 1960s, the Belize Estates Company owned about one million of the 2.3 million acres that were privately owned, and almost all of the estate was unused or exploited only for its timber resources. As Bolland (1986: 77) outlines, in 1927, about six percent of landowners held 97 percent of the freehold land, and in 1971 only three percent of landowners held over 94 percent of the freehold land. At the other end of the scale, those farmers with 100 acres or less constituted, in 1927, 85 percent of the landowners with only one percent of the freehold land, and in 1971, 91 percent of landowners with only two percent of the freehold land. Such massive inequalities were exacerbated even further by the fact that in 1971, all but one of the landowners with estates of 10,000 acres or more, were foreigners. In fact, foreigners owned 93.4 percent of all estates over 100 acres and over 90 percent of all the freehold land in Belize, with the Belize Estate and Produce Company alone in possession of about 42 percent (Bolland 1986: 77).

in 1973 and on seven small cayes carrying breeding bird colonies in 1977 (NARMAP 1995: 28).

Despite Belize's steady progression towards independence throughout the 1960s and 70s, the country remained relatively unknown at the international level. Throughout the 1970s, however, the Belizean cayes gradually became known on the word of mouth backpackers' trail through Central America as a hippie paradise because of its laid back atmosphere, tropical climate and a lack of modern communications and infrastructure (Sutherland 1998: 93-96). According to Sutherland, the first travelers to Belize were offbeat individuals with a sense of adventure and a desire to experience a back-to-nature, back-to-basics, simple life. In this regard, both American hippies and European antiestablishment youth swarmed the cayes to smoke pot and hang out with "rastas" (Sutherland 1998: 96). In a sense, the Belizean cayes became a refuge for those seeking to escape the "ills" of western society (including pollution, traffic, and angst) (Sutherland 1998: 95) just as they had provided convenient shelter to pirates hundreds of years earlier.

As tourists continued to trickle into Belize throughout the 1970s, local Belizean and foreign businessmen started developing plans for turning the islands into a more accessible tourist destination, particularly for sport fishermen and reef divers. In their effort to establish nature tourism (sport fishing, wind-surfing, sailing, snorkeling, diving) developers bought up land on the islands, built hotels and restaurants, and set up an area that was far more palatable to them than the enormous government sponsored tourist complexes of Cancun and Cozumel to the north. To these businessmen, Belize had

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[23] As Sutherland (1998: 101) states, the Belize Audubon Society became the first Belizean member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the world's largest

several advantages over Cancun: It was small and still had a local flavour, it was home to the largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere, it had respect for British laws, and English was widely spoken.

Spurred on by land speculation and the development of hotels that the businessmen had initiated, tourism continued to grow throughout the 1980s, as a sophisticated tourism industry emerged along the Belizean coast.[24] According to Sutherland (1998: 96-98), however, tourism (particularly on the largest island, Ambergris Caye) grew beyond its capacity to provide adequate water, housing, and sanitation. On Ambergris Caye, for example, many residents were no longer able to afford to live in the city of San Pedro and were forced to move to San Pablo, a new town in the swampy backland of the island. Wells became contaminated with sewage due to uncontrolled placement of septic tanks and the best land on the coastline was filled with tourist resorts from the southern to northern tip of the island. Land prices skyrocketed with land speculation as the last pieces of coastline were divided into lots selling for U.S.$55,000 each, mostly to foreigners.[25] Consequently, tourism on the cayes became remarkably expensive with restaurants often having a 900 percent markup, making a eggs-and-bacon breakfast coast as much as U.S.$7.50 (Sutherland 1998: 97). Perhaps of more significance, however, has been the negative impact on the marine environment, particularly that of the barrier reef. According to Patullo (1996: 117), the reef is showing signs of black band disease, a form of algae that attacks corals that have been knocked and broken (Pattullo 1996: 117).

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environmental organization, based in Switzerland.

[24] According to McMinn and Cater (1998: 679), the first hotel was built on Ambergris Caye 1965. By 1992, there were 33 hotels on the island with 606 hotel rooms, of which 385 rooms were in the town of San Pedro.

In the years immediately following Belize's transformation from a British Colony to an independent nation in 1981, tourism was condemned as "whorish" by the governing Peoples United Party (PUP) (Munt and Higinio 1993: 61).[26] The industry was seen as elite controlled and was thought to reinforce patterns of international inequality, exploitation, and dependency, and contribute to environmental degradation.[27] Nevertheless, by 1984 the tourism industry had become the second largest producer of foreign currency in the Belizean economy (NARMAP 1995: 28).

Independence in Belize also coincided with an economic recession, which was fueled, in part, by the worldwide oil crisis. Under pressure from the World Bank and IMF to resolve deficits in their balance of payments, plans for the economic recovery were established that were strongly in favour of the diversification of Belize's economy that recommended the development of the tourism sector as a potential sector for economic growth. (Volker and Soree 2002: 105). According to Belsky (1999: 659), imposed structural adjustment mandates compelled the Belizean government to promote new growth sectors like tourism rather than supporting small-scale farming, food crops, and rural livelihood security. With a financial injection from the World Bank and the USAID, Belize's infrastructure (such as roads and the national airport) was modernized and prepared for tourism.

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[25] In comparison, Joshua Brown purchased 1070 acres (Monkey Bay) in 1975 for U.S.$21,400.

[26] The PUP is a nationalist party. According to Mowforth and Munt (1998: 303), however, the PUP has increasingly become pro U.S. and free market oriented, thereby making it somewhat indistinguishable from its right wing rival, the United Democratic Party.

[27] As noted by Pattullo (1996: 10), during the 1970s Caribbean intellectuals began to question the co-option of the region by foreign interests, viewing tourism as recolonization by other means. Moreover, the Black Power movement gained momentum in the Caribbean during this period as states struggled from colonial to independent status. In this sense, the way tourism could be seen as being underpinned by racism became an important issue throughout the Caribbean (see also Munt and Higinio 1993; Munt 1994; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Belsky 1999, 2000).

Accordingly, the government's negative stance toward the tourism industry shifted dramatically in the late 1980s with the coming to power of the United Democratic Party which supported "new tourism," defined as respecting and restoring nature, preserving and valuing local culture, and building sustainable development (Pattullo 1996; Munt and Higinio 1993). In their first term in office, the United Democratic Party (UDP), a right of centre and pro-U.S. free market economics party, was the first Belizean administration to focus on tourism as a primary development strategy. It approved an *Integrated Tourism Policy and Strategy Statement* in its last year in office (GOB 1989). This document acknowledged the significance of tourism to the government, which had made the industry its second highest economic priority.[28] In the 1989 general election the victorious PUP party also endorsed tourism and clearly spelled out the advantages of ecotourism in the party's manifesto (Belizean's First 1989 - 1994) in what it also termed *Tourism with Dignity.*[29] According to Woods et al (1994: 8-9), the shift reflected an export-led development policy that sought to exploit the country's comparative advantage of having large tracts of undeveloped land and other impressive nature-based attractions.[30]

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[28] Export agriculture remained the country's first priority.

[29] "Belize has in abundance what few countries in the world still have left - nature. Ours, for the most part, is still intact. And nature is rapidly becoming tourism's Holy Grail. Belize has so far escaped the most brutal blow of man's destructive hand.... But, we must ask, for how long? The answer is forever if we safegaurd them. The protection of our national environment and development of eco-tourism are compatible goals which will be given high priority. The new PUP Government will place the portfolios of Environment and Tourism in one Ministry" (GOB 1989).

[30] According to Belsky (1999: 655), supporting the development of "community based ecotourism" also provided Belizean government leaders with a means to demonstrate commitment to community-based conservation and forge connections for accessing international grant money. Speaking at the Rio Earth Conference, for example, the Belizean Minister of Tourism and the Environment, demonstrated his support for CBNRM by claiming that Belize had "resisted the seductions of mass tourism" and had adopted "ecotourism and not only ecotourism but *community-based tourism*" (as quoted in Munt & Higinio 1993: 68).

Thus, in the late 1980s, tourism in Belize was reinvented as "community-based ecotourism." New marketing strategies were developed to appeal to the international tourist interested in more "authentic," "individualized," and "natural" tropical experiences (Belsky 1999: 647).[31] Reflecting on these changes within the Belizean tourism industry, Munt and Higinio (1993: 61) state:

> Succinctly, there has been a marked shift from traditional mass packaged holidays, typically described as "sun, sea, sand and sex." More flexibly packaged - individually oriented - tourisms are now of increasing significance, catering to a more "authentic" experience and characteristically, environmentally and culturally sensitive.

In this regard, tourists to Belize were directed inland for more "authentic" nature and culture based experiences involving hiking in tropical forests, viewing wildlife, visiting archaeological ruins, and staying in "traditional" Creole, Garifuna and Mayan villages (Belsky 1999: 648). "Community-based ecotourism" was marketed to adventuresome tourists, such as student groups, backpackers, and researchers; people thought to be willing to live in rustic conditions "closer" to natural and cultural attractions and, thus, able to contribute to the local economy rather than foreign and city tour operators. In essence, community-based ecotourism sought to give rural residents access to the lucrative tourism industry, thereby tying local livelihoods to a rationale for conserving wildlife and habitats as tourist attractions (Horwich et al. 1993).

Accordingly, Belizean capitalists supported the development of "new tourism" as part of economic restructuring and growth in the private sector (Belsky 1999: 647). Perhaps recognizing country's shift towards the international promotion of ecotourism, Joshua Brown, for example, abandoned his plan to convert Monkey Bay into a cattle

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[31] As Pattullo (1996: 10) states, however, the most difficult task of many Caribbean governments has not been "selling" tourism to the tourists, but "selling" the tourists to their own citizens.

ranch after coming to the conclusion that the property had more potential to be developed as a wildlife sanctuary and ecotourist attraction.[32] According to Brown, this change in philosophy was the result of his growing appreciation for the beauty of the area. As Brown states:

> After I had been in Belize for a while exploring around the bush, I was down at the far end of the property leaning against a particular cohune tree. I said to myself: "You know, this place is going to be the same wild place for a thousand years." Within one year following, my neighbor had pushed a road along our common survey line to that same cohune tree and began clearing the adjacent property in the river valley for citrus and cacao production. When that happened, I promised the wild creatures at Monkey Bay that they would have their home for a very, very long time (as quoted in Miller 2002: 2).

In 1988, Brown met Matthew Miller, a Peace Corps Volunteer working for the Belize Audubon Society. Brown presented his idea of protecting Monkey Bay and requested Miller's assistance in converting the property into a wildlife sanctuary. When Miller completed his volunteer service with BAS (helping establish Guanacaste and Blue Hole National Parks), he accepted the challenge and in partnership with Brown, initiated a plan to put Monkey Bay on the map of protected areas in Belize. They began by building a nature trail, a field research station and a small camping ground. Moreover, to help secure government approval, Brown and Miller sought the support of other conservation organizations in Belize and requested their endorsement of establishing Monkey Bay as a wildlife sanctuary. Four years later, on Earth Day 1990, the Belize Minister of Tourism and the Environment (the Honourable Glen Godfrey) publicly recognized and declared Monkey Bay "a protected area dedicated to the people and wildlife of Belize."

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[32] Brown had abandoned the idea of using Monkey Bay as a ranch by 1985 because of management difficulties, low profitability and a severe flood that destroyed half his cattle herd (Kather 1992: 108).

In order to finance the management and development of the sanctuary, environmental education and ecotourism services were targeted as the primary mechanisms to generate income and popular support for the long-term stewardship of the sanctuary. Monkey Bay began offering experiential learning programs to visiting student groups and ecotourists and facilitating study abroad programs with the aim of becoming a base location from which student groups and independent travelers could venture to destinations across Belize.

