In the rainforests of Petén, Guatemala, FSC-certified logging is proving to be the best defense against deforestation. The Maya Biosphere Reserve, established by the Guatemalan government in 1990, is Central America’s most biologically diverse ecosystem and holds the world’s greatest concentration of ancient Maya archaeological cities – including the ruins of Tikal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Studies by Rainforest Alliance and other researchers have established that certified forests managed by community-owned businesses in the Reserve have remained nearly intact since the 1990’s – in stark contrast to the dramatic deforestation all around them. FORESCOM’s efforts to increase and diversify markets, timber species and products on offer are vital to ensuring these businesses’ long-term success and the forest’s sustainability.

FORESCOM is a small company that was formed in 2003 as a joint effort between the community businesses, whose representatives serve as its board of directors. FORESCOM’s efforts are dedicated to providing them with processing, trade and marketing services and helping to increase the variety of species and products they sell. FORESCOM also serves as group FSC-certification manager for the concessions, and provides technical assistance from forest to sawmill and export. The community forestry enterprises log in concessions that are granted by the Guatemalan government and closely monitored by environmental authorities for legal and sustainable practices. Most of them own a small saw mill where the logs are cut into boards or pre-dimensional timber, before being brought to FORESCOM’s facilities for further processing such as kiln drying and molding. In the end, the wood is sold as lumber, decking wood and garden furniture. FORESCOM is also now exploring different types of value-added products such as musical instrument parts.

Organized by communities

Nine community forestry enterprises in the Maya Biosphere Reserve are providing jobs and incomes to over 2000 families, as well as protecting highly threatened forests. These businesses have primarily focused on harvesting highly valuable mahogany and cedar trees, which are relatively abundant in Peten’s forests.
FSC provides market access

FORESCOM is becoming known in both U.S. and European markets for its quality products in a broad range of lesser known tropical timber species, including santa maría, manchiche or “Guatemalan cherry”, and pucté or “tropical walnut”. Leroy Merlin, a major Spanish retailer, features a variety of garden furniture products made by FORESCOM in outlets across Europe.

For FORESCOM and its community partners, getting FSC certification is part of meeting Guatemala’s demanding legal requirements for forestry concessions. Other key objectives have been to establish market access and to achieve national and international recognition from a third party for their sustainable forest management. Having a group certificate significantly reduces costs for the communities and enables smoother coordination for all parties.

FACTS

Certificate Holder
FORESCOM (Empresa Comunitaria de Servicios del Bosque S.A.)

Certificate details
SW-FM/COC-001469
RA-COC-002661

Size of certified area
230,992.16 hectares

Products
Sawn timber
Decking
Garden furniture

Tree species
Aspidosperma polyneuron Muell. Arg.
Aspidosperma spp.
Astronium graveolens
Bucida buceras
Calophyllum brasiliense Camb
Calophyllum spp.
Cedrela odorata
Cordia glabrata (Mart.) A.DC. Exell
Lonchocarpus castilloi
Metopium Brownei
Platymiscium spp.
Swietenia macrophylla
Terminalia amazonia (Gmel.)

Volume obtained per year
Sawn timber (3,500 cubic meters)
Decking (1,500 cubic meters)
Garden furniture (1,500 cubic meters)
With FSC as a selling point, FORESCOM has obtained access to the markets of responsible American and Spanish buyers, but the business is eager to increase strategic long-term sales relationships with clients who recognize the value and beauty of socially and environmentally responsible tropical hardwoods. At the moment, the communities that FORESCOM serves are capable of increasing their production while maintaining sustainable harvest levels, particularly when it comes to the dozen lesser-known species that grow alongside mahogany and cedar in Peten’s rainforests.

Cooperation with customers
FORESCOM is cooperating with its clients to develop new products that will improve sales volume and diversity, and to develop products that not only add value but utilize non-traditional sizes or cuts in order to obtain better yield per cubic meter. This reduces waste, increases incomes and means less pressure on the forest.

In an attempt to reduce production waste and utilize harvested trees efficiently, FORESCOM urges their buyers to not purchase their raw timber in fixed dimensions, since demands for especially long and wide boards can be hard to meet. The simple reason for this is that the trees in the forests of Petén tend to be short to medium in height. FORESCOM works with both its buyers and its communities to create flexibility and lead to better usage of the forest and trees, to the benefit of all. This type of strategic value chain development makes FORESCOM a smart business partner and a model example of FSC group certification.

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