

Inception Report for Increasing the Efficiency in the Collection, Administration and Investment of Protected Areas Fees in Belize.

**Submitted by: Aukerman, Haas and Associates (AHA) in full partnership
with the Belize Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT)**

Introduction and Overview

In protected areas management, effective and efficient administration of fees and revenue is often seen as inequitable, and is often contentious. Belize is no exception. Belize's protected areas that collect fees expect to keep the fees, and protected areas that have little opportunity to collect fees feel left out and want some of the revenue collected in other sites. Protected areas systems in other countries have dealt with this problem and have found acceptable solutions. For example, creative approaches have been applied in National Parks in South Australia, and the US National Parks Service has resolved this problem. Learning from the experience of others and determining the applicability for a Belize Protected Areas system is a major part of this project.

The system that is required is one that generates and accounts for revenue equitably, efficiently and cost effectively. Revenue needs to come from fees and a variety of other revenue sources. The system needs to encourage and equitably reward creative fund raising from and for all protected areas, including those managed by the Fisheries Department, the Institute of Archaeology, and the Forest Department. And, while the proposed National Protected Areas System (NPAS) includes Private Protected Areas, the framework is to focus on the public terrestrial, marine and archaeological protected areas. It is crucial that the financial system strengthens and meets the fiscal needs of the public protected areas system and communities of Belize while reducing but not eliminating the entire financial burden on the Government. Designing such a system requires an understanding of the past and present fee frameworks and their strengths and weaknesses, and abilities and inabilities to meet the needs of Belize and its protected areas. A report titled "Sustainable Financing Mechanisms Belize's Protected Area System" (Launchpad Consulting, 2005) gives a good review of past fee and revenue production efforts. This report has also produced a bibliography of 32 fee and revenue related reports and projects that helps with this understanding. Three of these reports are from AHA. One missing and important report is titled "Revenue Generation Strategy for Protected Areas of Belize, (Aukerman and Haas 1992)

Summarizing from Launchpad's study, PA funding came originally from government allocations and grants from international organizations and NGO's. The establishment of the PACT and the enactment of an environmental fee levied on visitors to Belize led to supplementing funding for protected areas through competitive grants. More recently, because of limited Government revenue, and because there is no national protected area system, protected areas have had to generate revenues each on their own to meet their own financial needs. Except for the highly successful Belize visitor fee, administered by the PACT, tourism user fees have proven successful in generating revenue from and for only the most popular tourist areas such as Hol Chan Marine Reserve, Xunantunich Archeological site and Rio Bravo. This fractured approach has led to a fee system that favors those PA's that are capable of generating the most revenue, mainly from tourists. This approach is not designed to and is inadequate to sustain a national system of protected areas. This system leaves most PA's with inadequate management funding. According to the TOR for this project, "--there are various barriers that inhibit the system from being sustainable; these include; a) fractured institutional, legal and operational framework of protected areas management, b) ineffective/inefficient financial system that fails to address Protected Areas management needs, and weak institutional and individual management capacity." As of 2005, "-- few if any of Belize's protected areas enjoy fully funded status, much less sustainable financial status." (Launchpad Consulting 2005).

With the millions of dollars being accounted for by PACT, NGOs and Government, Belize already has examples and experience with effective accounting systems. In-country accounting systems may already provide a vehicle for a Belize PA system. On the other hand, creative accounting systems that match, for example creative electronic collection, may provide new opportunities for Belize. One such example, the details of which are already being explored by AHA, is the central reservation and fee system for all US parks, campgrounds, forests, wildlife refuges, monuments, rivers, etc. This is a national internet-based system.

Project Objective

The AHA/PACT team recognizes the overall objective of this consultancy is to improve the sustainability of Belize's national protected areas system by operationalizing mechanisms aimed at increasing the efficiency in the collection, administration and reinvestment of protected areas fees in Belize. The specific objectives are:

1. Examine and design a protected areas fee framework that meets the national needs of Belize.
2. Develop a revenue accountability system for the NPAS which will improve the efficiency in the collection and administration of fees.

Deliverables

AHA/PACT understands its responsibilities to submit in a timely fashion the following deliverables.