According to several scholars (see Boo 1990; Sutherland 1998; Belsky 1999, 2000; Chammas 1999; Horwich and Lyon 1998; Munt and Higinio 1993; Duffy 2002), the Government's decision to adopt ecotourism as a primary development strategy was also greatly influenced by both national and international conservation organizations. In this regard, the protection of Belize's environment was promoted as a means to link Belize with one of the "fastest growing segment of the tourism industry," ecotourism. Organizations such as WWF (see Boo 1990), BAS, and World Conservation International advocated that the creation of a strong system of protected areas would help to develop Belize by attracting international ecotourists and foreign direct investment to the country, and that by focusing on "ecotourism", such development would be sustainable. This argument was based on a perceived mutuality of interest between tourism and nature conservation and reinforced the move towards the further establishment of protected areas (NARMAP 1995: 28). As wildlife biologists Robert Horwich and Jonathon Lyon (1998: 344) state:

> In the 1980s, conservationists convinced the Belizean politicians of the potential of ecotourism for attracting foreign capital into the country. They argued that these funds could be obtained with only small expenditures by the government and limited infrastructure development,

> yet the industry would have minimal environmental impact. Thus, ecotourism provided economic and political justification for the protection of certain national areas, including the relatively high-profile Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary.

Clearly, the NGO community has been instrumental in developing ecotourism in the interior of Belize, both in terms of advocacy and actual protected area management and regulation, particularly since budget constraints on the part of the government have forced it to rely heavily on NGOs for support in the area of natural resource management (Chammas 1999). In this regard, Sutherland (1998: 100) claims that environmental organizations "have lobbied the government, written the environmental laws, and dedicated themselves to turning large tracts of land into preserves and parks with environmental protection."[33] In policy terms, for example, WWF advised the government regarding the issue of using tourism and park entrance fees to finance conservation efforts (See Boo 1990, Lindberg and Enriquez 1994; Lindberg et al 1996), resulting in the creation of the Protected Areas Conservation Trust[34] (PACT) and the implementation of park entrance fees. Moreover, in response to human and financial limitations and constraints, numerous development and conservation activities have been delegated to various private NGOs (such as Belize Audubon Society) and CBOs (such as

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[33] According to Sutherland (1998: 125), the "conservation community" is a powerful and influential lobby group, highly effective in creating and implementing government policies. In this sense, NGOs can work individually or cooperatively through an umbrella organization called the Belize Association of Conservation NGOs (BACONGO), which serves as a lobby, for among other things, obtaining funds from the Protected Areas Conservation Trust.

[34] The Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) is a fund dedicated to the promotion, conservation, and sustainable development of Belize's protected areas. PACT funds are derived from a U.S.$3.75 conservation fee paid by visitors upon their departure from Belize. Moreover, PACT receives 20% of revenues derived from cruise ship passenger fees, concession fees and recreation related license fees in relation to protected areas, as well as grants from international donor agencies, corporations, and citizens. PACT funds are allocated to NGOs, CBOs, private sector organizations and relevant government ministries.

Friends of Five Blues) through co-management agreements.[35] In the Belizean context, "co-management" refers to legally binding agreements between NGOs or CBOs and a government agency to share protected area management roles and responsibilities. However, given that the necessary financial resources and institutional support from the Belizean Government have not accompanied the devolution of roles and responsibilities, the Belizean context has been interpreted by some scholars as a divestment of responsibility rather than a true sharing of roles and responsibilities (see Ravndal 2002:11). According to DeVries et al (2003: 196), this situation conflates the process of *democratic decentralization* with that of *privatization*. The distinction between decentralization and privatization is particularly ambiguous in Belize because of the existence of numerous private protected areas such as the Rio Bravo Conservation Area,[36] Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary,[37] and the Community Baboon Sanctuary.[38] While decentralization of protected area management has allowed for a level of on-the-ground management unlikely under direct governmental control, means are lacking to

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[35] These include the eight protected areas managed by the BAS – Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, Victoria Peak Natural Monument, Blue Hole National Park, Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve, Guanacaste National Park, Blue Hole Natural Monument, Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, and the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. Six sites are managed by CBOs under co-management arrangements with the Forest Department including Caye Caulker Forest Reserve, Five Blues Lake National Park, Laughing Bird Caye National Park, Mayflower Bocawina National Park, Noj Kaax Meen Eligio Panti National Park, and Rio Blanco National Park (DeVries et al 2003).

[36] The Rio Bravo conservation Area is owned and managed by the Programme for Belize, which began as an external initiative (as the Belize Programme within the Massachusetts Audubon Society) and evolved into a Belizean organization (NARMAP 1995: 29). The 229,000 acre protected area is one of the largest pieces of land in Belize and contains more than 60 Maya archaeological sites including La Milpa, one of the most important and largest sites in Belize. According to Sutherland (1998: 20-21), the creation of the Rio Bravo reserve was the result of a land scandal involving the sale of land (approximately 13 percent of the entire country) from Belize Estates and Produce Company to Coca Cola Foods, and the resulting international opposition (led by Massachusetts Audubon) to the establishment of a huge citrus plantation. For more information see Sutherland (1998).

[37] The staff of Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary has been given the responsibility of managing Monkey Bay National Park, a 2250 acre protected area located directly across the Sibun River from the privately owned wildlife sanctuary.

[38] For a discussion of the Community Baboon Sanctuary see Horwich et al. (1993).

ensure that managing organizations are held accountable to the government, local populations, and other stakeholders (DeVries et al 2003).

The transformation of Belize from an unknown and underdeveloped backwater colony into "Mother Nature's best kept secret" occurred very quickly. By its tenth anniversary as a nation Belize had placed over one-third of the country under some form of protected status. According to DeVries et al (2003: 18), Belize now has 71 protected areas located in both marine and terrestrial environments,[39] representing over 40 percent of the country (Sutherland 1998). Correspondingly, throughout the 1980s private U.S. business investments and economic assistance began flowing into the country. As Sutherland (1998: 4) illustrates, USAID and other international financial institutions provided loans for crucial infrastructure development such as the construction of paved highways, a new telecommunications system, an upgraded sewer system in Belize City, and new port facilities. What's more, tourists to Belize from North America increased from 30,000 in 1984 to 90,000 in 1990. By the mid-1990s tourism and travel comprised 48 percent of Belize's total export receipts and by 1997, ranked first among all sources of foreign exchange earnings in the country (Stonich 2000: 8-9).

Conclusion

This brief overview of Belizean history has highlighted several key points. First, competing conservationist and exploitation interests have persisted throughout the history of Belize, and can be traced at least as far back as the creation of the forest reserves in the early 1900s. In the early colonial period, the most dominant forest stakeholders were

[39] These protected areas have been declared under a number of different legal instruments including the National Parks System Act, the Forest Act, the Fisheries Act, and the Ancient Monuments and Antiquities Act. Additionally, there are a few private reserves that are officially recognized by the Government of

loggers, with an interest in commercial exploitation of the country's timber resources. A period of uncontrolled logging was followed by forest reservation and controls in an effort to conserve resources and ensure sustainable timber supplies to the colonial power. Moreover, throughout the colonial stage of the country's development, no policy of agricultural expansion or large-scale settlement of the countryside was promoted by administrators until the mid-twentieth century (Platt 1998: 128). Consequently, although certain tree species suffered from overexploitation, Belizean forests have remained fairly intact.[40] Despite extensive selective logging, the timber industry has not had a significant impact on the total forest area of Belize as the industry focused on selective extraction of certain species (Chomitz et al. 1995: 17).

Although the land area under forest cover throughout Belize remained fairly extensive, the forests have been "high-graded - that is, stripped of all marketable individuals of preferred species, leaving behind the less-valuable species - to the point that valuable species, such as mahogany and cedar, are fairly rare" (Platt 1998: 125). The "natural" habitats and "pristine" forests of contemporary Belize should, therefore, be seen against a background of continuous human modification that was perhaps most intense 1200 years ago (during the Classic Maya era), but has been sustained in various forms to the present day. Although Belize still possesses a significant amount of forested area, "the area of truly pristine natural habitat in Belize is very small indeed and is probably limited to the highest peaks and most remote karst formations" (NARMAP 1996: 17).

Belize although no legal instrument exists to fully incorporate them within the national protected areas system.

[40] In this regard, Belize has not experienced the same scale of deforestation that can be seen throughout Mexico and Guatemala. This can, however, be at least partially attributed to a much lower population density than other countries in the region (Platt 1998: 129).

Belize's current economic and environmental situation dates back to the mid-20th century when there was a shift from the production of forestry products such as logwood, and mahogany towards large-scale plantation-type agriculture with citrus and banana cultivation in the south of the country and sugarcane in northern Belize. A new shift is currently taking place as the country has emerged as an international "ecotourism mecca" (Cater 1994). Due to its growing popularity as an ecotourist destination, and because ecotourists desire to see "pristine" and intact ecosystems, Belize has found itself with an economic incentive to protect and conserve its natural areas. Belize now boasts over 40 percent of its land under some form of protected legal status and tourism has become the nation's largest source of foreign exchange.

This evolution of Belize's economy did not happen spontaneously, but was keenly directed and promoted by a number of stakeholders. Since the 1980s, environmental NGOs from Belize and abroad, International Financial Institutions, tourism entrepreneurs, and the government itself have all become involved in the project of reshaping the way both Belizeans and foreigners have "imagined" the nation, its history, development and "natural" resources (Pat 2001: 16). In this sense, Belize's extensive forests that had been seen as "degraded," "undeveloped" and "connoting backwardness" were suddenly redefined as "pristine" and accorded value as a "remarkable asset" in a postindustrial and postmodern world increasingly acknowledging the importance of "sustainable development" (Pat 2001: 16). The emergence of conservation and ecotourism initiatives in the Sibun Watershed provide an effective illustration of this process, and will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: A Stakeholder Analysis of the Indian Creek Trail Project

Introduction

Chapter three outlined the emergence of ecotourism in Belize and illustrated how the growth of the industry has been facilitated and promoted by diverse stakeholders. This chapter focuses on a closer examination of a particular ecotourism project in the Sibun River Watershed of Belize, the Indian Creek Trail Project (ICTP). Specifically, this chapter will examine the process of implementing the ICTP. As chapter two explained, ecotourism projects should not be conceptualized as (imagined) communities of actors working together to achieve *common* goals, but rather as "political systems" or "middle grounds" through which stakeholders with *diverse* power, interests, and legitimacy engage in processes of negotiation, collaboration, and resistance. Accordingly, this chapter will consist of a stakeholder analysis of the ICTP, which outlines the various individuals and groups involved in (and excluded by) its creation, their respective characteristics (power, interests, legitimacy), and the social relationships between the project's stakeholders.

In order to facilitate this analysis, the chapter will begin with a brief description of the ICTP and an outline of the project's objectives. Following this will be a stakeholder analysis of the ICTP that assesses the relative levels of power, interest, and legitimacy of, as well as relations of collaboration and conflict between, project stakeholders. This form of analysis is particularly useful since it lends itself to an eight-fold stakeholder class typology reflecting the variable degrees of influence of, and types of relationships between, project stakeholders (Chevalier 2001). In this regard, "dominant" stakeholders are those who possess high levels of all three attributes of power, interest and legitimacy

(PIL). Three other classes come next in rank: the "forceful" who possess power and interest (PI) though no legitimacy; the "influential" who possess power and are perceived as having legitimate claims (PL); and the "dormant" who are potentially influential (P) but are without interest or legitimacy. The least influential stakeholders are the "concerned" who have legitimacy (L) but lack power and interest, the "vulnerable" whose claims are deemed legitimate and who have interest but lack power (IL), and finally, "marginalized" stakeholders who have interest (I) but lack the power and legitimacy to advance their claims. After presenting the analysis, the concluding section of the chapter will synthesize the information in a stakeholder matrix based on the above typology, placing stakeholders in descending order starting with the dominant stakeholders at the top of the matrix down to the marginal stakeholders that will be placed at the bottom.

