

# **The Belize Coastal Tourism Project**

**An Assessment of the Environmental, Socio-Cultural and  
Economic Impacts of Tourism in Coastal Communities in  
Belize**

## **PROJECT SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**



Prepared by:  
Amy Diedrich  
Department of Marine Affairs  
University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI, USA

Project funded by:  
Oak Foundation, Boston, MA, USA

**August 2006**

## PROJECT SUMMARY

The purpose of the Belize Coastal Tourism Project was to assess the environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts of tourism in six coastal communities in Belize including Belize City, San Pedro, Caye Caulker, Placencia, Hopkins and San Pedro. In particular, the research was intended to improve our understanding of how to promote tourism that provides maximum benefits to local people, coastal communities, the nation and the marine environment while having minimal negative impacts upon them. Survey interviews were carried out with 403 local people (including fishermen, tour guides and random households) and 300 overnight and cruise ship tourists across the study communities during the period of March – November 2005 by a researcher from the University of Rhode Island in collaboration with a team of Belizean research assistants. The objective of the interviews with local people was to find out how Belizeans view tourism and how it is impacting their communities. Communities that are in varying stages of tourism development were chosen purposefully so as to allow for the interpretation of the findings in terms of the progression of tourism. The tourist interviews were intended to learn more about the environmental and cultural values of the tourists in addition to their views and experiences while visiting Belize. Given the recent expansion of cruise ship tourism in Belize, this study also emphasized learning more about the dynamics of developing this type of tourism in a nation that has traditionally been marketed as an ecotourism destination.

Tourism can alter the way countries and local people value and use marine ecosystems. Before tourists discovered Belize, many coastal communities were primarily dependent on fishing and farming for survival. Nowadays, many of these communities are becoming increasingly dependent on tourism. Where the economic value of Belize's coral reefs in the past was primarily related to the ample marine produce they provided, they are becoming increasingly valuable as a source of revenue from tourism. Preservation of these areas is essential for this continued source of income, making the evolution of a national awareness and consciousness of coral reef conservation both necessary and logical. Ideally, tourism should result in social, economic, and environmental benefits to host communities but the unfortunate reality is that in many cases the benefits are not equitably distributed or abundant enough to outweigh associated negative impacts. In fact, tourism can create conflict and resentment related to conservation measures among local people who feel they are losing control of natural resources that are rightfully theirs to use as they please. Alternatively, with proper management and consultation with the local population, tourism can promote local awareness and support for conservation measures because of the benefits associated with maintaining attractive and healthy natural resources.

Tourism can also result in socio-cultural and economic impacts to communities which may be structural, such as shifting livelihoods and population increases from immigration or, less tangible in the form of changes in morals and traditions. Similar to environmental impacts, socio-cultural changes may be positive or negative. When tourism development gets out of control, negative impacts are most likely. When nations consider tourism development, the potential for negative consequences is often overshadowed by the lure of economic benefits. There is no doubt that tourism can increase job opportunities, standards of living and community development. In fact, it is considered by many international aid and development agencies to be a primary tool for poverty reduction in rural, developing communities. Unfortunately, however, economic benefits and community development are not always equitably distributed or properly controlled and, as a result, have been associated with social and environmental costs to local people. For example, in countries where local communities do not have the capacity to accommodate the growth associated with rapid increases in the demand of tourism, it is common for foreign investors to take over the responsibility of providing the necessary accommodation and services. This draws tourism revenue out of the country and away from the people who should be benefiting from it.

With the above potential impacts in mind, the important question is: How are they manifesting in coastal communities in Belize? Although tourism clearly has some negative impacts on coral reefs, the results of this research show that tourism development is having a positive influence on coral reef conservation awareness and support among local people. This was particularly evident in relation to local support and belief in the effectiveness of marine reserves. The government's progressive and pioneering approach to environmental preservation was especially evident throughout this research, as was the strong commitment and important role of marine recreation providers, fishermen and tour guides as stewards and protectors of the marine environment.

In fact, it is interesting to note that unlike in many parts of the Caribbean where tourism has clearly had a negative effect on the livelihoods of fishermen, the majority of fishermen interviewed during this research do not feel that tourism has had a negative impact on their lives. This is largely a result of the nation's Tour Guide Training Program. Although many fishermen expressed a preference to continue with their livelihoods and not move into tour guiding, those who did said it has improved their quality of life. Many also choose to fish in the slow season for tourism and work as tour guides the rest of the year, which suggests a complementary relationship between tourism and fishing. The most frequent complaints from fishermen, rather than being related to tourism, were based on the misplacement of closed areas in marine reserves and the fact that they were not adequately consulted during the planning phases for these areas.