- i. A comprehensive Framework and Policy that defines at a minimum:
 - How fees and charges will be assigned/ adjusted and their allocation across the National Protected Areas System.
 - How fees for additional services including but not limited to parking, watercraft docking, scientific research, filming, camping, among others.
 - Visitors' willingness-to-pay for services.
 - Improvements in the PA fee collection system.
- ii. A system of agent fee collectors which will include:
 - Incentives to pay gate and service fees in advance (defined and in operation).
 - Mechanisms by which fees will be collected by the government (defined and in operation).

Note: the system should be relatively inexpensive and easy to operate.
- iii. A mechanism to ensure that revenue can be adequately tracked:
 - Revenue accountability system for the NPAS (defined and in operation).
- iv. A communication/information strategy
- v. An Inception Report, inclusive of a Work Plan at the start of the contract period.
- vi. Progress Reports at the end of each component.
- vii. Final Report.

Guiding Principles

The implementation of this project will be guided by the following principles.

- a) Realistic: The recommended option/alternative developed during the planning process will be based on the present situation in Belize, and be viable within the next ten years.
- b) Analytical: The recommended option/alternative will be based upon a full and fair array of evaluation criteria in order to make a transparent, reasoned and defensible decision.
- c) Integrity: To examine and assess the situation and recommend options with objectivity, professionalism, best available science and expertise, and sound professional judgment.
- d) Benefit: To recognize the need for local stakeholder benefit (socio-economic opportunities and environmental services) and integrate this into the consultancy.

e) Participation: To ensure full participation from key stakeholders at local and national level in the development of the outputs.

f) Long Term Sustainability: The product of this consultancy will provide a technologically advanced platform to generate revenues for the long term sustainability of the benefits that accrue from protected areas to Belizeans, communities, economies, tourists and tourism industry, co-managers, future generations, and to the environment.

g) Systems Perspective: This consultancy will recommend an option/alternative which addresses the needs for the entire National Protected Areas System and its long term sustainability.

Methodology

AHA and PACT understands that the consulting team is expected to “operationalize mechanisms aimed at increasing the efficiency in the 1. Collection, 2. Administration and 3. Reinvestment of Protected Area Fees in Belize.” This requires meeting two specific objectives that are stated in the request for proposals (RFP).

Objective one requires knowledge of the national needs of Belize and its PA’s. Based upon the Terms of Reference for this RFP, “the Government of Belize (GoB) has shown its desire to sustainably manage and protect its extensive and diverse natural and cultural resources by endorsing the National Protected Areas Policy and System Plans and putting in place mechanisms such as the Protected Areas Secretariat.” However, the shrinking financial resources of the GoB restrict its ability to adequately fund the management of its protected areas. A system is needed to do this.

Object two focuses on the accounting system and effectiveness and efficiency of collection and administration of fees. Belize already has some effective and efficient fee collection, especially in Marine Protected Areas. This does not mean that the systems cannot be made more effective or other systems are not more efficient and effective. It also does not mean that the existing systems will be effective for other protected areas, or applicable to a nationwide fee collection system. Evaluating existing systems and exploring and testing new and creative fee collection systems, such as passports and stamp programs, are major components of this project. Creative fee collection systems and Belize applicable systems will be explored across Belize, the region and worldwide.

Proposed Timeline, Phases and Steps in Methodology for PA Fees Project

(Note: These steps are not necessarily sequential and several may be underway at any time).