The Indian Creek Trail Project

On March 26th 2003, a group of thirty American Boy Scouts completed a three-day jungle trek along the Indian Creek Trail, which runs from Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to Five Blues Lake National Park, a 4200-acre protected located to the south of Monkey Bay.[41] The event marked the official opening of the Indian Creek Trail, and the successful implementation of the Indian Creek Trail Project, a community-based ecotourism project initiated by Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (a local conservation NGO in central Belize). In essence, the Indian Creek Trail Project has involved the establishment and consolidation a "backcountry" hiking trail in the Sibun River Watershed that follows the course of the Indian Creek (a tributary of the Sibun River)

[41] Like most Belizean forests, the area has been logged and does not have significant timber resources (NHML 2001: 3).

from Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to Five Blues Lake National Park. Facilitated by old logging and hunting trails in the area, the Indian Creek Trail is a three to five day jungle trek that allows ecotourists to travel through a landscape characterized by tropical broadleaf forest and steep limestone hills that contain extensive cave systems, some of which hold ancient Mayan artifacts.[42]

Beginning at Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, groups of ecotourists are led through the forest by local Belizean guides from the nearby village of La Democracia. La Democracia is a small, predominantly Creole village of approximately 200 residents. It is the closest village to Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, located approximately two miles east of Monkey Bay along the Western Highway. After three days of trekking through forests, rivers and caves, ecotourists arrive at Five Blues Lake National Park and the adjacent community of St. Margaret's Village, where they have the opportunity to support a women's bed and breakfast cooperative by staying for a night (or more) in the homes of participating families. St. Margaret's Village is an economically poor community comprised primarily of Mestizo immigrants. The Village is situated south of Monkey Bay, directly adjacent to Five Blues Lake National Park. St. Margaret's Village has grown rapidly since the 1980s – from 60 people in 1980 to 472 people by 1991. Locals estimate the current population to be around 1000 residents. The rapid population increase has been largely due to an influx of immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala who have settled in the area after fleeing to Belize to escape political persecution and/or military conflict in their home countries. In 1992, St. Margaret's Village became the first community in Belize to enter into an agreement with the Government to co-manage a

[42] NARMAP (1995: 81) reports that the Indian Creek caves "are quite exceptional. It should be noted that apart from being natural features of extraordinary delicacy and so vulnerable to damage through visitation,

protected area by forming a community-based organization (Friends of Five Blues Lake) consisting of a volunteer park board.

The ICTP management plan (Gibbs 2002) outlines the objectives of the project, and describes it as a "community development" initiative with three primary goals.[43] The first purpose of the ICTP is to fill a void in Belize's ecotourism industry by creating a unique backcountry attraction for ecotourists. As Gibbs (2002: 1) clearly asserts:

> Currently, throughout Belize there are few opportunities to enjoy multi-day hiking excursions in a remote backcountry environment. Most of the jungle experiences that are available to tourists in Belize are comprised of excursions to caves systems, Mayan ruins, river-tubing trips, and day hikes on well-traveled nature trails. Most - if - not - all, of these experiences are in areas easily accessible by vehicles, are facilitated by well-established local tour companies and will be no more than one day in length. Because of the duration and the 'supported' nature of these tours, they appeal directly to the "soft adventure" tourist (one who is willing to take some minor personal risks in experiencing a natural setting, but at the end of the day prefers the comfort level offered by a resort or hotel).

In contrast to the "packaged" nature of many of the ecotourism activities presently offered throughout much of Belize, the ICTP has been designed to attract "the independent traveler interested in a more authentic and personalized jungle experience" (Gibbs 2002: 1). In this regard, the Indian Creek Trail has been altered very little from its "natural" state, with very little infrastructure development in order to emphasize the "wild and untamed nature of the landscape" (Gibbs 2002: 7). As Gibbs (2002: 7-8) explains:

> It is the raw experience of walking through rivers and unexplored caves that makes this trail so impressive. Because of the lack of significant human interference on sections of the trail, the user will sometimes feel as though they are treading in a pristine environment. The hiker must...wade through the Creek to pass though Darknight Cave and Daylight Cave.

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these caves have major archaeological significance and harbour a highly specialized biota."

[43] The ICTP management plan (Gibbs 2002) was written by the manager of Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary at the time of this research.

> Furthermore, a portion of the Trail is actually the limestone riverbed of [the creek] that flows in places at waist height.

Consequently, "the concept of the Indian Creek Trail is most congruent with the substantial ecotourism trend that Belize's tourism industry is aggressively promoting internationally" (Gibbs 2002: 3).

The second objective of the ICTP – indeed, the "ultimate goal" according to the management plan (Gibbs 2002) – is to promote development in local communities adjacent to Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (La Democracia) and Five Blues Lake National Park (St. Margaret's Village). This is to be achieved by empowering villagers to "assume management and support roles in the daily operations of an ecotourism venture" (Gibbs 2002: 4). In this respect, the project's mission statement (Gibbs 2002: 5) affirms that "[t]he Indian Creek Trail Project is dedicated to the creation of a self sustainable ecotourist attraction managed and operated by the citizens of La Democracia, St. Margaret's Village and other adjacent communities." According to Gibbs (2002: 2), "in La Democracia and St. Margaret's there are community members who possess all the skills and expertise necessary to engage in both the management of the trail and to initiate small business ventures directly related to the trail (guiding, porters, accommodations, interpreters, rangers, etc.)." Thus, while "it may seem at first glance that [the project] is primarily concerned with a creek and a tract of land...upon closer scrutiny one discovers that it is in fact all about people" (Gibbs 2002: 4).

The final objective of the ICTP is to promote environmental conservation by contributing to the consolidation of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Project (MBCP) in Belize. The MBCP was launched in 1994 by a group of international

conservation organizations[44] and seeks to conserve biodiversity by linking corridors of protected areas from southern Mexico to Panama.[45] Biological corridors are linear strips of protected vegetation that provide a continuous pathway between habitats. The "corridor" approach to nature conservation accords with a new emphasis within conservation biology on the importance of maintaining connectivity between biological populations and has become a strategy to cope with increasing habitat fragmentation caused by activities such as industrial agriculture, urbanization, extensive logging, mining, oil drilling and infrastructure developments like highways and dams. The aim of the MBCP is to create space for the passage of animals and seeds through an interconnected system of habitats rather than through the maintenance of isolated "islands" of protected areas (Miller et al 2001). By creating a co-managed ecotourist attraction around the Indian Creek and increasing tourist visitation to the participating communities, it is hoped that community participation in conservation efforts will be increased as participating communities begin to see the financial benefits of ecotourism practices (Gibbs 2002: 3). Moreover, it is hoped that pressure will be placed on the government to place the land and resources around the Indian Creek under protected status.

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[44] The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC) with financial support from the USAID.

[45] For more information see Miller et al (2001) and DeVries et al (2003). For a more critical discussion, see Hodgson and Schroeder (2002) or Zerner (2000).

Figure 4.1: Hiking in Broadleaf Forest

Source: www.monkeybaybelize.org

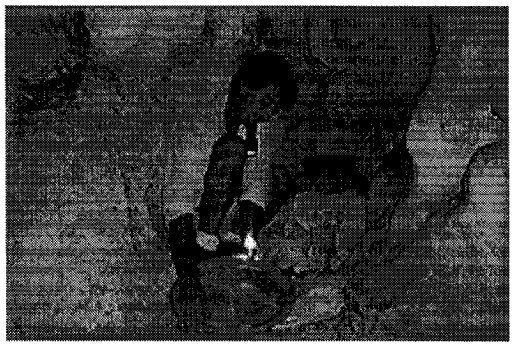
FIGURE 4.2: HIKING IN THE INDIAN CREEK

Source: www.monkeybaybelize.org

FIGURE 4.3: HIKERS EXPLORING A CAVE

Source: www.monkeybaybelize.org

FIGURE 4.4: MAYAN POTTERY



Source: www.monkeybaybelize.org

A Stakeholder Analysis of The Indian Creek Trail Project

As Ferguson (1990: 225) argues, the implementation of development projects should not be understood as "a craftsman approaching his raw materials, but more like that of a bread crumb thrown into an ants' nest." In other words, attention must be paid not only to how and why development projects are planned, but to the ways they are acted on, grabbed, pulled and twisted by numerous forces other than just the project's planners (Ferguson 1990: 225). Rather than simply understanding the ICTP as a "community-based" ecotourism project that has been developed and supported by a group of stakeholders working together (i.e. an imagined community) with common goals, this analysis suggests it should be seen as a middle ground; the outcome of a complex process of negotiation and collaboration between Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (the project planner) and other stakeholders. Indeed, the implementation of the ICTP has been clearly influenced by a diverse range of stakeholders, and can therefore be seen as a process of negotiation and enrolment both "reflecting *and* effecting power relations in development" (Hilhorst 2003: 223).

The project's stakeholders include ecotourists, conservation organizations, the state (represented by the Forest Department) as well as a range of local community actors. The groups have diverse interests, ranging from increasing the cultural capital of ecotourists, increasing state control over natural resources through decentralization, the expansion of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, to basic economic subsistence and livelihood struggles. In addition to having diverse interests, ICTP stakeholders also display great disparities in terms of both their respective levels of power and legitimacy. Of note is the fact that those stakeholders possessing two or more attributes of power, legitimacy and interest have been actively involved in the ICTP, while stakeholders with less than two have not.

The Ecotourist

A major basis for the promotion of ecotourism in general, and the ICTP specifically, as a form of sustainable development, has been the emergence of a new type of tourist in the international travel market: tourists in search of different activities, and experiences than traditional "sun, sand and sea" holiday packages have been providing. According to Wearing and Neil (1999: 119), these are ecotourists, travelers interested in visiting wilderness, national parks, and tropical forests, and in viewing birds, mammals, trees and wildflowers. These ecotourists want to experience new lifestyles and meet people with similar interests to themselves, and they want to see their traveling dollars contributing to conservation and benefiting the local economy (Wearing and Neil 1999: 119).

While individual ecotourists may not have significant power within the context of the tourism industry, or even a specific project like the ICTP, as a group this stakeholder

holds considerable power. Indeed, it is the wealth of these travelers (combined with the environmental sensitivity) that has generated many ecotourism projects in the first place. While no in-depth studies have attempted to determine the exact size of the ecotourism market, Epler Wood (2002: 20) states that an extremely rough estimate of the world's international ecotourism arrivals would put the industry at seven percent of the tourism market. This can be equated to approximately 45 million arrivals internationally in 1998, with 70 million expected by 2010.[46] In their review of ecotourist characteristics, Wearing and Neil (1999: 120) conclude that ecotourists can be generally characterized as having higher than average incomes and largely holding tertiary qualifications. The majority of ecotourists to Belize are from relatively affluent Western regions such as North America and Europe, where many citizens have significant levels of available leisure time allied with relatively high levels of disposable income to spend on leisure services (Wearing and Neil 1999: 121). Representing billions of dollars (internationally) in annual sales (Epler Wood 2002: 7), it is this powerful stakeholder group that the ICTP has been designed specifically to attract.

In addition to their financial resources and high levels of education, ecotourists are perceived as having rights, responsibilities and resolve. In this regard, ecotourists have been given the right to travel through sensitive natural environments since they are seen to have accepted the responsibility for, and often demonstrate considerable resolve, of being environmentally aware. Wearing and Neil (1999: 7), for example, state that ecotourists are, as a general rule, more concerned with environmental impacts and personal growth than mass tourists and as such, ecotourism promotes a greater

[46] These numbers do not include the substantial number of domestic visitors to natural areas (Epler Wood 2002: 20).

understanding and respect of cultures, heritage and the natural environment." Moreover, "unlike other tourist forms, [ecotourists] pursue [their] goals with high levels of physical and mental rigour" (Wearing and Neil 1999: 131). As Duffy (2000: 2) states:

> Ecotourists have been conceptualised as a new type of tourist who is environmentally conscious as well as socially and culturally aware, unlike their mass tourism counterparts. Ecotourists are often defined as travellers who are willing to engage in self-denial in order to preserve the environment and reduce the social and economic impacts of their holiday making activities. In theory, they will reduce their consumption of natural resources, such as water and fuelwood, and they are concerned to ensure that the local populace, and not multinational corporations, receive maximum financial benefits from tourism.

