

IMPACT OF COMMUNITY FOREST CONCESSIONS IN 2026

IN THE MAYA BIOSPHERE RESERVE OF GUATEMALA

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Community Forest Concessions continue to operate successfully in the Department of Petén, Guatemala.

They represent an innovative solution that promotes biodiversity and forest conservation in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, counteracting widespread deforestation caused by growing agricultural pressure, unsustainable logging of valuable timber species, forest fires, and the pillage of archaeological sites, while simultaneously supporting the socio-economic development of local communities.



Introduced in the 1990s in the region's largest tropical forest area, which covers approximately 2.1 million hectares, this innovative practice has been developed by the State of Guatemala through the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) in collaboration with the [Association of Forest Communities of Petén \(ACOFOP\)](#).

In May 2026, the website of the [Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests](#) published an article reporting that, thanks to the forest carbon initiative developed by the Petén Community Forest Concessions under the REDD+Guatecarbon project, Guatemala received its first results-based payment in December 2025 as part of its National Emission Reduction Program (PRE). This payment, linked to the verified reduction of 4.84 million tons of carbon emissions in 2020, set an important precedent, marking the first time the country had received an international payment for forest protection.

The article highlights that forest protection is one of the most effective and feasible nature-based climate solutions, and that payment mechanisms that reward countries for reducing emissions from deforestation provide a financial incentive to preserve forests. Indigenous peoples and forest communities protect and manage vast areas of tropical forest and have proven to be among the most effective guardians of these ecosystems. However, studies have shown that [they receive less than 1% of climate funding from results-based payment mechanisms](#).

The Maya Biosphere Reserve (RBM), located in the Department of Petén, was established by the Government of Guatemala to protect the region's tropical forests under the framework of the Protected Areas Law (1989), which also established the [National Council of Protected Areas \(CONAP\)](#). Within the Reserve, rural communities traditionally relied on production systems based on agriculture and the extraction of forest products. To reconcile community interests with conservation objectives, an innovative co-management mechanism known as the *Community Forest Concessions system* was devised, with regulations approved in 1994. To consolidate the community movement, the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP), comprising 24 rural and indigenous organizations, was established in 1997 to represent and support these communities.

Community Forest Concession (CFC) is the right that the State of Guatemala grants to legally organized communities, through a public tender, for the use and overall management of forest products. This is done under rules established by the State and for a clearly defined period of time (25 years). A CFC does not involve the transfer of land title, the forest remains public. The granting of a CFC is based on the power of the State to authorize Guatemalan individuals or legal entities to carry out forest exploitation activities on their own in State-owned forests, subject to agreed rights and obligations. (CONAP).



By granting these concessions, CONAP turns community residents of the Maya Biosphere Reserve into allies in the conservation of protected areas, allowing them exclusive use of resources provided that they operate under a sustainable management framework. Between 1995 and 2024, more than 511,000 hectares (70% of the reserve's forests) were awarded to 13 organized community groups and two forestry enterprises, all of which have continued their operations while fulfilling the terms of their 25-year contracts.

In particular, the actors involved in this co-management practice fulfil the following roles:

- The *State of Guatemala*, through CONAP, has recognized the [concessions as an explicit instrument of national development policy](#), creating a technical and legal basis for regulating and guiding the process of granting and managing them. To evaluate the management of the concessions, CONAP uses a set of standards (principles, criteria and indicators) that cover the ecological/forestry, social, economic and administrative components. Concessions are also granted to industrial concessionaires, exclusively for timber production activities.
- *Concessionaires* ensure the management and use of the goods and services covered by their concession contracts. Among their responsibilities, concessionaires must ensure effective monitoring and surveillance to prevent the loss of forest cover, prevent and control fires, and combat illegal logging, the depredation of archeological resources, and other illegal activities. Local communities can engage in agricultural activities, ecotourism, and others compatible with the objectives of the Maya Biosphere Reserve.
- The ACOFOP Association, in collaboration with *Non-Governmental Organizations* and technical support organizations, works to ensure the proper administration of the concessions, provides training, coaching and technical advice to the communities, strengthening their technical, administrative and organization capacities for self-management.

The ACOFOP Association promotes sustainable forest management of forests helping to preserve forest ecosystems while enabling communities to produce and market a variety of forest products, nationally and internationally. These products include certified timber and value-added byproducts such as xate palm, pepper, ramón seed, as well as beekeeping products. Communities can access financing through banks that accept the annual operating plan as a condition of guarantee. Taking advantage of the natural beauty and cultural richness of the Maya Biosphere Reserve, communities also offer tourism services. The results achieved have created the conditions for the State of Guatemala to renew the Concessions and ensure the continuity of the mechanism.

In this framework, Guatecarbon was a pioneering project, a founder and representative of the REDD+ movement in Guatemala, that began taking shape in 2006; the project encompasses nine community forest concessions and one industrial forest concession, which together secured results-based payments for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating climate change within the Multiple Use Zone of Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve.

[The article published by the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests](#) highlights that, for forest communities of Petén, the news of the payment to Guatemala, linked to the verified reduction of 4.84 million tons of carbon emissions, marked a long-awaited milestone. After two decades of protecting forests, reducing deforestation, and generating verified carbon credits, the communities received their first payment through the national system. The funding recognizes the communities' decades-long efforts to conserve the forest and was made possible by



the approval of Decree 20-2020, which recognized the community concessionaires as eligible beneficiaries of these payments.

[The article mentions the REDD+ Guatecarbon Case Study Making Forest Carbon Markets Work for Communities](#) published in June 2025 and updated in May 2026 by the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) and the Rainforest Foundation.

The Study presents the full history of the Guatecarbon REDD+ Project in Guatemala, highlighting how, as the project took shape, ACOFOP positioned itself as the representative organization for the forest concession communities and in 2006, working alongside the concession holders and the government, spearheaded the development of the Guatecarbon REDD+ project. The project aimed to promote and incentivize forest protection and support community development to reduce pressure on the forest by strengthening community forestry enterprises and fostering other sustainable sources of income within the concessions. The Multiple Use Zone of the Maya Biosphere Reserve spans 721,000 hectares; of this area, approximately 500,000 hectares fall under ACOFOP's community forest management model and constitute the Guatecarbon REDD+ project. The study notes that Guatecarbon was one of the first projects to meet all PRE-requirements and also reports the establishment of a project governance body within the PRE framework, comprising all concession holders, who are responsible for making decisions regarding the distribution of benefits.

The study concludes that the forest communities of Petén are pioneers, founders, and representatives of the REDD+ movement at the national level, having initiated this process in 2006. The story of ACOFOP and the Guatecarbon REDD+ project serves as an inspiring example of the power of collective action for civil society actors, government entities, Indigenous peoples, and local communities in other contexts to spearhead initiatives and access benefits from the carbon market.

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[Article in alianzamesoamericana.org](#)

[Article en rainforestfoundation.org](#)

[ACOFOP website](#)

[ACOFOP multimedia and publications](#)

[ACOFOP in Facebook.com](#)

[Guatecarbon initiative and rEDD+readiness in Guatemala in rainforest-alliance website](#)

[Guatecarbon Project in rainforestfoundation.org](#)

[Guatecarbon Project Case Study in rainforestfoundation.org pdf](#)

[Rainforestfoundation.org](#)

[Concesión Forestal Comunitaria \(CFC\)](#)

[About REDD+ in unfccc.int](#)

[Article in fsc.org](#)

[Concesiones Forestales Comunitarias in equatorinitiative.org website](#)



[Concesiones Forestales Comunitarias on equatorinitiative.org](http://equatorinitiative.org)

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[Evaluating forest fire control and prevention effectiveness in the Maya Biosphere reserve. Acofop.org publicaciones](http://Acofop.org_publicaciones)

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[Guatecarbon Somos Bosques para siempre Video in Facebook.com](http://Facebook.com)