A positive relationship was also found between the level of tourism development and a number of socio-cultural and economic impacts, both positive and negative. Local people are aware of both the positive and negative effects that tourism is having on their communities and, as the level of tourism increases, so does their conviction about these impacts. Specific impacts include more jobs for locals, non-Belizeans, and women, immigration of people from other countries and other communities in Belize, increases in crime, increased pride in traditional culture, people wanting more possessions, and an overall increase in quality of life. The majority of locals in Belize City, Punta Gorda, Hopkins, and Caye Caulker cited economic benefits as the primary effects of tourism, where locals in Placencia and San Pedro were more likely to mention community development.

With regards to the tourists themselves, a comparative assessment of the characteristics and impacts of cruise tourists and overnight tourists suggested that, although cruise tourists have lower levels of environmental concern, both types of tourism result in positive and negative impacts. With the exception of Belize City residents, however, Belizeans expressed a strong preference for attracting ecologically and culturally minded overnight tourists rather than cruise ship tourists to their communities. Belize City residents expressed equal desires to attract both types of tourists and, although they are fully aware of the utmost importance of regulating and monitoring cruise tourism impacts, have a positive outlook on the future development of cruise tourism.

Overall, the findings of the Belize Coastal Tourism Project clearly illustrate that, as tourism develops in coastal communities in Belize, so do its associated impacts, both positive and negative. Proportionately, the findings also suggest that, to date, the benefits are outweighing the costs. What is abundantly clear, however, is that Belize's image as an undiscovered ecotourism paradise is on the cusp of shifting into that of a mass tourism destination. The local response to the Carnival Cruise Line contract and, more recently, the proposal for the Scarlet Macaw development on the Placencia Peninsula has shown clearly that the Belizean people are rightfully concerned about the impacts that this shift will have on their nation and its natural resources. That tourism is a double edged sword is nothing new. Neither is the fact that mass tourism, in particular, can have devastating effects on the natural and social environment of coastal nations. Where the principles of sustainability and ecotourism are elements that should be incorporated into all types of tourism, a brief visit to the majority of tourism destinations in the Caribbean will indicate that this rarely occurs. Belize has the clear advantage of being in a relatively early stage of tourism development where decisions and actions related to tourism will have profound impacts on its future. Tourism in Belize has yet to pass the critical threshold where the natural and cultural resources become so degraded that it loses its competitive edge in the tourism market, an often irreversible situation that can be economically devastating.

This research should act as a clear warning signal that the time for tourism decision-makers to act is now. The results clearly illustrate that the Belizean people and government already have a clear and intelligent understanding of what they want and need to get out of tourism and the impacts that such tourism may have on their country. Belize, as a nation, has already established an exemplary legislative and regulatory framework that governs environmental protection and tourism impacts. The key to Belize's future as a tourism destination will be to recognize the powerful position it holds where a mindful, monitored, precautionary approach to tourism development can result in it continuing to be an international showcase for sustainable tourism.

## **List of Recommendations**

The following list of recommendations draws upon the findings of the Belize Coastal Tourism Project and is intended to help guide future decisions regarding tourism development in Belize. Besides the tourist surveys, all of the findings of this research were obtained through surveys and interviews with Belizean people. These recommendations, therefore, are intended to represent the current concerns and beliefs of Belizeans rather than the independent views of the researcher who carried out the project. The recommendations are meant to be practical and complementary to current initiatives. In this context, they may not be surprisingly different to many of the actions currently taking place or being discussed and developed. Rather, the recommendations should serve to confirm the fact that Belizean people have a strong and advanced understanding of the potential impacts of tourism and that their opinions should play a major role in influencing the future of Belize as a successful, sustainable tourism destination. With this in mind, the recommendations are:

With respect to coastal communities:

### **1. Continue to encourage and facilitate local entrepreneurship and small business development**

Sustainable tourism can only be achieved in healthy, prospering communities. One of the things that makes Belize such a pleasurable experience for visitors is the ample opportunities that exist to interact with locals on a personal level while sampling local foods, drinking a cold Belikin beer in a thatched hut on a beach, taking a personalized tour to a beautiful caye, or browsing local arts and crafts. Local entrepreneurship and small business development is dependent upon the governments' ability to provide creative micro-enterprising financing such as low interest loans and seed grants. Lack of access to such resources was cited by many individuals as being a limiting factor in their ability to participate in tourism.