Demonstrating this understanding of "ecotourists" outlined by Duffy (2000), one ecotourist who had hiked the Indian Creek Trail stated:

> [our guides] made us things like tea from vines and knew about the tropical broadleaf forest vegetation and animals. It felt more genuine I guess to have local people with us. I guess comforting is the word. And it was good to know that we were supporting them, not some cruise ship tourism company.

Another remarked:

> I really don't want to return in the future with the entire country carved up in trails. This would take away from the uniqueness of the experience. Also, if the trails are catered to "tourists" and not "travelers" the environment and wildlife will likely be harmed and it wouldn't give the same feeling of seclusion.

Thus, ecotourists are often accepted as legitimate stakeholders in sensitive natural environments and remote rural areas since they are perceived as being environmentally and socially responsible.[47]

While it is commonly stated throughout ecotourism discourse that ecotourists are interested in seeing an experiencing unique natural environments, only a few studies have

attempted to examine what ecotourists actually get out of their experiences, or in others words, what their interest in ecotourism actually is. According to Williams (1990: 84), "[Ecotourists are] expecting discovery and enlightenment from their ecotourism experience. Personal growth in emotional, spiritual, as well as intellectual terms appear to be expected outcomes from ecotourism travel for the majority of these travellers." This statement is consistent with the goals and motivations of ecotourists that participated in the ICTP. When I discussed this topic with ecotourists at Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary who had hiked the Indian Creek Trail, they produced a list motivating factors reflecting personal development goals – such as "learning about the environment," "helping a local community," "seeing the jungle and exotic animals," "learning about myself" and "becoming more independent." As one woman elaborated:

> I came to Belize mainly to experience a new culture and develop personally. I'm very interested in community service and am looking forward to completing a service project in Belize, and specifically in St. Margaret's Village. I've never lived in a foreign country, hiked extensively, and lived off the land as much as I'm expecting to this month in Belize.

Another ecotourist stated that:

> The main reason I came to Belize was to have an adventure. I have traveled in and outside the U.S., but rarely in such a place as Belize that is often compared to countries like Mexico or Costa Rica and other places I am intrigued by, where it is so socially, environmentally, and economically different from the U.S. It was also a hot place to go, although I didn't quite realize it'd be this hot and humid!

According to several recent studies (Munt 1994; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Duffy 2000, 2002; Urry 1990), ecotourism is more than a simple leisure activity. It is a style of travel that reflects and promotes a particular orientation to not only travel, but significant

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[47] Palacio and McCool (1997: 236) contend, however, that a lack of descriptive data on ecotourists remains a significant weakness in the ecotourism literature because without such research there is an underlying

lifestyles, behaviours and philosophies (Wearing and Neil 1999: 121). As Mowforth and Munt (1998) explain, certain forms of tourism have recently become an important means of accumulating cultural capital, a way of building a reputation that can later be converted into economic capital. As Mowforth and Munt (1998: 132) explain, cultural capital is not something that can be bought, but instead relies on the ability of individuals to join the game of being able to 'know' and 'appreciate' what to eat, drink, wear, watch and in this case, what type of holiday to take. In other words, it requires the skill of reading the cultural significance of certain types of holidays, whether sea kayaking in Belize or backpacking in South-East Asia. Ecotourism has become a tool of class differentiation, whereby upper classes distinguish themselves from the working classes below, who largely participate in mass packaged tourism (Mowforth and Munt 1998: 134-135).

In this sense, ecotourism, not mass tourism, has become a symbol of sophistication (Wheeler 1994: 652) and has emerged as an important informal qualification for many professions and occupations, with "the number and range of stamps in a passport acting, so to speak, as a professional certificate; a record of achievement and experience" (Mowforth and Munt 1998: 139). As Crouch and McCabe (2003: 83) explain:

> identity is formed through consumption of leisure goods, services and signs in the postmodern age, opposing the traditional notion that identity is formed through occupation and employment. Ecotourism practices by individuals in society then could be assumed to bestow a certain prestige upon individuals who are able to partake.

This has led some researchers (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Duffy 2000, 2002) to describe ecotourists as "curriculum vitae builders" since their travels are seen as a way of

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assumption that people are found in certain natural settings are "ecotourists."

accumulating experiences and stories which constitute positional goods in their home societies. During her research in Belize, Duffy (2000) found that ecotourists chose to participate in ecotourism because it was good for curriculum vitae or would assist them in gaining a place at university or employment when they returned home. As the website (Trekforce Expeditions 2004a) for Trekforce Expeditions (an NGO that frequently organizes treks for ecotourists along the Indian Creek Trail) explains to potential ecotourists:

> There is no doubt that employers are interested in people who are motivated and worth investing in. After your expedition you will be armed with the ultimate evidence of having used initiative, determination and teamwork to complete a common aim in one of the most primitive and unpredicatable environments that are left in our world. You can add valuable skills to your CV such as project management and leadership, specific health and safety skills, and the all-important life skills as well.

In addition, many ecotourists hiking the Indian Creek Trail do so as part of an academic study abroad program. Participating in ecotourism activities like the ICTP therefore allow ecotourists to earn academic credits when they return home.

The significance of this discussion is that it demonstrates that ecotourists do not, at least primarily, have vested interests in protecting the environments they visit. Instead, the main concern of many "ecotourists" in Belize was how their holiday benefited *them* (not the environment) in a variety of ways, such as hedonistic pursuits, the capacity for self-reliance and organizational skills, and the building of character.[48] Ecotourists have a significant interest in ecotourist since it can increase their cultural capital (a source of power) in their home societies. Duffy (2002: 156-157) concludes therefore, that ecotourists in Belize are in many ways engaged in a performance, portraying themselves as environmentally aware and culturally sensitive with the aim of impressing peer groups

and potential employers at home with tales of self-denial and tenacity and their genuine concern for the environment and the cultural well-being of the communities that they visit. This is significantly different from the agendas of other ecotourism stakeholders (that promote conservation, for example) and demonstrates that ecotourism can be used to satisfy diverse interests.

Conservation Organizations and ICTP: Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and Trekforce Expeditions

As research by Munt (1994), Mowforth and Munt (1998), and Duffy (2000, 2002) indicates, there has been a rapid rise in the number of organizations offering a chance for student groups and international volunteers to take part in conservation efforts in developing countries. A number of these conservation organizations are defined as part of the growing ecotourism market, which claims to combine tourism and environmental protection. According to Duffy (2000: 1), these organizations are located at the interface between commercial tourism (specifically ecotourism) and charities or non-governmental organizations. Despite their interest in operating in the South, the expansion of their activities can be related to the rise in interest in conservation or ecotourism holidays in the Northern hemisphere, as certain social and economic groups seek out activity-based holidays in more and more remote places.

Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, for example, is a non-profit conservation NGO that manages a 1070–acre private protected area and environmental education centre in the Sibun River Watershed of central Belize. While NGOs like Monkey Bay are often perceived as advocates for particular causes (like the environmental conservation),

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[48] These findings are in accordance with research on ecotourists in Belize conducted by Duffy (2000, 2002).

Hilhorst (2003: 190) argues that they can also be understood as *brokers*, organizations that fulfill a function by bringing together parties that need each other (such ecotourists and local communities), but can only get together with the help of a third party (the NGO).[49] In the Belizean ecotourism industry, Volker and Soree (2002: 104) illustrate that brokers have a considerable amount of power since they often have direct access to important resources (such as land and ecotourists) and knowledge that other stakeholders, particularly in rural areas, lack.

Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary has been promoting conservation and sustainable development in Belize since the early 1990s,[50] primarily by facilitating environmental education and ecotourism programs for visiting groups of international students and ecotourists. With the assistance of Dr. Ed Boles from the University of Belize (a specialist in watershed ecology), Monkey Bay has introduced a watershed ecology field course (The Path of the Rain God) for students interested in tropical natural history. The field course attracts groups of students primarily from North American universities and high schools. Through this program, the Sibun Watershed is used as a "living classroom" to observe and study natural processes and human interactions with natural resources in Belize. Following the path of the Sibun River, groups of ecotourists travel throughout the watershed from its headwaters high in the Maya Mountains through the mid-section of the Sibun River Valley and eventually ending the course on cayes of the Barrier Reef. Homestays in rural villages throughout the watershed are integrated into the course,

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[49] According to Hilhorst (2003: 190), brokers are "development interveners" who bridge life worlds, forge social relations, and "mediate between different knowledge systems, namely, the language of development and local languages."

[50] The Government of Belize officially recognized Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary on Earth Day, 1990, as the Minister of Tourism and the Environment (the Honourable Glen Godfrey) publicly declared Monkey Bay "a protected area dedicated to the people and wildlife of Belize."

allowing students to experience Belizean life first-hand. Homestay families are paid for room and board services provided to student guests leading to a direct transfer of tourism dollars to families throughout the Sibun River Watershed (Miller 2002). Emphasizing the brokerage role played by Monkey Bay, a website marketing Monkey Bay's programs (www.watershedbelize.org) states that:

> Monkey Bay serves as the gateway to intercultural exchange programs in rural Belizean villages that offer unique opportunities to live with a host family and participate in village life. Homestay is an experiential learning opportunity for visitors, while at the same time serves to empower local communities to have greater control over the management and protection of their region's natural and economic resources.

According to the owner of Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, the role the organization has played by facilitating ecotourism "has assisted both [ecotourists and local communities] in developing an appreciation of ecotourism benefits and an active concern for the health of the Sibun Watershed."

In addition to the important role Monkey Bay plays by facilitating ecotourism programs, an important source of the organization's power comes from the social ties and networks that have been developed with other organizations. Monkey Bay has cultivated conservation partnerships in their effort to promote biodiversity protection. In 1995, for example, Monkey Bay staff volunteered to coordinate conservation flights in Belize sponsored by LightHawk. LightHawk, "the Wings of Conservation," is an international conservation NGO based in the United States and has been providing environmental aviation services to the Belize Government's Ministry of Natural Resources and local conservation organizations. LightHawk's conservation flights in Belize help local organizations monitor protected areas, survey endangered species and their habitats, and enable the government to better enforce conservation and natural resource protection

rules and regulations (www.monkeybaybelize.org).[51] Monkey Bay also formed a partnership with the Atlanta Zoo in 1997 to promote the expansion of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor through ecotourism. Through the partnership, an ecotourism program was developed at Cox Lagoon Crocodile Sanctuary – located on private land near Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary – in order to attract foreign visitors to the lagoon for wildlife viewing, canoeing, and overnight camping. User fees are paid to the property owners as incentive for them to manage and protect the ecological integrity of their property. Most recently, Monkey Bay has collaborated with Trekforce Expeditions (a conservation NGO from England) to develop and promote the ICTP.[52] These relationships have provided Monkey Bay with important technical, financial, and ideological support in their efforts to promote conservation and ecotourism in Belize.