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| <p>Phase 1: Inventory and analysis of current situation</p> <p>(Timetable: 30 consulting days between July- August 2011)</p> | <p>AHA/PACT participated in an initial kickoff meeting with the PMU and representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.</p> <p>An inception meeting was held on Monday July 18 during which the Forest Department, Fisheries Department, National Protected Areas Secretariat, APAMO, PMU and consultants (AHA and PACT) were present. During that meeting APAMO's concern about a possible conflict of interest was addressed and it was stated that as per the Project Board there was no perception of a Conflict of Interest. Moving forward and to ensure that the consultancy is fair and balanced, the PB decided that Andrew Bovarnick of UNDP be included as part of the consultations and that APAMO is kept abreast of the developments of the consultancy.</p> <p>Tools: Interview, content analysis of record of discussion</p> |
| | <p>Conduct a comprehensive review of existing studies, reports and other documents, including but not limited to the National Protected Areas System Plan (along with relevant appendices), the PACT's strategic plan, State of Belize's Protected Areas 2009, and A National Strategy for Fee Collection in Marine Protected Areas (Concept Paper).</p> <p><i>PACT will take the lead in identifying and collating documents and will participate in analyzing the information. AHA will take the lead in the review.</i></p> <p>Tool: Content analysis</p> |
| | <p>Communicate with and gain an understanding for the other related consultancies underway.</p> |
| | <p>AHA will spend 7 days with PACT implementing the project and securing information. July 12-20, 2011.</p> |
| | <p>Submit Inception Report. July 31, 2011.</p> |
| | <p>Conducts individual interviews with key government officials and PA managers. A rapid assessment of the current funding situation will be conducted to project the gap between PA fee revenues and operating expenses.</p> <p>Tools: Personal interviews; rapid assessment; gap analysis.</p> |
| | <p>Conduct interviews with key Belizeans (e.g., tourism industry, environmental organizations, tour guides, ecolodges operators, community leaders) to more fully understand the current fee collection system, issues to be concerned about, constraints of various options, issues to consider, and personal preferences. This strategy is intended to build trust and an on-going working relationship. On-going throughout project.</p> <p>Tools: Personal interviews</p> |

AHA/PACT Inception Report for Increasing the Efficiency in the Collection, Administration and Investment of PAs Fees in Belize. July 31, 2011 (3)

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| | <p>Conduct and analysis of how the current fee system operates (collection, administration and investment). The sample will also include PAs not listed in this TOR. This includes interview with GOB officials and non-government park managers to understand the nature and scope of fees collected (i.e., recreation related, resource related, services, extractions). Other consulting projects will be helpful in securing this information.</p> <p>Tool: Observation, personal interviews, comparative analysis recreation demand analysis, descriptive statistics</p> |
| | <p>Conduct a future demand/trend analysis to anticipate future visitation and non-recreational activities on PAs. BTB data will be used here---both overnight and cruiseship travel.</p> <p>Tool: Future demand analysis.</p> |
| | <p>Conduct a web-based search for literature and commentary about fee systems throughout the world in order to provide the state-of-the art thinking as a launching platform for the project.</p> <p>Special attention will be given to terrestrial versus marine fees systems given their inherent differences.</p> <p>AHA will interview the director and lead technician of the US fee passport system serving all federal agencies (www.recreation.gov).</p> <p>Tools: Personal interviews, content analysis, web-based word search.</p> |
| | <p>Alternative fee systems will be reviewed including consideration of strengths, weaknesses, best practices and mitigation measures to reduce any collateral effects will be identified. The existing literature has evaluated alternative fee systems.</p> <p>Tool: Comparative analysis, gap analysis, mitigation analysis.</p> |
| | <p>Host an internal work session with the PMU and other project consulting teams to discuss alternative fee systems, their strengths, weaknesses, best practices and mitigation measures to reduce any collateral effects.</p> <p>Tool: Focus groups, facilitated discussion.</p> |
| | <p>Conduct informal discussions (interviews) with at least 25 international tourists to assess their willingness to pay, preference for advanced versus on-site fee systems, experiences with fee systems on other travels, and alternatives they would find to be convenient and agreeable. On-going through Phase 2.</p> <p>Tool: Personal interviews, willingness to pay technique, descriptive statistics.</p> |
| | <p>Input from key stakeholders (e.g., tour operators and guides) through informal meetings and discussions. On-going through Phase 2.</p> <p>Tool: Informal meetings and discussions</p> |
| | <p>A list of decision or evaluation criteria will be developed to be used in analyzing alternative fee systems under consideration. (<i>The inclusion of the</i></p> |

AHA/PACT Inception Report for Increasing the Efficiency in the Collection, Administration and Investment of PAs Fees in Belize. July 31, 2011 (3)