In addition, allowing large, generic, all-inclusive resort enclaves to develop at the expense of fostering the types of small, local businesses that offer authentic Belizean experiences could not only result in reduced economic benefits for local businesses, but could diminish Belize's attractiveness to its current tourism market. Maintaining a geographical distance between all-inclusive resorts and communities could minimize the propensity for such establishments to out-compete local businesses. These establishments should also be required to hire a significant portion of local people into managerial-level positions.

### **2. Continue to involve local communities in all stages of tourism planning and development**

The participation and consent of community groups in tourism planning and development are essential for sustainability. Local resentment towards tourism, which may result from not being involved in the development process can have a negative effect on the experience of the tourist and decrease the competitiveness of the tourism market. Belize's tourism industry is largely dependent upon repeat visits and word of mouth so it is essential that guests have a positive and welcoming experience. The equitable distribution of benefits of tourism, from local communities to the government level, is also essential for fostering the healthy and favorable social environment that makes Belize such a pleasurable place to visit. Transparency and local participation in decisions related to tourism development is extremely important to ensure a successful, equitable tourism industry.

### **3. Increase public infrastructure and pollution mitigation capacity in communities to accommodate growth in tourism and associated coastal development**

It is essential that increases in tourism be accompanied by a growth in amenities and infrastructure necessary to accommodate the additional tourists and the associated waste. Where necessary, actions could include upgrading and expansion of local trash disposal facilities and sewage systems, improved roads and transportation facilities, and upgraded medical facilities, particularly, installation of hyperbaric chambers. Some

of the funds necessary to implement such changes could be derived from tourism taxes already in effect. These improvements would invariably strengthen the tourism market, making them worthwhile investments from a long-term perspective. For example, the quality of the groundwater in Caye Caulker is a frequent source of complaint among tourists and may even deter visitors from spending time on the island. Addressing this problem would not only result in environmental benefits, but in widespread economic benefits as well. In addition, new businesses and developments should be made to comply with international and national standards to limit their impact on the environment and the government should make every effort to monitor this compliance. Belize is attracting a great deal of attention from foreign investors. These individuals should be encouraged to contribute financially to improving the infrastructure and facilities in the communities where they invest. Belize has the advantage of being able to negotiate such contributions during business transactions by providing incentives, co-financing and by simply convincing investors that, ultimately, such improvements will result in benefits to their businesses.

With respect to the hotels, tour operators and the marine recreation industry:

#### **4. Continue work with existing initiatives to improve environmental standards and develop Best Practices for hotels and tour operators**

Hotels and tour operators are crucial mediators between tourism and environmental impacts, both through their capacity as environmental educators and by taking appropriate measures to reduce their own ecological footprints in the nations where they operate. Continued participation in Environmental Performance Improvement Programs will be important to maintaining this role. In collaboration with the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST) and leading local-level tourism industry associations, Conservation International (CI) piloted the Environmental Walk Through program (EWT), which is changing the business practices of 23 hotels – eight in Belize and 15 in Mexico. The EWT program introduced hoteliers to good business practices for conserving water and energy, reducing solid waste, and managing chemicals, and provided these hoteliers with seed funding that allowed them to adopt recommended good practices. Also in relation to hotels, it is critical that the potential impacts of new developments be evaluated using comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). Measures should be taken to ensure that EIAs are viable and enforced through electing neutral third parties to evaluate such studies.

Marine recreation providers bring thousands of tourists into contact with fragile coral reef ecosystems on a daily basis. Their environmental standards, particularly with respect to pollution mitigation measures and education of tourists, are critical for minimizing the negative impacts of tourism. CELB is also working with tour operators to improve environmental conduct, as is the Coral Reef Alliance, whose current initiative is to establish a voluntary Code of Conduct for environmental practices for the marine recreation industry through the International Coral Reef Action Network's Mesoamerican Reef Program (ICRAN MAR).

In addition to continued involvement in initiatives such as those described above, the Belize Tour Guide Training Program will be critical to the mitigation of the negative impacts of tourism and is an important source of alternative livelihoods for fishermen. Over the years, this program has been improved and adapted to the emerging needs of the tourism industry. Such activities include the development of specialized training courses for marine tour guides, whale shark interaction guidelines, and an alternative livelihood program for fishermen in southern Belize. The latter is especially important. There is an increasing demand for tour guides, and alternative livelihood programs provide necessary financial assistance to individuals who may otherwise not be able to afford the training.