The nature of Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary's interest in the ICTP is directly related to the organization's promotion of environmental conservation in Belize, particularly through the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Project. According to the owner of Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, the most significant of its conservation efforts has been its "full participation in the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Project" (Miller 2002). In an effort to contribute to the MBCP, Monkey Bay has been advocating for, and working towards the consolidation of a biological corridor across central Belize that would link the large blocks of protected areas that exist in the north and south of the country. While Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary is among the smaller protected areas in Belize, it is situated extremely strategically - roughly in the middle of the country - to

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[51] In their discussion of environmental NGOs and ecotourism in Belize, Munt and Higinio (1993: 65) refer to Lighthawk as "The Environmental Air Force" and claim that the organization bombards Belize from the air with "the conservation imperative."

play a crucial role in the promotion and completion of the MBCP. Indeed, Monkey Bay's location makes it "potentially" part of a very important habitat linkage between the protected areas of northern and southern Belize (NARMAP 1995: 82-85). NARMAP (1995: 85) reports, for example, that the contribution of Monkey Bay to the national system of protected areas is "dependent upon the establishment of a series of protected areas across the Belize River Valley." In this regard, Monkey Bay has successfully advocated for the creation of the 2250-acre Monkey Bay National Park (MBNP), located directly beside the private wildlife sanctuary on the opposite side of the Sibun River.[53] The rationale for the creation of MBNP was to maintain and manage a biological corridor across the Sibun River Valley that would link Monkey Bay with the Manatee Forest Reserve. After the creation of MBNP, Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary entered into an agreement with the government to co-manage the protected area, increasing the total area of land managed by Monkey Bay to 3320 acres across the middle section of the Sibun River Watershed.[54]

Since the creation of Monkey Bay National Park in 1992, Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary has been advocating for the protection of an additional parcel of land between Monkey Bay and Five Blues Lake National Park (the area around the Indian Creek). The development of the ICTP is, therefore, clearly part of Monkey Bay's larger effort at promoting the expansion of biological corridors in Belize. As Trekforce Expeditions (2003: 3) states:

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[52] The nature of Trekforce Expedition's role in the ICTP and the characteristics of this stakeholder will be discussed at length below.

[53] Before the area was designated as a National Park, the Ministry of Natural Resources required Monkey Bay to commission an experienced forester to conduct a timber inventory of MBNP (Kather 1992: 110). After completing a forest inventory and agricultural suitability assessment, it was demonstrated that the best use of the land was conservation management (Miller 2002).

[54] Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary is 1070 acres while Monkey Bay National Park is 2250 acres.

> The development of the Indian Creek Trail is seen as an important step towards encouraging the government to set aside this area of land as nature reserve. The trail currently runs through Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Manatee Forest Reserve, and 5 Blues Lake National Park. Around a third of the trail passes through government land in which logging concessions exist. Through developing the trail, and increasing the number of users on the trail, it is hoped pressure will be placed on the government to restrict the logging practices, and support the conservation of the fauna and flora in this area.

While Monkey Bay's interest in the ICTP revolves around its contribution to the MBCP, it must be acknowledged that the organization has an economic interest in promoting the ICTP. This is clear in the organization's mission statement, which declares that "Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary seeks to create a model self-supporting economic entity for private land stewardship that encourages conservation management and community development through environmental education and ecotourism" (www.mokeybaybelize.org). By facilitating ecotourism and environmental education programs, Monkey Bay has been able to remain a self-financing organization with the freedom to operate, and indeed expand, without relying on banks or lending institutions to provide financial assistance. In this regard, Monkey Bay sells its programs to groups for $US 55.00 to $US 78 per person per day.[55] In addition to its educational programs, Monkey Bay has developed the facilities to provide meals (costing from US$4-8) and accommodations (camping costs US$5, shared room US$15, while a private room costs US$20) for individual ecotourists and can facilitate a variety of ecotours (such as canoeing, hiking, and caving opportunities) throughout the Sibun River Watershed (prices vary). All revenue from these initiatives is channeled into the management and operation of Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, and any money left over after expenses is directed to employee benefits and the improvement and expansion of the sanctuary's

facilities and programs. Developing the Indian Creek Trail gives Monkey Bay access to a unique ecotourism destination in Belize, thereby increasing the organization's attractiveness to potential student groups and ecotourists.

As noted above, in order for Monkey Bay to achieve the right to develop the ICTP, the organization had to accept to generate (and demonstrate) community support for the project. In other words, Monkey Bay lacked the legitimacy to implement the ICTP without the support of surrounding local communities. During the early initiation phase of the Indian Creek Trail Project, Monkey Bay started contacting and consulting with organizations and individuals at various levels (international, national and local) that were perceived (by Monkey Bay) as having an interest in promoting ecotourism along the trail. After these initial consultations had taken place, an introductory trek of the Indian Creek Trail was organized by Monkey Bay to familiarize interested participants with the trail's location, environment, infrastructure requirements, and potential as an ecotourist attraction. As the manager of Monkey Bay explained to me, the purpose of the consultation process was to expose local community members and relevant organizations to the idea of the project and its intended benefits with the intent of creating interest in the trail's development and management. As a result of their consultations, Monkey Bay was able to receive the support of various stakeholders, including an expert nature guide from the community of La Democracia, the Friends of Five Blues National Park, the Women's Rising Bed and Breakfast Cooperative from St. Margaret's Village and Trekforce Expeditions. These stakeholders wrote letters in support of the ICTP that were presented by Monkey Bay to the Forest Department in order to receive official permission to initiate the ICTP.

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[55] This is the cost of an all-inclusive service that covers all activities as well as room and board.

Even though Monkey Bay was able to generate the support of some "community" stakeholders, the organization's resolve in promoting community participation in the ICTP has been questioned by other stakeholders. During a conservation I had with a community member from La Democracia, for example, it was suggested to me that if Monkey Bay did more to benefit the community, the organization wouldn't have to worry as much about security issues in the sanctuary.[56] This concern relates to the fact that very few community members participated in creating the letters supporting the ICTP. Although a letter was received from the community La Democracia (a village of approximate 200 residents) it was only signed by two community members, both of whom happen to be experienced tour guides often used by Monkey Bay to lead groups along the trail. In St. Margaret's Village (approximately 1000 residents), letters were received from the board of Five Blues Lake National Park and twelve women from a local bed and breakfast cooperative. Moreover, no community members from St. Margaret's Village and only six people from La Democracia participated in the introductory hike of the trail that was organized by Monkey Bay. The issue of Monkey Bay's legitimacy in the ICTP (and consequently the legitimacy of the ICTP as a "community-based" project) is therefore somewhat ambiguous, and will be discussed again below.

As mentioned above, Trekforce Expeditions has been one of the organizations that has collaborated with Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to promote the MBCP. Trekforce Expeditions is an international NGO based in London, England, that organizes and sends groups of approximately 20 volunteers to Central America and South East Asia

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[56] This comment was made in reference to a number of recent thefts at Monkey Bay in which tourists' belongings had been stolen.

to carry out conservation and community-development projects. As a registered charity, Trekforce has little interest in projects beyond promoting conservation and ecotourism internationally. Nevertheless, Trekforce has been an "influential" stakeholder with power and legitimacy within the ICTP. In terms of power, Trekforce has been able to supply the project with a volunteer labour force, expertise regarding the implementation of conservation and development projects, and access to communication via the organizations website (www.trekforce.org). During the early planning stages of the ICTP, Trekforce Expeditions was approached by Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and presented with an opportunity to help develop infrastructure along the trail. Trekforce accepted the offer, and during the months of February and March 2003, implemented a project aimed at developing the infrastructure of the trail in order to make it more "user friendly" for potential ecotourists. The expedition spent six weeks working on the project and consisted of 25 people, including 19 British volunteers, three project leaders (from England), two local guides from the village of La Democracia and one member of the Belize defense force. Trail developments included trail clearance and mapping, the construction of campsites, latrines, and thatched cooking shelters, the cutting of escape routes around caves (for access in the rainy season), and clearance of a helicopter landing area (for emergency evacuations). Moreover, during the winter of 2004, Trekforce implemented a second project aimed at further expanding and upgrading the infrastructure of the trail.

In addition to developing the trails infrastructure, Trekforce has brought legitimacy to the ICTP. All of Trekforce's projects have the support of the governments from the countries in which they are implemented, and are carried out at the request of,

and in collaboration with local sponsoring bodies, ranging from local NGOs, protected area managers, government departments, funding agencies and other scientific and conservation bodies (Trekforce Expeditions 2004b). Illustrating the legitimacy that Trekforce enjoys, the director of the Belize Audubon Society states, "[Trekforce's] work ethic is of such a high standard that we have agreed to collaborate in the future and I will maintain this support as long as they maintain the high standards they have been keeping to date" (as quoted in Trekforce Expeditions 2004c). Moreover, the Prime Minister's Office has stated that the country regards Trekforce "as a true friend of Belize" (as quoted in Trekforce Expeditions 2004d). This combination of power and legitimacy has allowed Trekforce Expeditions to become a very "influential" stakeholder throughout the process of developing the ICTP.

Ecotourism and the State

While it has been organizations like Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and Trekforce Expeditions that have been the primary forces behind the promotion and development of the ICTP, it is the Forest Department – through the Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment, Commerce and Industry (MNREI) – that has statutory responsibility for managing the forestry resources of Belize, which includes all national forests, protected areas, wildlife, and biological diversity of terrestrial zones. The responsibilities of the Forest Department are primarily mandated in the Forest Act of 1927 Chapter 213 of the Laws of Belize, revised edition 2000, Forest Ordinance of 1958, National Park System Act of 1981, the Wildlife Protection Act of 1981 and the Protection of Mangrove regulations of 1989. According to Platt (1998: 130), the last important

piece of colonial forest legislation was the Forests Act, which conferred authority upon government ministries to regulate the use of forests on both public and private lands.

Since a large portion of the Indian Creek Trail passes through Government land, the Forest Department has a significant amount of power within the context of the ICTP, particularly in terms of economic power (access to money and land), and political authority (the ability to reach decisions and pass and implement rules and regulations).[57] As Gibbs (2002: 4) explains, "Government permission in the form of issued permits is required to conduct any tourist-related activities on government owned land. The permit process is inefficient, lengthy and complicated." As a result, Gibbs (2002: 4) states that "it is imperative to actively maintain the good working relationship that the Indian Creek Trail Project has established with the [Forest Department]."

In terms of legitimacy, Fennell and Rowling (2003: 332) assert that the government is often the "key cog" in the interactions that exist between ecotourism stakeholders since it is "charged with the responsibility of balancing, as much as possible, the demands of all." The public sector holds this challenging position by virtue of its dual responsibilities for protecting and regulating the use of natural resources and promoting the economic development of its citizens (Holtz and Edwards 2003: 44). In this regard, the role of the Forest Department in Belize is to "create, maintain and develop a national forest estate taking into consideration the need for agricultural development and protection of the environment" (GOB 2004a). As a Chief Forest Officer states:

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[57] While these are the principle forms of power possessed by the government within the context of the ICTP, the government also has the power to coerce (see Sutherland 1998) as well as access to and control over information and communication (see Cutlack 2001).

> [Forest Department personnel] are trying to develop more coherence between the different stakeholders especially those people who are managing protected areas or who are directly involved with the whole issue of sustainable use of the forest resources. We are trying to facilitate the participation of the different NGOs or CBOs as much as possible in the initiatives that have started. And also through the Mesoamerican Biological Corridors Project, we also have helped to basically fund and facilitate community and NGO initiatives that tend to bring different stakeholders together (as quoted in DeVries et al 2003: 116).

As the manager of Monkey Bay explained to me, the primary concern of the Forest Department regarding the development of the ICTP was for the project to have the support of surrounding local communities, as well as the intent to involve community members in any income generating activities arising from the project. This demonstrates the Forest Department's resolve in ensuring that the ICTP promotes both the objectives of conservation and local economic development. Because of the legitimacy of this stakeholder, as well as its power, it is not surprising to see many references in the ICTP management plan to the "community-based" nature of the project, and its aim of combining "community" participation and empowerment with environmental protection.

As chapter two explained, the Belizean government has a high level of interest in the forest resources of the country. Indeed, the national economy has been built upon the exploitation of its timber resources. Belize has had a long history of intensive selective logging, which has contributed to a sharp decline in economic tree species such as mahogany and cedar. Accordingly, forest management paradigms and principles have been shifting to "view management from a holistic viewpoint and one of the pillars of this change is ecosystem management" (GOB 2004a). As NARMAP (1995: 23) states, "over exploitation of the primary timbers has depleted the value of the forests and management for resource rehabilitation, rather than for timber production, is starting to

enter the vocabulary." As a result, "the immediate future is one of radical, and undoubtedly painful, restructuring (NARMAP 1995: 23).