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| | <p><i>PMU, PACT, Government- and non-government stakeholders to develop the criteria will ensure that recommendations are practical, effective, economical, transparent and administratively efficient. PACT expertise will be critical as to the practicality of applying these systems. The list of criteria would be presented to and approved by the PMU).</i></p> <p>Tool: Comparative analysis, decision science techniques.</p> |
| | <p>August Progress Report will be submitted. August 31, 2011.</p> |
| <p>Phase 2: Develop and evaluate alternative fee systems for due consideration. <i>(Timetable: 50 consulting days September – December 2011)</i></p> | <p>Develop at least 2 options for a fee system---from collection, administration and investment. <i>(Several sample models developed by AHA are included in the end of this proposal, with the latter seemingly the most pertinent and applicable at this time.)</i></p> <p>Tool: Formative evaluation, decision science.</p> |
| | <p>Analysis of each alternative would be done. This includes rigorously comparing and contrasting based upon the evaluation criteria previously agreed to document the strengths, weaknesses and best practices of each alternative.</p> <p>Tool: Comparative analysis, gap analysis, decision science techniques, mitigation analysis.</p> |
| | <p>AHA/PACT will meet for an intensive 3-day worksession to detail and evaluate each proposed alternative. September 12-15, 2011.</p> |
| | <p>AHA/PACT will meet with corporate officials from Active Network, INC to see first-hand the services provided for advanced internet license/park pass purchasing.</p> |
| | <p>AHA/PACT will select a preferred alternative and prepare a powerpoint presentation, including internet demonstration with handouts. The presentation will address collection, administration and investment.</p> |
| | <p>Present recommendations and findings to PMU, tourism officials, GOB, and other key stakeholders for critical feedback and additional information—collection, administration and investment. Sept 26-30, 2011.</p> |
| | <p>Submit Sept Progress Report with recommendations as outlined in the contract. September 30, 2011.</p> |
| | <p>Based upon the findings of the preceding steps, a draft framework for the assignment of fees and charges and their allocation across the National Protected Areas System developed as well as a draft national protected areas fee policy---addressing collection, administration and investment.</p> |
| | <p>Submit October Progress Report on work towards a draft framework for the assignment of fees and charges and their allocation across the National Protected Areas System developed as well as a draft national protected areas fee policy. October 30, 2011.</p> |
| | <p>Submit the first full draft of a Comprehensive Protected Areas Policy and Framework---addresses collection, administration and investment.</p> |

AHA/PACT Inception Report for Increasing the Efficiency in the Collection, Administration and Investment of PAs Fees in Belize. July 31, 2011 (3)

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| | <p>November 30, 2011.</p> <p>Tool: Content analysis.</p> |
| | <p>Prepare and sign the 2012 contract to continue this project.</p> |
| | <p>Submit a December Progress Report on revisions to the Comprehensive Protected Areas Policy and Framework and recommendations for piloting the Framework. December 31, 2011.</p> |
| <p>Phase 3: Implementation, Testing and Revisions of Framework and Policy.</p> <p><i>(Timetable: 40 Consulting days January- March 2012)</i></p> | <p>Develop the operational procedures for all aspects of the agreed Framework and Policy, including but not limited to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Incentives to pay gate and service fees in advance, i.e. other than at the PAs gate. b. Management structure to streamline the administrative ticket sales and fee collection chain. c. System of agent fee collectors (to include appropriate incentives). d. Mechanism(s) that will ensure that revenue from fees can be adequately tracked (financial management system) e. Network revenue tracking. <p>Tool: best business practices, decision science.</p> |
| | <p>Submit January Progress Report. January 31, 2012.</p> |
| | <p>Pilot the framework/mechanism in eight PAs, selected, including, but not limited to: Hol Chan Marine Reserve, the Blue Hole/ Half Moon Caye Natural Monuments, the Laughing Bird Caye National Park, and Actun Tunichil Muknal National Park. Additional PAs may be added if the representativeness of the 8 preselected PAs are not deemed sufficient. (PACT will take the lead on piloting.) February, 2012.</p> <p>Pilot an integrated “pass” system and/or passport system.</p> <p>Tool: formative and process evaluation, personal interviews. comparative analysis.</p> |
| | <p>Interview park managers, tour operators, fee agents, tourists and others involved in the fee system to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the fee system. The interviews would address the decision criteria previously established to develop and evaluate alternative systems. (AHA will design the assessment tool and PACT will conduct the assessment; the team will analyze the results) February-March, 2012.</p> <p>Tool: Personal interviews, summative evaluation techniques, descriptive statistics, comparative analysis.</p> |
| | <p>Submit February Progress Report,. February 29, 2012.</p> |
| | <p>Review findings of pilot test and recommended modifications with PMU, government officials and other key stakeholders. Include discussion of proposed monitoring program.</p> |
| | <p>Modify the framework/mechanism as necessary based on the findings in the pilot test and discussions with PMU, government officials and other key stakeholders.</p> |

