

Watershed Ecology – Sample Itinerary

Come discover the Macal River Watershed. Learn how the forests feed the streams, the streams build the valleys, and the valleys peter out into coastal wetlands and mangrove forests that filter the water one last time before leaking essential nutrients into the ocean to support our tropical coral reefs. Learn how the proposed Chalillo dam is threatening our watershed, and what we're doing to fight it. Learn how you can contribute to tropical conservation.

Day 1: Arrive Belize Int'l Airport, transfer two hours west to our base camp just outside San Ignacio Town. Set up tents and break for lunch. Afternoon orientation and a swim in the river.

Day 2: Lecture on health and safety in Belize and a watershed ecology overview. Afternoon paddle up the Macal and a short creek hike. Streamside lecture on riparian ecology and the plight of the green iguana. Optional night walk.

Day 3: Early morning birding before breakfast. Lecture: Broadleaf Forest Ecology. Hike an ancient forest trail and examine the forest close up. Enjoy a Mayan lunch prepared for us by our Mayan cook. More forest ecology on the hike back to camp.

Day 4: Study the interaction of forests and streams at Che Chem Ha falls. Sample streams for benthic invertebrates and other aquatic wildlife. Paddle 12 miles down the Macal River back to our base camp. Streamside lectures along the way on hydrodynamics and riparian wildlife.

Day 5: Paddle the Macal River to Cristo Rey Village, a Mayan and Mestizo community. Tour village and examine its traditional and modern impacts on the river, with river sampling. After a Mestizo lunch at Cristo Rey, continue paddling to San Ignacio Town to examine its impact on the river, and local conservation efforts.

Day 6: Tour and hike the Mollejon Hydroelectric Facility. Sample for biological indicators above and below the dam. Discuss the proposed Chalillo Dam. (Consider extending this topic with the Chalillo Educational Program, a three-day paddle down the Raspaculo River to the proposed Chalillo dam site, where wildlife sightings of tapir, scarlet macaw, king vultures, and morelet's crocodile are nearly a certainty.)

Watershed Ecology...2

- Day 7: Travel Caye Caulker on Belize's Barrier Reef. Settle in to your hotel and take an afternoon swim. Evening slide presentation on Tropical Reef Ecosystems, lecture on the connectedness of watersheds to reefs.
- Day 8: Snorkel Hol Chan, Belize's only Marine Park. Snorkel Coral Gardens and swim with sharks in the Shark and Ray Alley. Snorkel sea grass beds and mangrove forests surrounding the caye.
- Day 9: Optional volunteer work. Give a day for the reef. There's plenty to do.
- Day 10: Transfer via water taxi to Belize City and on to Belize Int'l Airport.