Through the "restructuring" of forest management in Belize the involvement of non-state actors like communities and NGOs has become an "integral component" of successful management and is being promoted through the refining of mechanisms such as co-management agreements (GOB 2004a). It must be acknowledged, however, that the readiness of the government to enter into co-management arrangements with non-state entities such as NGOs and communities is not simply a transfer of power from the state to separate non-state actors (Li 2002: 270). As explained in chapter two, the Forest Department has been faced with severe resource limitations and as a result, has faced difficulties in performing its duties – such as monitoring of logging operations and enforcement of forest and wildlife regulations – effectively, and is often forced to depend on the goodwill of community members and NGO personnel to report illegal activities (DeVries et al 2003: 113). By entering into co-management agreements which give some control and authority over natural resources to non-state actors, the Forest Department is able to save money by delegating some of its responsibilities to other stakeholders while effectively retaining these areas under its control. Thus, community-based initiatives can be a means for governments to gain, rather than lose, power and control over the use of natural resources. The development of "community-based" initiatives cannot, therefore, be seen as a transfer of power from state to community, envisaged as separate entities, but rather as "rearrangements of the ways in which rule is accomplished" (Li 2001: 164).

In the case of the ICTP, for example, ecotourism groups traveling along the Indian Creek Trail regularly pass by evidence of logging, and in some instances, have

actually come across groups of loggers in the process of cutting trees. Reflecting on a recent trip along the Indian Creek Trail, one guide reported to me that the group "saw multiple evidence of logging, multiple hardwoods that were felled and in the process of being boarded...most of it likely illegal. We actually met a group of loggers occupying one of the nearby caves." Moreover, a tourist who had recently hiked the trail stated to me that:

> There were three men who were ferrying Mahogany planks down the creek right by daylight cave, but there was evidence of ferrying elsewhere along the trail, even when we got close to Five Blues [National Park]. There were many Mahogany planks littering many sites on the trail where they had obviously felled a Mahogany tree.

In these instances where groups traveling along the trail have encountered evidence of logging, Monkey Bay has written letters to the Forestry Department reporting these encounters, providing the Department with information it would not otherwise have had [see appendix A]. As the project's management plan (Gibbs 2002) clearly states:

> In addition to being the ambassadors of the Trail, the guides will also be the eyes of the forest. In effect, the guides will be acting as park rangers. Because they will be traveling the Trail more often then the current [government] staff, they will be able to monitor all activities on the trail. This will include watching for and reporting illegal logging and poaching.

In this regard, groups traveling along the trail do not become the "eyes of the forest," but the eyes of the Forest Department, as non-state actors take on the responsibility for surveillance activities traditionally performed by agents of the state. Thus, while the Forest Department's responsibility for monitoring the environment around the Indian Creek has been delegated to other actors, the project simultaneously allows the Forest Department to assert its control, or power, more effectively over the natural resources in

and around the Indian Creek, since those non-state actors are helping to enforce the government's regulations.

While the ICTP may represent an opportunity for the Forest Department to increase its control over natural resources around the Indian Creek, the government also has an economic interest in promoting community-based ecotourism. As Belsky (1999: 655) states, "the embeddedness of community conservation in international and national politics also affects the calculus of costs and benefits in community-based ecotourism." In this regard, supporting community-based ecotourism projects "provides Belizean government leaders with a means to demonstrate commitment to community-based conservation and forge connections for accessing...grant monies" (Belsky 1999: 655). As discussed in chapter two, promoting tourism has been part of the structural adjustment policies attached to some of the country's loans. Moreover, on May 19th 2004, the Forest Department received $867,438.00 from the Protected Area Conservation Trust.[58] These funds were provided for the purpose of aiding the effective and efficient development of the country's protected areas through the enactment of appropriate policies and legislation promoting community co-management and better monitoring of co-managed protected areas (GOB 2004b). This illustrates how supporting ecotourism projects like the ICTP can be an important means for the government to enhance its power and control over natural resources, in this case by gaining important funding from PACT.

Disaggregating the "Community"

The above section explained that the interests of "the state" and "the community" can, in some instances, overlap, creating a situation where some community members

have taken on roles previously ascribed to the agents of the state (such as enforcement of conservation regulations). It should not be assumed, however, that communities themselves are homogeneous and have a unified interest in taking on such tasks. Rather than being homogeneous entities with a unified interest in promoting conservation and ecotourism, the communities (La Democracia and St. Margaret's Village) involved in the ICTP are comprised of diverse stakeholders. Thus, while some individuals in the communities have been able to participate in the ICTP and take advantage of the economic opportunities it has created (primarily by offering accommodations and through tour guiding), others have not. This is primarily due to the fact the many community members lack the legitimacy and/or power to participate in ecotourism and conservation projects like the ICTP.

As noted above, community members participating in the ICTP include tour guides from La Democracia, as well as women from a bed and breakfast cooperative and the Friends of Five Blues Lake in St. Margaret's Village. All of these actors were able to participate in the ICTP largely because they were perceived by Monkey Bay and other stakeholders as having legitimacy. The Friends of Five Blues Lake, for example, is a community-based organization in St. Margaret's Village that has entered into an arrangement with the Forest Department to co-manage Five Blues Lake National Park (through which the Indian Creek Trail runs). Tour guides and members of the women's bed and breakfast cooperative, on the other hand, have the right to offer their services to ecotourists, but are expected to provide services that meet a certain standard. Women participating in the bed and breakfast cooperative, for example, must have access to the

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[58] This is a considerable amount of monkey given that the Protected Areas Programme presently receives less than 1% of the annual budget of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment, Trade and Industry

appropriate facilities. Bedrooms must often have specified furniture such as beds with sheets, mosquito nets, and fans, while cooking and bathroom facilities must also meet certain standards (Belsky 1999:652). Moreover, "customer service relations are increasingly becoming an important part of guiding in the backcountry. It will be important that the guides on the Trail are made aware of what the expectations of their clients are" (Gibbs 2002: 13). In addition to meeting the expectations of ecotourists, guides participating in the ICTP are expected to be the "eyes of the forest" and the "environmental stewards" of the Indian Creek Trail (Gibbs 2002: 13).

In addition to having legitimacy, these stakeholders also have interest in the establishment of the ICTP. B&Bs, for example, enable women in Belize with the requisite resources to market traditional female domestic skills. Importantly, because normal domestic activities can be continued while providing services for foreign guests, B&Bs are not viewed in the communities as "work," and women are often able to maintain control over B&B income (Belsky 1999: 653). In St. Margaret's Village, women sell B&B services to ecotourists for BZ$40 per person per day. Since the ICTP promises to bring many groups of ecotourists to the community of St. Margaret's Village, the women of the bed and breakfast cooperative could stand to make considerable net gains from their participation in the project.

Similarly, participating tour guides, who are paid up to BZ$60 per day while guiding groups along the Indian Creek Trail also stand to make significant financial gains. For the Friends of Five Blues Lake, the ICTP represents an important opportunity to promote Five Blues Lake National Park and increase the tourist visitation to the co-managed protected area. Five Blues Lake National park is currently one of the least

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(US $116,629) (Ravandal 2002: 11).

visited of the country's national parks, attracting approximately 1000 visitors a year.[59] As the organization's letter in support of the ICTP clearly asserts, "this trail will serve to promote biodiversity while at the same time attract tourists to our park." Since the Friends of Five Blues Lake relies primarily on visitor entrance fees to finance its operations and the park's management, the ICTP will have positive impact on the organization. Given the interest that the B&B cooperative, tour guides, and the Friends of Five Blues have in the ICTP, it is not surprising that they have written letters to support it. As Belsky (1999: 657) found in her study of Gales Point, Belize:

> support for rules and regulations regarding hunting licenses, hunting seasons, and prohibitions on hunting...is strongly linked to personal benefits from ecotourism. Households earning income from either B&Bs or tour guiding (or especially, both) are more sympathetic to [environmental] regulations than those whose interests are not tied to rural ecotourism.

As Belsky asserts, "they have discovered the bridge envisioned in the [ecotourism] discourse regarding the complementarily of livelihood security and environmental conservation" (Belsky 1999: 657).

However, although these stakeholders have both interest and legitimacy, they do not control or have access to important forms of power, making them "vulnerable" stakeholders (with interest and legitimacy, but without power) within the context of the ICTP. As explained above, it is brokers – actors like Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary that control the flow of ecotourists – that possess significant power in the Belizean ecotourism industry. As Horwich and Lyon (1999: 105) explain, tourism agencies "develop their own infrastructures and systems for bringing tourists to given sites. A key problem is that locals have little or no control or influence over this large external

[59] As a comparison, Blue Hole National Park attracted 7, 880 visitors and Cockscomb Basin Wildlife

process." Community members that work as tour guides for the ICTP do not organize the trips themselves, but are hired by Monkey Bay on a contract basis to facilitate the expeditions. The positive net gains that these stakeholders may achieve through the ICTP are, therefore, dependent on Monkey Bay continually organizing trips along the Indian Creek Trail. While they have benefited, the amount of empowerment (which is central to ecotourism discourse) experienced by participating community members is questionable.

Many people from rural villages participating in the ICTP, particularly those participating in agriculture, hunting and logging activities, have not participated in the ICTP. This has occurred, at least in part, because these activities are seen as environmentally destructive, if not illegal. In this regard, the ICTP management plan (Gibbs 2002) clearly identifies activities like logging and agricultural expansion as environmental threats, while promoting ecotourism as a means of achieving "sustainable" development. Gibbs (2002: 4) states, for example, that if logging and agricultural expansion are allowed to continue in the area, "the significant biodiversity and natural beauty of the Sibun River Watershed will be diminished and with it the potential for sustainable ecotourism opportunities." Similarly, the Forest Department specifies deforestation due to land clearing for agriculture as the largest threat to the country's forest resources. The Forest Department also specifically highlights uncontrolled milpa and agricultural fires, illegal logging, poaching, and extraction of non-timber products as threats to Belize's forests (GOB 2004a).

While many supporters of the ICTP (including Monkey Bay, Trekforce Expeditions, and many ecotourists) view agriculture as environmentally destructive, this is not the case for many community members in Belize. As DeVries (2003: 208)

Sanctuary attracted over 10,000 visitors in 2003.

explains, in many cases communities do not necessarily share NGO perceptions of "threats." On the contrary, they often seem to view NGO interventions as at least as great a threat to their immediate livelihoods as the broader, and to them less salient, regional issues affecting the environment. Indeed, the reality is that the livelihoods of many community members in La Democracia and St. Margaret's Village are tied directly to agriculture. As noted above (chapter one), the landscape in which the Indian Creek Trail is situated – from Monkey Bay Wildlife and La Democracia to Five Blues Lake National Park and St. Margaret's Village – is dominated by large-scale agricultural operations, primarily citrus plantations.[60] As major landowners with vast amounts of capital and investment, this stakeholder group holds a considerable amount of power. However, since they lack legitimacy and would have little interest in supporting a project aiming to place potential agricultural land under protected status, large landowners have remained a "dormant" stakeholder in the ICTP.

While large-scale agriculture dominates the land-use and economy of the area, smaller scale agricultural practices are also important sources of livelihoods. According to Barrow et al (2002: 24), the scale and type of land holding a person, family or group has determines the level to which they can satisfy their livelihood needs, and the extent to which they will need to use forest resources, whether on, or off farm. For small farmers and landless people in particular, access to forest resources can be crucial as they strive to secure their livelihoods (Barrow et al 2002: 24). Clearly then, small farmers could be significantly affected by the ICTP, particularly since their access to resources could be greatly reduced by the creation of a protected area around the Indian Creek Trail.

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[60] Many of the citrus plantations have been established on land that was bought from the Belize Estates and Produce Company (Kather 1992: 120).

