



## **Press Release**

### **Clarification: Management of the Columbia River Forest Reserve**

**Belmopan, Belize, September 17, 2025** - On September 16, 2025, Ya'axché Conservation Trust (Ya'axché) issued a press release raising urgent concerns about increasing illegal logging and agricultural encroachment in the Columbia River Forest Reserve. That same day, 7 News Belize aired a segment titled "*Major Guatemalan Encroachment in Columbia River Forest Reserve*" and subsequently broadcasted an interview with the Prime Minister of Belize under the headline "*PM Chastizes Ya'axché for not 'Doing Their Jobs' in the Columbia Forest Reserve.*"

The Association of Protected Areas Management Organizations (APAMO) hereby clarifies that Ya'axché Conservation Trust is **not** the co-manager of the Columbia River Forest Reserve and therefore does not hold management responsibilities for this protected area. The Columbia River Forest Reserve is a critical biodiversity hotspot managed directly by the Forest Department.

As with many other conservation Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) engaged in protected areas management, Ya'axché contributes to national efforts by participating in **multi-agency surveillance and enforcement patrols**. In this instance, Ya'axché collaborated with the Belize Defense Force to monitor illegal activities in key hotspot areas, including Columbia River Forest Reserve. These joint efforts are indispensable in exposing ongoing transboundary incursions and the degradation of Belize's National Protected Areas System.

APAMO emphasizes that the challenges of illegal resource extraction and cross-border incursions cannot be addressed by the Government or co-management entities alone. Only through collaboration, mutual support, and shared responsibility can we effectively protect Belize's forests and natural heritage.

APAMO therefore urges the Government of Belize to take decisive and sustained action, while working hand-in-hand with the network of co-management organizations across the country. Together, through trust and coordinated action, we can halt the destruction of our natural resources, safeguard the integrity of our protected areas, and secure the resilience of our national heritage for future generations.

APAMO stands firmly in solidarity with its member organization, Ya'axché Conservation Trust, and reaffirms its commitment to strengthening collaboration with the Government of Belize to ensure the effective management and protection of Belize's protected areas system.

END.