AHA/PACT Inception Report for Increasing the Efficiency in the Collection, Administration and Investment of PAs Fees in Belize. July 31, 2011 (3)

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| | Put in place mechanisms for the PAs to be monitored throughout the project and provide recommendations for a future system-wide expansion of the financial management system. (This monitoring system will be part of the system design, so that it includes an administrator of the system that will administer on behalf of the Government since it is public revenues.) Tool: Process evaluation techniques. |
| | Submit March Progress Report. March 31, 2012. |
| Phase 4: Final Preparation <i>(Timetable: 30 Consulting days April- June 2012</i> | The AHA/PACT team will develop a comprehensive public relations and information program including key messages, types of delivery, incentives, roles for different agencies and stakeholders, and time table. Tourism industry leaders would be consulted for advice into this program. The program would be aimed at increasing awareness and “buy-in” among decision-makers, managers, tourist industry and visitors. AHA/PACT will work closely with BTB and BTIA to develop this program. Their collaboration will be critical. Tools: Public education principles, personal interviews. |
| | Submit an April Progress Report. April 30, 2012. |
| | Develop a basic training program that can adequately integrate small co-managers with low administrative capacity to system-level mechanism for fee collection and administration. A hands-on training program with written supporting materials will be provided. May or June, 2012. Tool: Process evaluation, personal interviews, interactive and progressive communications, electronic educational techniques. |
| | Submit a May Progress Report. May 31, 2012. |
| | The AHA/PACT will prepare and submit to the PMU a final report on this consultancy. This report will include a section outlining any lessons learned and recommendations for improving future similar consultancies. June 30, 2012 |

Timeline for Preparing Belize’s Protected Areas Fee Policy and Framework.

| Activities | 2011 | | | | | | 2012 | | | | | |
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| | Jul | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun |
| Phase 1: Inventory and analysis of current situation | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with the PMU and representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and other stakeholders Conduct interviews with key stakeholders (BTB, BTIA, IoA, Forest and Fisheries Department, BNTOA, BAS, Hol Chan, Tour Operators, tour guides, visitors) Prepare and Submit Inception Report and Workplan Literature review and analysis of current situation Analysis of current fee systems in other countries. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prepare and Submit Progress Report | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Phase 2: Develop and evaluate alternative fee systems for due consideration | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AHA/PACT Working session Literature review and analysis of current situation in country Analysis of current fee systems in other countries Present recommendations and findings to PMU, tourism officials, GOB, and other key stakeholders for critical feedback and additional information. Submit Sept Progress Report | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Submit October Progress Report | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Submit the first full draft of a Comprehensive Protected Areas Policy and Framework—collection, administration and investment. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prepare and sign the 2012 contract to continue this project | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Submit a December Progress Report | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Phase 3: Implementation, Testing and Revisions of Framework and Policy | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Submit January Progress Report. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Submit February Progress Report | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pilot the framework/mechanism in eight PAs | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Interview park managers, tour operators, fee agents, tourists and others involved in the fee system to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the fee system. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Submit March Progress Report | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Phase 4: Final Preparation | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Develop a comprehensive public relations and information program | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Submit an April Progress Report | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Develop a basic hands-on training program with written | | | | | | | | | | | | |