In the St. Margaret's area, over 90 percent of the population is involved in small-scale mixed agriculture. Approximately 75 percent of the small-scale farming (often referred to as *milpa*) is carried out by Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrants who usually have small plots containing subsistence crops of maize and beans, interspersed with cash crops such as citrus, pineapple, bananas, plantains, and assorted vegetables such as tomatoes and cabbage. Plots of normally less than one hectare are cleared by slash and burn methods and planted with crops for about two years, after which the land is abandoned and allowed to regenerate for a decade or more. Many of these farmers do not own the land they farm, but occupy it informally. Many residents in the area also supplement their livelihoods through limited logging, and hunting. According to Day (1987: 127), most small scale mixed farmers, and many others in St. Margaret's Village, supplement their diets by hunting in the forests in the area. Although most hunting is for personal consumption, some meat is sold locally or in Belmopan (Belize's capital city). In La Democracia, many families are relatively poor, and although they conduct little farming of their own, most generate their livelihoods from work in the surrounding area, (through citrus cultivation, construction work, gravel mining), and many families also supplement their livelihoods through hunting in the surrounding area.[61]

While small-scale farmers in developing countries are often those most cited in the ecotourism discourse as being the "targets" of many projects (e.g. those whose livelihoods should be tied to ecotourism to protect the environment) it is often unfeasible to expect people to automatically assume employment positions with ecotourism. As Wearing and Neil (1999: 79) assert, "the hard truth is that a local farmer, fisherman or plantation worker cannot always be changed overnight into a tourist guide or hotel

[61] Many individuals from La Democracia also find work in Belize City.

manager." In addition to meeting certain standards, offering B&B services, for example, requires the availability of an extra bedroom or the ability to temporarily displace a family member from their room. Moreover, as part of an initiative to promote professionalism in the Belizean ecotourism industry all guides must now attend training courses in Belize City to become licensed tour guides (costing US$70) and pay an annual fee to retain their licenses (Duffy 2002: 110-111).

Thus, for many potential guides there are significant barriers to their participation in the industry, particularly in rural areas like St. Margaret's Village were many people are poor, do not speak English (the language of most tourists to Belize) and earn their livelihoods though subsistence agricultural production.[62] As one community member in St. Margaret's bluntly stated: "Look around the village. Do you think people here are ready for tourists? The answer is no." This individual went on to explain that most villagers lack the necessary qualifications such as wilderness first aid and knowledge of the surrounding environment to participate in ecotourism. Moreover, it was asserted that most families were too busy worrying about securing their livelihoods and did not have the time to spend on issues like conservation. As Peter Eltringham, the author of the *Rough Guide, Belize* (an individual with over 15 years of experience of ecotourism) stated to me, "by no means all people in a particular area can or will benefit [from ecotourism]; they can't all be hotel owners or tour guides. Some people will be left behind, left out and the success of others may lead to jealousies, even acts of violence." It is widely reported in St. Margaret's, for example, that the creation of the Five Blues Lake National Park in 1991 has led to a long-standing tension between certain stakeholders,

particularly between the park board (the Friends of Five Blues) and the small-farming community. As Sutherland (1998: 139) states, "there is...internal tension between the Creoles, who are the historical residents of the area and want to develop it as a tourist draw, and the new Central American immigrants, who want to build houses and plant crops there." During my fieldwork in St. Margaret's it was mentioned to me by a former park board member that the park's visitor centre had been burned down a few years earlier. This act was thought to be a form of resistance to the creation of the park and the lack of benefits many residents had received. Accordingly, Eltingham stated to me that many ecotourism projects "would have been more likely to be sustainable if they had engaged in training local people to be guides, for example, and in teaching them English from the beginning. Lately, there has been some improvement in guide and English language training in a few projects, but in many cases it's too little, too late."

Since small farmers have an interest in the ICTP but lack the power and legitimacy to affect its outcome, they have remained "marginalized" stakeholders. This fact, however, directly challenges the legitimacy of the ICTP and the project's abilities to achieve its stated objectives. Without working to involve these stakeholders in the ICTP, for example, the project could not be seen as empowering marginalized community members. Moreover, by not incorporating these stakeholders into the project, their economic practices (such as slash and burn, hunting, limited logging, and land clearing for citrus estates) could significantly affect the environment around the Indian Creek, reducing not only the possibility of the ICTP's contribution to the MBCP, but the trail's attractiveness to future groups of ecotourists (who desire "pristine" environments).

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[62] Research by Stonich (2000: 142) in the Bay Islands of Honduras (a location similar to Belize) has noted that being able to benefit from tourism is particularly difficult for recent Mestizo immigrants who often

During a trip along the Indian Creek Trail, one group of ecotourists, for example, discovered that a large tree had been cut down at the trail's first campsite. The fallen tree had completely destroyed the site, forcing the group to find a new location to set up their camp.

The Sibun Watershed Association (SWA)

One means of potentially incorporating more small and large-scale farmers into the ICTP and allowing them to negotiate their interests, would be to more actively involve the Sibun Watershed Association. The Sibun Watershed Association (SWA) is a "community-based organization" that was formed in 1997 with the support and encouragement of Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, the Department of the Environment, and the United Nations Development Programme. The objective of SWA is to involve communities in protecting the ecological integrity of the Sibun Watershed by monitoring the use of natural resources and reporting to communities and regulatory agencies on the state of the Watershed's environment. As SWA's mission statement asserts, "[SWA is] a non-government community-based organization primarily committed to protecting the integrity of the Sibun River's natural ecosystems for the benefit of future generations, while recognizing the diverse interests of all of its inhabitants" (Boles 1999). Despite the fact that SWA's mandate clearly coincides with that of the ICTP, and the ICTP management plan identifies SWA as a key stakeholder, the organization has not been significantly involved in the ICTP to date.

As a community-based organization, SWA involves a broad spectrum of partners in collaborative management of the watershed and indeed, popularized the idea of

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lack education, the ability to speak English, and access to important social and economic networks.

watershed-based collaboration in Belize. In this regard, they successfully involve not only diverse communities in watershed management, but also Government, NGO, and industry stakeholders. Thus, SWA has formed positive relationships with not only other NGOs like Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and Trekforce Expeditions, but large-scale citrus growers and small farmers throughout the watershed.

Indeed, SWA is respected throughout Belize for both its public involvement strategies and its success at promoting environmental protection through education and advocacy efforts. A leading SWA education project, for example, has been their "mobile classroom" that the organization takes from community to community, predominantly for youth education. In addition, SWA produced a *Sibun River Watershed Atlas* (Boles 1999) with support from the Ministry of Education, which explains, in an accessible style, the natural history of the Sibun Watershed, the threats to watershed's health, and provides a history of the Watershed Association. SWA also relies on a community-based board that meets monthly in each of the eleven communities in the watershed on a rotating basis (DeVries et al 2003: 123). Through the efforts of SWA, citrus industry landowners in the region have increased stream-side buffers, communities have developed alternative laundry facilities away from the river, a gravel-mining company has stopped washing gravel in-stream, and Government enforcement of environmental violations has increased with the help of SWA-trained community river watchdogs (DeVries et al 2003: 124). As a result, SWA has become a model for stakeholder collaboration in natural resource management initiatives throughout the country.

Though SWA has been successful in bringing together a broad spectrum of interested parties in watershed management and achieving positive results, the

organization has faced serious resource constraints in terms of staff and finances, a factor that limits their operations and involvement in projects. Since they are predominantly grant-funded, SWA's capacity to attract qualified staff members and conduct its operations at any given time is highly dependent on their success in gaining funding. SWA began with significant funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), but has subsequently had difficulty securing new funding. Consequently, SWA does not presently have access to the resources that would be needed to participate as an influential stakeholder in the ICTP.

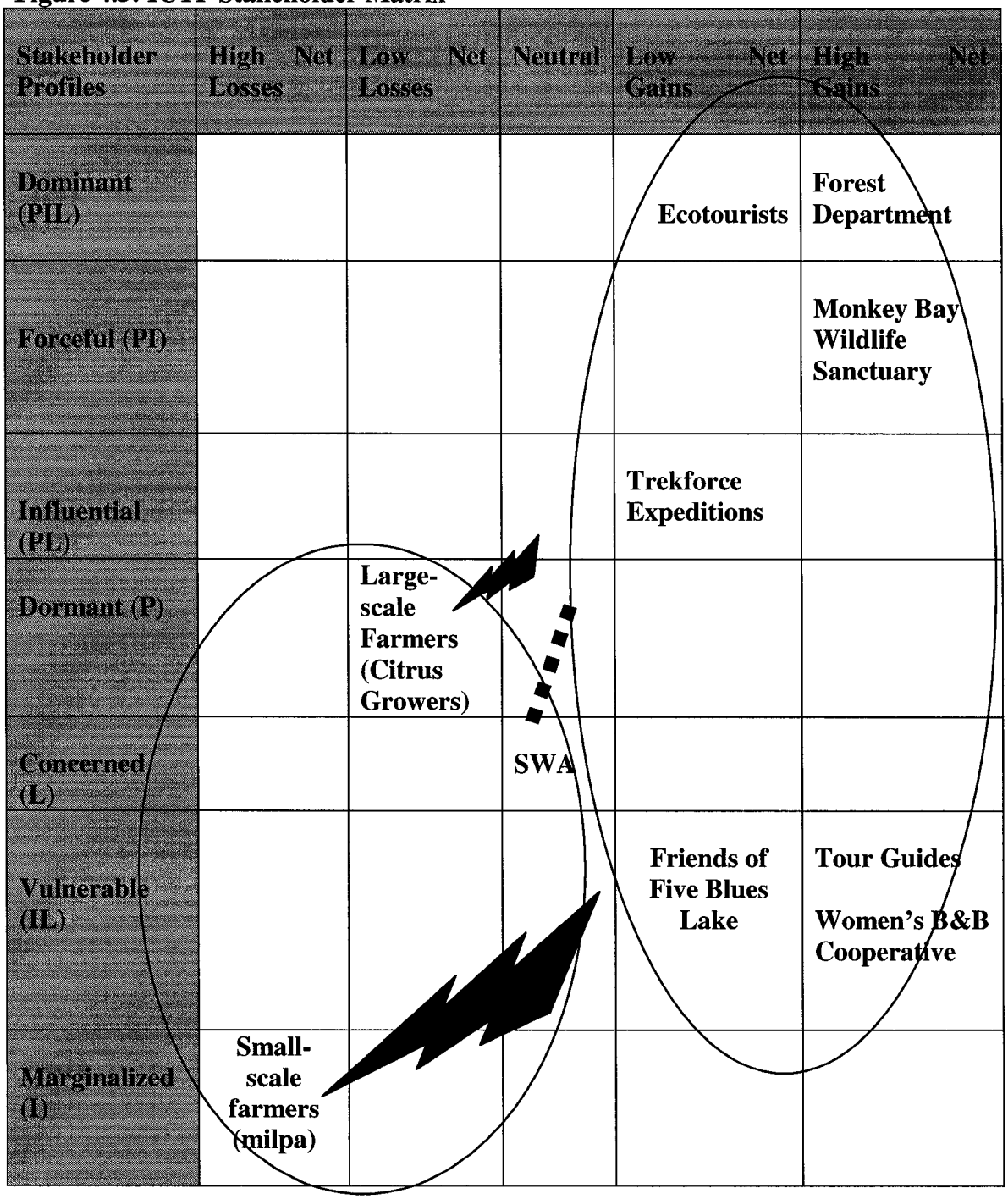
As explained above, SWA's efforts have focused primarily on advocacy, environmental education, and the monitoring of the use of natural resources in the Sibun River Watershed. As such, the organization has not been involved in the development or promotion of ecotourism in the watershed and has not had an interest in the projects like the ICTP. At the time of this research, however, SWA staff members were considering the notion of submitting a funding proposal based on the organization promoting nature tourism throughout the Sibun River Watershed. The idea for the proposal was focused specifically on developing and promoting a system of nature trails. If SWA decides to take this path and gains adequate funding, the organization would be able to take a more active and influential role in the ICTP. This could be significant because SWA has developed collaborative relations with such a diverse range of stakeholders throughout the Sibun River Watershed, and specifically with stakeholders that have not, as yet, been actively involved in the ICTP.