#### **5. Develop formal regulations for the sailboat charter industry relating to environmental conduct**

The sailboat charter industry in Belize is currently not subjected to some of the more stringent regulations related to environmental impacts. Presently, tourists who charter a sailboat are not required to hire a local skipper or guide unless they plan to travel beyond the outer boundary of the barrier reef. This means that

such individuals are free to snorkel, fish, and SCUBA dive without a trained tour guide. It is well known that briefings and proper guiding are essential for educating and monitoring tourists when they come into contact with fragile marine ecosystems. Since hiring a local guide is compulsory and necessary for all other tourists wishing to engage in marine recreation activities, it is recommended that those who charter sailboats be subjected to the same regulations. It is understandable that having a local guide on-board at all times may not be favorable to tourists wishing to enjoy the privacy of a charter sailboat. In this context, it is suggested here that it only be mandatory to hire a guide should they wish to dive or snorkel within the boundaries of a Marine Protected Area. Logistically, this would involve picking up the guide on shore or meeting the guide at the site. The latter would cost no more than the price of a regular tour from shore. It should also be mandatory that all individuals be given a briefing on appropriate environmental conduct prior to departure from shore.

In addition, there are no formal regulations governing the use of holding tanks and appropriate methods for sewage disposal for the charter industry. The use of holding tanks and the installation of sewage pump-out stations in the locations where boats are returned should be mandatory for all charter sailboat companies. Finally, it was clearly stated by a number of key individuals involved in the charter sailboat industry that Belize's navigational charts are outdated. Tour guides in San Pedro considered the greatest impact on the reef to be boats running aground. Upgrading the charts and improving communication between incoming vessels and Belize's coastal authorities will be essential to preventing more accidents.

#### With respect to cruise tourism:

### **6. Embrace cruise tourism as a real and significant component of Belize's tourism market that, if properly managed, should not compromise the overnight tourism industry**

For better or for worse, cruise tourism in Belize is here to stay. More than likely, it will only continue to grow in significance with the construction of Carnival Cruise Line's docking port in Belize City. In this context, it is important to take action now to ensure that this type of tourism has minimal negative impacts and generates maximum benefits to the nation. Appropriate measures must be taken to ensure that the current concerns of the overnight tourism industry are not vindicated and that cruise tourism serves to complement rather than jeopardize Belize's current reputation as an ecotourism destination. This should start with the evaluation, adaptation and enforcement of the Belize Cruise Tourism Policy. The development of this policy was an exemplary and progressive step towards managing the impacts of cruise tourism. However, the current stipulations related to carrying capacity and environmental conduct are not being adhered to. Daily visitation frequently exceeds the limit of 8000 that was stipulated in 2003, and reports of client to tour guide ratios being in excess of 8: 1 during marine recreation activities are not uncommon. Establishing and monitoring carrying capacity in particular is an integral component of sustainability related to all types of tourism and should be strictly enforced.

Conservation International's (CI) recently launched publication, *From Ship to Shore: Sustainable Stewardship in Cruise Destinations*, also suggests ways for cruise lines, governments, civil society and shore operators to influence the impacts of cruise tourism on a destination. These stakeholders can play a proactive role in more effectively managing cruise passenger visits, maximizing environmental, cultural and societal benefits, and minimizing negative impacts. The publication includes over 30 examples of practices and projects that are contributing to the sustainability of cruise destinations around the world. CI plans to use the book as a vehicle for working with governments, cruise lines and other key stakeholders in all major cruise ports in the Mesoamerican Reef Ecoregion (Cozumel, Majahual, Belize City and Roatan) to establish and enact cruise tourism management plans over the next two years.

## **7. Apply specific management measures to marine areas to be used primarily by cruise ship tourists**

The presence of cruise ships and large groups of cruise tourists will understandably affect the experience of other types of tourists visiting tour destinations at the same time. Cruise tourist groups, because of their sheer numbers, will also invariably place more strain on natural resources than smaller groups of independent travelers. In this context, rather than allowing cruise tourists to visit all marine areas in an unregulated fashion, it is recommended that certain sites be set up primarily for the use of cruise tourists. Areas already under heavy use by the cruise tourism industry will require additional infrastructure and practical strategies to accommodate and mitigate tourism impacts. Strategies could include site rotation and enforcement of visitation limits. In order to accommodate limited resources available to implement such measures, shore operators, cruise lines and government should all work together to address this issue.

## **8. Invest in revitalizing Belize City**

One of the potential benefits of the proposed Carnival Cruise Line Port is the motivation and resources it could provide for the revitalization of Belize City. Currently, complaints about harassment, safety, and the “run-down” feeling of the town are common among visitors. Belize City has a lot to offer as a tourism destination. It has historic sites, museums, beautiful buildings and is a central access point for many of Belize’s attractions. Revitalizing the city could encourage both cruise and overnight tourists to spend more time and money in the community thus generating important revenue for local residents and the nation as a whole. This has been proven to be successful in other cruise destinations in the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. One potential source of revenue for revitalization would be the additional funds generated from cruise tourist taxes and the new tourism port. The cruise lines should also be urged to invest in revitalization since making Belize a more attractive destination would result in an increase in the attractiveness of their Caribbean tour package.

## **9. Increase opportunities for independent guides and smaller tour companies to benefit from cruise tourism**

Cruise tourist’s tours are currently monopolized by a small number of large tour operators, often out-competing independent guides and smaller tour operators. It is also expensive and difficult for tour operators and vendors to get permits to operate within the current Tourism Village, which means that the benefits of cruise tourism are not as widespread as they should be. This scenario has also contributed to the fact that there are a significant number of guides operating outside the Village who are offering lower prices to try and out-compete the few companies serving the cruise lines. These guides are often forced to cut corners when it comes to safety and environmental standards in order to make a living. In this context, it is recommended that more opportunities be created for smaller-scale companies and individuals to profit from cruise tourism. The market is expanding to such an extent that this would not result in losses to the larger tour operators currently working with the cruise lines. The Belize Tourism Board and the Belize Tourism Industry Association’s project for improving small business competitiveness in the tourism industry is a positive development related to this issue. Also related to this recommendation, alternative livelihoods should be identified for the tenders currently operating in the Tourism Village who will be made redundant by the new docking port. As with previous recommendations suggesting investments, reallocation of tourist taxes, and low interest loans, the basic premise is that such actions will ultimately pay for themselves and result in economic benefits through creating a more competitive, sustainable, and equitable tourism market in Belize.

With respect to future tourism development in general:

#### **10. Continue to develop and improve conservation and education programs at local and national levels, particularly in relation to Marine Protected Areas**

Conservation, education and alternative livelihood programs are important for the continued success of ecotourism in Belize. To date, there are many success stories related to such programs including the designation of a network of protected areas, the Tour Guide Training program, and educational fieldtrips for school children. These activities have contributed to the fact that Belize is frequently cited as a positive example of an ecotourism destination by guide books, the media, and researchers. Not only do such programs contribute to the conservation of precious natural resources, but they provide solid evidence to tourists that Belizean's care about the environment. This is extremely important since 94% of the overnight tourists interviewed for this study said they would be more likely to visit a destination if they knew it protected the marine environment. This research also showed that coral reefs and marine wildlife are the most important attractions for tourists in the study communities. Marine Protected Areas in particular can be important self-financing mechanisms for environmental conservation. Recent studies and key informants of this research highlighted the fact that Hol Chan Marine Reserve is the only Marine Protected Area that is self-financing through the administration of user fees. It is also critical that, once they are effectively established, user fees are channeled directly into improving the management and infrastructure necessary to maintain these areas effectively. If mindfully implemented, these programs will continue to attract environmentally aware tourists who are willing to contribute financially to the maintenance of these programs.

#### **11. Establish and enforce carrying capacity in all Marine Protected Areas**

It is essential to remember that the ultimate objective of marine reserves is to preserve marine resources. These areas are arguably Belize's most important tourism attraction so their effectiveness is not only crucial to preserving the barrier reef, but to Belize's success as a tourism destination. It cannot be disputed that high visitation rates already pose a threat to the integrity of the more popular marine reserves, such as Hol Chan Marine Reserve and Laughing Bird Caye National Park. Belize has the advantage of having a significant number of qualified individuals and institutes conducting marine environmental research. This research should be targeted at the critical issue of establishing appropriate carrying capacities so that they may be implemented and strictly enforced before the often irreversible threshold of coral reef degradation is surpassed in the very areas geared towards its prevention. In order to reduce the pressure on the Fisheries Department, tour guides should also be enlisted to support enforcement efforts.

#### **12. Develop a National Zoning Plan for different types of tourism development**

Certain types of tourism, such as cruise tourism or all-inclusive resorts can alter the atmosphere of an area and make it less attractive to ecotourists and higher-spending independent travelers. In order for Belize not to lose this important, well-established market with the expansion of mass tourism, it is recommended that a clear zoning plan be developed that will target pre-defined geographical areas for different types of tourism development. This approach has been used to limit widespread negative impacts of mass tourism in more established tourism destinations in the Mediterranean.

Belize City could clearly benefit from the expansion of cruise tourism, while the established overnight markets in areas such as Placencia could be severely affected by it. Rather than build additional ports in other communities, it is strongly recommended that resources and energy be focused on the continued improvement of Belize City as the country's only port. In addition, all-inclusive resorts, besides altering the character of a community, can out-compete smaller locally owned businesses and have serious impacts on the environment. Due to this, it can viably be argued that the additional employment they provide will not make up for the overall costs to the community. Tourists who elect to stay in all-inclusive resorts are unlikely to venture into the community to spend money when they have already paid for everything in advance. Likewise, tourists who elect

to stay in a smaller hotel within a community are unlikely to wish to visit, or even be near to a large all-inclusive resort. As mentioned in a previous recommendation, such hotels do not need to be located directly adjacent to or within a community. Similar to other destinations in the Caribbean, transportation services could be set up to bring employees to and from work every day so the benefits of employment could still be realized with fewer social and economic costs to the community.

### **13. Recognize the long-term benefits of targeting higher spending, independent tourists as opposed to all-inclusive mass tourists**

The benefits associated with all-inclusive resorts in the short-term can be substantial in terms of the financial gains associated with foreign investment, employment, and improvements in infrastructure to local communities. These immediate gains can overshadow the more gradual benefits associated with smaller scale tourism and influence governments and locals to promote such developments. However, targeting the majority of tourism development towards accommodating higher spending, ecologically minded tourists could be more sustainable and bring more long-term economic benefits to communities and to the nation. This market, which is currently flourishing in Belize, results in fewer tourists producing larger, more equitably distributed economic benefits than mass tourists, while having fewer negative impacts on natural and cultural resources.

### **14. Recognize that Belize is in a critical stage of tourism development where actions today will govern the future of the country as a tourism destination**

Completing and implementing the Belize Tourism Policy should be made a national priority. Compared with its Caribbean neighbors, Belize is still in a relatively early, developmental stage of tourism development. This means that, unlike many places that have already passed the threshold of sustainable tourism development, Belize is still in a position to shape its destiny as a tourism destination. Our understanding of tourism impacts has grown immensely in the last ten years and Belize should take advantage of such developments by learning from the successes and failures of other nations.

### **15. Take full advantage of the interest Belize is generating in the academic research community**

Abundant natural and cultural resources, geographical location and political stability have all contributed to the fact that a plethora of research studies have been carried out in Belize in recent years. The majority of these studies are aimed in some way at helping to maintain or improve Belize's environmental, socio-cultural and economic integrity, resulting in overall benefits to the nation. It became apparent during this research that Belizeans are rightfully concerned that the results and information generated by such studies might not always benefit the nation as much as they should. This may result for a number of reasons including researchers neglecting to distribute their results effectively once the research has ended, lack of project funding to engage in such activities, or the distribution of findings in inappropriate formats or to the wrong audience. Measures are already in place to ensure that research conducted within the boundaries of marine reserves must be officially permitted and shared with the Belizean Government. It is recommended that additional measures are enforced to ensure that all individuals engaging in academic research in Belize be required to provide, at the very least, a report of the findings to the appropriate entity once the research has been completed.

The interest of the academic research community is mirrored and supported by a significant number of donors who recognize the importance of providing grants that will help ensure the associated objectives are achieved. In this context, it is also recommended that Belizeans take full advantage of this donor interest by identifying important and relevant research topics and encouraging the generation of grant proposals for research targeted at addressing these needs.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank the Oak Foundation for providing funding for this project, particularly, Imani Morrison for her consistent support and guidance. Thank you also to the Community Conservation Network for facilitating the project and the Belize Tourism Industry Association for their consistent support. Finally, the author wishes to thank Robert Pomeroy at the University of Connecticut and Seleni Matus at Conservation International's Center for Environmental Leadership in Business for their input to these recommendations.

\*\*\*

*The complete project findings document is available in electronic format for all interested parties. There are also data summaries of the results from the local and tourist surveys. If you would like to obtain a copy of any of these documents or have any questions or comments about the Belize Coastal Tourism Project please contact Amy Diedrich at: [asdiedrich@yahoo.com](mailto:asdiedrich@yahoo.com)*