



Placencia Lagoon Nature Center

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The Crocodile Research Coalition (CRC) is a Belize-based nonprofit, established in January 2016, that seeks to preserve crocodiles and their environments throughout Central America and the Caribbean. We believe the success of our conservation efforts parallels the involvement and support from local communities. Thus we continuously work alongside local communities and partner organizations to empower people with the knowledge of co-existence and sustainable practices to ensure the survival of crocodiles and mutual well-being of the communities that live beside them. Our outreach also incorporates working with government agencies, utilizing our research to better inform policy decisions regarding wildlife and their habitat (= translational ecology).

Crocodiles, however, are our flagship species in pursuing regional conservation efforts. The CRC recognizes that the conservation success of crocodiles is not only dependent on direct conservation efforts of the focal species, but also understanding how crocodiles interact with their environment and other wildlife as long-lasting conservation management is dependent on preserving the integrity of ecological interactions.



Executive Summary

The Crocodile Research Coalition (CRC) is currently the only wildlife-focused organization in the Stann Creek District of Belize, taking the role as a scientific authority and wildlife rescue response team not only for crocodiles, but other adjacent wildlife occurring in crocodile habitat, such as birds and manatees. The research and rehabilitation of crocodiles and other wildlife, and to the education about preserving (crocodile) wetland habitat concurs with the mission of the CRC. **To further our mission and work, the CRC seeks to enhance local and international support for the preservation of crocodiles and their habitat through the establishment of the Placencia Lagoon Nature Center (PLNC) in Flower Camp, west of the Placencia Lagoon in southern Belize.** This facility will include 25 acres, in which five will be developed for the facility and the rest left undeveloped as a reserve.

The CRC anticipates that with an established facility we can assist in the conservation of the Placencia Lagoon, furthering tentative plans by the government of Belize (GoB) to establish it as a wildlife sanctuary in conjunction with increased enforcement in the area. Additionally, CRC intends that the PLNC will serve as an eco-tourism destination for local and international visitors alike, providing guests an unique opportunity enjoy and learn through a guided tour of our facility and nature trails. The PLNC will also provide an educational outlet to local students who may not otherwise have access or opportunities to learn about Belize's wildlife and habitat. Among other benefits this will provide in addition to providing them with hands-on exposure to a relatively unexplored career avenue in science and conservation.

The facility will be established in three phases that includes the following steps:

1) boat dock, captive and rehab crocodile enclosures, and nature trails, 2) housing for caretaker(s), and interns, 3) environmental science museum infrastructure, 4) sustainable utility connection, 5) research laboratory and wildlife veterinary clinic, and 6) bird tower. Income to support the CRC facility will be generated through

ecotourism (day and night tours), guests to the PLNC, student courses, patrons and donors. The full vision for the PLNC will also establish the first science museum in Belize, and the most modern scientific lab for ecological and conservation studies in-country, furthering progression of conservation and management efforts here in Belize. Ultimately, this facility will establish the CRC and Belize as a conservation stronghold for crocodilians and their habitat throughout this region.



Project Details

In November 2019, the CRC through the investment of Crocodile Encounter, a private zoo based out of Angleton, Texas (<https://www.crocodileencounter.com/index.html>) in the United States, was granted 25 acres along Flower Camp, a tributary lagoon off the principal body of water, the Placencia Lagoon. The CRC is currently in agreement in paying Crocodile Encounters \$500US/month to lease the land. Our goal is to become a co-owner through the investment of \$35,000US. With the land, the CRC is now ready to further our mission of wildlife conservation through the establishment of the Placencia Lagoon Nature Center. Through this establishment, we intend to provide a location that can create or further people's interest in wildlife conservation in Belize, in addition to inspiring the next generation of scientists and conservation leaders. The PLNC will provide local communities and tourists an opportunity to learn about the various wildlife and ecosystems in Belize via a hands-on environmental science center; observe some of Belize's native flora and fauna through day and night hikes on the CRC managed land; meet CRC Crocodile Ambassadors through crocodile educational talks; and experience a day in the life of a field researcher through viewing decks of the CRC research laboratory and veterinary clinic. Locals and tourists can further their wildlife experience outside of the CRC grounds through one of our Next Gen Croc tours (tours led by a licensed tour guide accompanied by a high school student as a form of internship), which include nocturnal eyeshine surveys, and morning and afternoon kayak bird tours around the Placencia Lagoon, and the 38 acres we currently manage on Placencia Caye.

The location of the PLNC will be in Flower Camp, a lagoon connected to the main Placencia Lagoon (Annex I). The land can be accessed both by road and water. The main road at night is guarded by two shrimp farms (one north and one south of the land), providing security via road by our neighbors.

Out of the 25 acres owned, it is intended to develop 5 acres for the whole facility, leaving the rest untouched as a private wildlife sanctuary. This will extend and ensure a biological corridor around the western side of the Placencia Lagoon given the land set aside and undeveloped among the 4 operating shrimps farms on the western side

of the lagoon. In addition, the landowner south to us has generously granted us access and management to his 35 acres, thus the CRC in total will be overseeing 60 acres of forest, in which only 5 will be developed.

Our preliminary surveys demonstrate that Flower Camp is inhabited by crocodiles, sharks (likely an important pupping ground) and manatees, as well as various fish species (locals know Flower Camp to be a good fishing spot). Recently confirmed by national and international manatee experts from Clearwater Aquarium based in the United States, Flower Camp is an important feeding and resting spot for manatees, providing safety from threats like boat strikes. The land is also home to jaguars, tapirs, armadillos, and a variety of birds and snakes. Flower Camp used to be a key nesting site for crocodiles in the 1960s-1970s, however the development of aquaculture facilities in this area disrupted nesting habitat. The CRC intends to restore nesting habitat for crocodiles to further assist in the recovering population (the population of crocs in southern Belize is still in recovery from past exploitation) in addition to providing a safe haven for manatees. Furthermore, by employing reforestation efforts, we can augment the natural habitat regeneration already noted to be occurring in the area, and extend a corridor for other wildlife that inhabit broadleaf forest from the surrounding area. We also plan to work with national and international avian experts to determine good nesting habitat for parrots, such as the Critically Endangered Yellow-headed Parrot.

Funding for our current operating cost is accrued from our student course fees, grants and donations. The CRC offers 2-4week student courses. Our Wildlife Research, Education and Conservation (WREC) course is growing (an average of 3 students/session). Currently, students/volunteers are housed at a local hostel. A list of previous and current grants can be found in Annex III. Annex IV lists previous budgets and a proposed 5-year budget plan.

Crocodile Encounters, a member of Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and located in Angleton, Texas, USA, is the main investor of the CRC land, investing

\$70,000US to buy the land for the CRC facility. With their popular and positive image in the United States, the CRC anticipates a continuous enrollment of students and volunteers to assist in subsidizing employee stipends as well as setting aside finances to begin the establishment of the complete facility vision in conjunction with guests that are interested in eco-tourism ventures.

Belize is known as the Jewel of the Caribbean, still very much untouched from the modern world, attracting tourists from all over the world to see some of the luscious forests, wildlife (such as jaguar, manatee, and crocodiles) and experience the 2nd largest barrier reef in the world. As some of the key conservationists conducting research in this area, the CRC has learned some of the hotspots of wildlife around the Placencia Lagoon- where the manatee like to rest, where Charlie the 13ft American crocodile likes to feed, where the Critically Endangered Yellow-headed parrots like to roost, and where osprey love to fish. Sharing and furthering people’s interest (locals and tourists alike) in the Placencia Lagoon will increase community stewardship towards its protection, thus the interest of the CRC to enter the realm of eco-tourism.

Eco-tourism is the main source of income for Belize, and we anticipate conducting tours around the Placencia Lagoon will assist in obtaining finances for facility development. The CRC is currently initiating eco-tourism partnerships with resorts and initiating various wildlife tours through D-Tourz.

Project Estimate

Item	Qty	In-Kind Donation	Cost (US)	Subtotal (US)
Nature Trails	TBD	Yes	\$0	\$0
Entrance Road	1	Yes	\$0	\$0
Signage	7	---	\$300	\$2,100
Palapa hut for temporary welcome center/shelter	1	---	\$2,000	\$2,000

Water and electricity connection	1	---	\$6,000	\$6,000
Caretaker House (Mennonite House)	1	---	\$10,000	\$10,000
Caretaker house supplies and utilities	TBD	---	\$2,000	\$2,000
Captive and rehab crocodile enclosures	6	---	\$3,000	\$18,000
Phase I: Environmental Science Center ^a	1	---	\$500,000	\$500,000
Research Laboratory, Wildlife Clinic, and Office Building	1	---	\$200,000	\$200,000
Equipment and supplies for initial laboratory, clinic, and office	TBD	Partial	\$50,000	\$50,000
Student housing	1	---	\$5,000	\$5,000
Bird Tower	1	---	\$2,000	\$2,000
TOTAL				\$797,100

^a Phase I of Environmental Science Center. As we grow financially, in the future we can budget for remodeling or upgrading the science center.



Conclusion

The PLNC will be the first facility of its kind in Belize, while establishing the first science museum in Belize. The CRC will not only provide opportunities to experience wildlife, but will be pivotal in training the next local and international generation of conservation biologists and scientists. It is difficult to find jobs in



conservation in Belize and in the region, thus this facility will provide a wide-range of job opportunities for Belizeans in addition to building in-country capacity in wildlife conservation.

Our stewardship of a collective 60 acres of savanna, broad-leaf and lagoon habitat provides CRC with a crucial role in landscape management in southern Belize. This role will enable locals and visitors with dynamic opportunities to experience the habitats and wildlife around the Placencia Lagoon. For many cruise ship or short-term visitors to the Placencia Lagoon area, there are no options for a quick eco-adventure tour; our facility will provide a solution. Additionally, the PLNC will provide an option for excursion during rainy days, and at night. Furthermore, the PLNC will enhance and promote the protection of the Placencia Lagoon and advocate for its declaration as a Wildlife Sanctuary. Thus, the PLNC will not only have significant value for the organization, but will have a positive impact on the wildlife and affiliated communities of the Placencia Lagoon.

Annex I

Figure 1. Location of Flower Camp in relation to Placencia Lagoon



Figure 2. Location of land in Flower Camp



Figure 3. Location of CRC Facility



Figure 4. Master Plan of Center

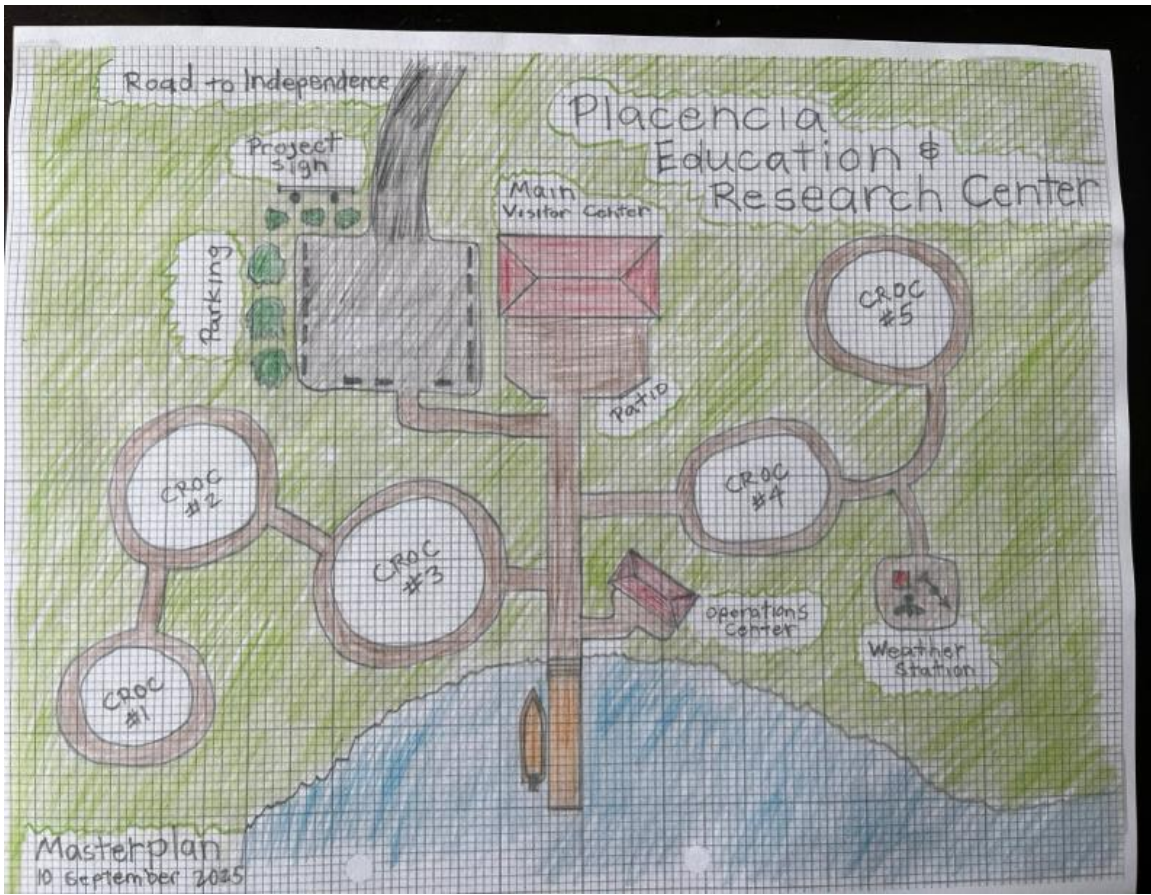


Figure 5. Main Building view



Placencia Education & Research Center



40 feet

80 feet

Floor Plan - Main Visitor Center
11 September 2025