Summary: The ICTP as a Constellation of Power, Interests and Legitimacy

In this section, the ICTP stakeholders will be placed in a stakeholder matrix based on the typology explained above, arranging stakeholders in descending order starting with the dominant stakeholders at the top of the matrix down to the marginalized stakeholders at the bottom. Furthermore, stakeholders will be placed in one of five columns in the matrix (from left to right) according to the particular effect (positive or negative) the project is perceived to have on them, ranging from high net losses on the left to high net gains on the right. In addition to illustrating the characteristics of ICTP stakeholders, the matrix will identify any relations of collaboration or conflict. Circles around relevant stakeholders will indicate collaborative relations while zigzag lines will illustrate conflict. Broken lines will signify the potential development of future relationships between stakeholders or stakeholder groups. Following the matrix will be a summary of the analysis.

As the stakeholder analysis of the Indian Creek Trail Project has demonstrated, the ICTP is not comprised of a community of stakeholders working together to achieve common goals, but is, in fact, made up of a constellation of stakeholders with diverse power, interest and legitimacy. Summarizing the stakeholder analysis, the table above (figure 4.6) indicates a situation in which a group of upper-class stakeholders (Ecotourists, the Forest Department, Monkey Bay and Trekforce Expeditions) have been able to form collaborative partnerships among themselves and with a group of lower stakeholders (tour guides, women's cooperative B&B, and the Friends of Five Blues Lake) in order to initiate the ICTP. At the same time, however, other stakeholders, namely SWA as well as large and small-scale farmers have not participated in the project.

Figure 4.5: ICTP Stakeholder Matrix



While these groups have not formed an alliance of their own, they do have a history of interaction through the Sibun Watershed Association. This stakeholder configuration is consistent with the thesis of Mitchell et al (1997), which asserts that stakeholders with

two or more attributes are likely to be noticed and participate in projects, while those with less than two will tend to be ignored or excluded.

The significance of this configuration within the context of the ICTP, and the field of ecotourism generally, is that the project has not helped rural stakeholders practicing environmentally destructive economic activities (i.e. the "targets" of ecotourism projects) to tie their livelihoods to the supposedly more "environmentally sustainable" ecotourism industry. On the contrary, the project has only included those stakeholders that previously enjoyed access to the power, interest, and/or legitimacy to benefit positively from tourism. As a result, the ICTP's chances of achieving its goals will be greatly reduced. Not only will the project have difficulty gaining legitimacy as a "community-based" initiative, since it has not empowered its primary "targets," but its environmental objectives could be compromised as well. Indeed, if excluded stakeholders are not able to receive benefits from the ICTP, their "destructive" practices could be expected to continue. This could result in a situation of conflict – either directly through forms of resistance by excluded stakeholders (such as cutting trees along the trail), or indirectly as the ICTP is forced to compete with other stakeholders for access to the same resources. This could also reduce the potential of the ICTP to attract ecotourists in the future.

Importantly, the analysis has also indicated that there is the potential of incorporating presently excluded stakeholders into the ICTP. This could be achieved be more actively involving SWA in the ICTP's management, particularly since SWA is widely recognized throughout Belize as integrating a wide range of community stakeholders (most notably citrus industry stakeholders) in natural resource management activities in the Sibun River Watershed. Such an arrangement could be beneficial for all

stakeholders, and would move the ICTP toward a "middle ground" taking the interests of all of its stakeholders into consideration.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Since the early 1990s, ecotourism has become a popular development narrative and is often proposed as a way of ensuring environmental conservation while enabling economic development, particularly in developing nations. In many ways, ecotourism is seen as a development tool capable of reconciling the complicated, and at times contradictory, relationships that often exist between diverse stakeholders – including international financial institutions, conservation NGOs, tourism businesses, national governments, local communities and tourists. Ecotourism, for example, is promoted as being able to provide a solution to conflicts that have surrounded the reservation of land in protected areas since it allows local communities to participate in, and benefit from conservation. Consequently, ecotourism is often conceptualized as facilitating the creation of an "imagined community," or group of stakeholders with a common interest (in promoting conservation).

On the surface, the Indian Creek Trail Project seems to conform to the above narrative. The project involves many different stakeholder groups – from conservation organizations, government departments, and ecotourists, to various community level actors – who appear (particularly to ecotourists whose experiences with it are brief) to be working together to create a desirable tourist attraction while protecting the environment of the area and benefiting participating communities. This is particularly evident in the way the project is conceptualized as "community-based." In this sense, the ICTP seems to rely on a somewhat generalized and simplistic representation of "communities" as homogeneous entities. This is reflective of a broad trend in the CBNRM movement to promote "community" as an essence, or staring point, rather than as the result of

community-forming processes (Agrawal and Gibson 2001; Li 2000, 2002; Watts 2000). As Li (2002: 266) explains, CBNRM's narrative of community, participation, empowerment and sustainability is used widely in conservation, donor and government circles, even though the meanings ascribed to these terms and the ways they are translated into action vary. In order to move beyond simplistic representations of the "local community" in natural resource management, the community itself (as a stakeholder in a project) needs to be rendered politically; "it needs to be understood in ethnographic terms as consisting of multiple and contradictory constituencies and alliances. This can be referred to as identifying 'stakeholders'... or, at the least, the identification of wildly different forms of political power and authority" (Watts 2000: 38).

A more thorough analysis of the ICTP revealed its stakeholders to have diverse interests that go well beyond simply protecting the environment, empowering local communities, or creating a unique ecotourist attraction. Moreover, these stakeholders had unequal access to, and control over, various forms of power and legitimacy. Based on the stakeholder typology outlined by Mitchell et al (1997) and Chevalier (2003b), this stakeholder analysis illustrates a situation in which a group of upper-class stakeholders (Monkey Bay, Trekforce Expeditions, the Forest Department, and ecotourists) have worked collaboratively with a group of "vulnerable" stakeholders to initiate the ICTP. At the same time, a group of lower stakeholders (SWA, small-scale farmers, and large scale farmers), with access to only one characteristic of power, interest and legitimacy respectively, have not actively participated in the ICTP.

The significance of this configuration is twofold: On one hand it suggests that the ability of the project to achieve its goals may be compromised because of the exclusion of important stakeholders, particularly stakeholders often cited as the primary beneficiaries, or "targets" of ecotourism interventions (e.g. small-scale *milpa* farmers). On the other hand, the analysis also indicates a means of incorporating excluded stakeholders. This could potentially be accomplished by actively encouraging SWA to be more involved in the project. Following this path could be an important step for the ICTP, as it would facilitate the negotiation of a greater range of stakeholder interests, helping move the project towards a more equitable and inclusive multi-stakeholder forum (i.e. a middle ground) for ecotourism and community-based natural resource management in the Sibun River Watershed.

Ecotourism initiatives like the ICTP, which promote community involvement in conservation projects, may enable some community members to see conservation efforts as being compatible with their own interests. A better understanding of the diversity of community interests, however, including perceptions of environmental "threats," may help to frame and implement programs in ways that are more consistent with the diversity of stakeholder interests, and thus more successful and sustainable in the long run (DeVries et al 2003: 208-209). In this regard, the Community Baboon Sanctuary (CBS), the first community-based ecotourism program implemented in Belize, may be an effective model that the ICTP could draw from. The CBS was initiated in 1984 by two biologists from the U.S. (Robert Horwich and Jon Lyon) and was a pioneering experimental approach to conservation and ecotourism development in Belize. While the history of the project has been well documented, it is worth reviewing here.

Horwich and Lyon started the CBS by working with local farmers to establish a "baboon" (the Creole term for howler monkey) sanctuary along the Belize River. The success of the project has revolved around convincing farmers to adjust their shifting agricultural practices in such a way as to preserve the monkey's habitat. The effort is centred on individual land management plans for each landowner designed to protect the habitat of the black howler monkey. Management plans ask landowners to maintain a 21 meter forest corridor along the Belize river, leaving a forest buffer strip along property boundaries, leaving a strip of forest across large cleared areas, and leaving specific howler food trees in large clearings. If all forested lands were developed for agriculture and the management plans were adhered to, the CBS would still maintain a minimal, continuous skeletal forest from which howlers would be able to forage and regenerate (Horwich and Lyon 1998: 346-347). In return for their voluntary participation, farmers are offered a stake in the sanctuary's potential for generating tourism revenues. Importantly, this ecotourism project was developed in such a way as to allow farmers to continue their agricultural practices, making tourism an added bonus rather than a substitute for their livelihood activities. While the project has faced problems, it has become a popular ecotourist destination in Belize (9,452 visitors in 2003) and enjoys a broad base of community support.[63] As a result, it has become a model for many other ecotourism projects, both in Belize and internationally.

The lesson from this analysis, therefore, is that we must move beyond simplified images of community-based ecotourism as an imagined community of actors working together to achieve common objectives. While such an understanding has been beneficial

[63] For more information on the CBS see Horwich & Lyon (1990, 1998, 1999), Horwich et al. (1993), Lindberg and Enriquez (1994), Lindberg et al (1996), Alexander (2000), and Lash (2003).

in encouraging the transition towards more participatory and inclusive development and conservation models, it has ultimately presumed, rather than empirically demonstrated the links between its theory and on-the-ground implementation. Instead of being perceived as an imagined community, ecotourism should be understood as a "middle ground" through which diverse stakeholders compete for influence and authority in order to promote their respective and diverse interests. The implication of this is clear: those promoting ecotourism – whether they are scholars, planners, conservation organizations, funding organizations, or local people themselves – need to be aware of the complex social environments in which ecotourism projects are implemented.

Stakeholder Analysis has the potential to be an important tool in the field of ecotourism research and practice. The approach is being increasingly used as an analytical tool for policy makers dealing with practical natural resource management issues, as well as a more general analytical framework for better understanding the use and management of natural resources, particularly in developing country contexts (Grimble and Chan 1995: 114). According to Grimble and Chan (1995: 114):

> the overall objective of SA is to improve our understanding of, and design better projects and policies for, natural resource management. This is to be achieved by explicit recognition of stakeholder groups and their differing sets of objectives, interests and circumstances, and by taking these fully into account in development and conservation planning.

This is particularly important within the context of ecotourism projects, which often strive to empower marginalized rural stakeholders. Vast differentials in the power, interests and legitimacy of stakeholders mean that projects are implemented in situations of social complexity. Without a solid understanding of this complexity, which includes the characteristics and relationships between a project's stakeholders, its chances of being

successful may be reduced, particularly regarding the empowerment of marginalized groups or stakeholders. As stated in chapter two, the whole range of stakeholders who can influence or be influenced by projects need to be taken into account, and compromises actively sought between stakeholders' objectives in order for projects to be successful (Grimble and Chan 1995: 115). As Ferguson (1990: 281) asserts, "it seems clear that the most important transformations, the changes that really matter, are not simply 'introduced' by benevolent technocrats, but fought for and made through a complex process that involves not only states and their agents, but all those with something at stake, all the diverse categories of people who craft their everyday tactics of coping with, adapting to, and in their various ways, resisting the established social order."

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Appendix A

To Whom It May Concern

We are writing to you to express our concern regarding logging activity on Crown land in the area of the Indian Creek, south of the Creek's confluence with the Sibun and north of Five Blues Lake National Park. More specifically, the land surrounding 'Darknight Cave' and 'Daylight Cave'. As you are aware, The Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary has been leading trips down the trail as part of our tropical and watershed ecology courses for international student groups. In addition, Trekforce Expeditions International has recently completed work on the trail having spent six weeks building trail infrastructure to facilitate it's use.

On our last trip through the area we found that several mahogany trees had been cut down and were being processed into boards. One of the trees in question was felled onto one of the camping areas that were constructed by the Trekforce crew. We also encountered a number of individuals camping in one of the nearby caves. We are unaware of the status of any logging concessions in this particular vicinity and would like to confirm with you that there has been a legal permit issued for this area.

We would be happy to hear back from you at your earliest convenience regarding the situation and we would be happy to assist in any way possible. Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary