ECO-TOURISTIC SITUATION ANALYSIS

FOR

ITZAMNA SOCIETY

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ELIJIO PANTI
NATIONAL PARK

PREPARED FOR

GPAP-
UICN
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CONSULTANCY TO PREPARE AN ECO-TOURISTICAL SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS FOR THE ITZAMNA SOCIETY

Executive Summary
Itzamna Society (IS), a community based organization, has realized its objective, the formation of a national park but has not achieved the level of management, development and visitor use. The Elijio Panti National Park (EPNP) was created as a direct result of the efforts of the IS. The organization is charged with co-management under an approved agreement with the Forestry Department, Ministry of Natural Resources despite the lack of a completed and approved management plan intended to be a guide for management, development and sustainable use.

Gestion Participativa de Areas Protegidas - Union Mundial para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza (GPAP-UICN) has commissioned a profile and situational analysis arising out of a diagnosis to be performed by Wiezsm Consulting. The methodology used is a modified Total Quality Management format, analytical techniques, interviews and consultation with all stakeholders, A local and district focus was applied and information obtained which elucidated the levels of awareness and marketing of the park. Examination and analysis was conducted on the nature of the problems and causes, players, positioning and present status of co-management.

The organization was diagnosed to determine the nature and status of its leadership, executive management, planning, operations management. The consulting team carried out an assessment of the capacity of the society to exercise ownership and control, identify and package the attractions as well as the nature and practice of its services and marketing. The charge also includes investigating the positioning of the organization in order to improve management through upgrading the capability of the IS, especially its marketing program.

The diagnosis and situational analysis shows that the IS lags behind in not having an approved management plan for the EPNP. Thus, the mission of the park is not stated, is unclear and un-prioritized. A business, work and marketing plans are also recommended.

The pace of development of park infrastructure is slow and insufficient attention paid to revenue generating activities. The IS has not collected sufficient revenues nor obtained sufficient funding to finance development and ensure sustainability. The IS bears the costs and contributions required to sustain the park but is not earning sufficient return to do so. Itzamna Society now faces an additional problem of the loss of key accessible attractions. A particular concern was unauthorized visits and use of the park which were investigated to determine its magnitude so that the problem can be eliminated or significantly mitigated. The consulting team did not find a significant effect upon revenues as the occurrences were low and occasional. The survey indicated that awareness
marketing and having a contact party would have ameliorated much of the concerns.

Recommendations have been made to strengthen governance and the formation of an executive body which is more oriented to the EPNP areas that need improvement. Particular attention was paid to the development of more and improved eco-tourism products. A basic marketing program was proposed to increase awareness of the park locally and regionally as well as control issues such as unauthorized visitation.

A number of organizations have been identified which have similar circumstances and attractions which can be used as benchmarks in part or in total. Likewise, some best practices have been identified.
BACKGROUND
Belize is facing economic and social development issues related to growth and development. Government has been strapped for finances to carry out the management of a large number of reserves and conservation areas known as protected areas. One strategy that has been tried is the implementation of co-management of natural parks and other protected areas in concert with community associations.

Smaller, more remote and less organized community based organizations (CBO’s) and non-government organizations (NGO’s) have struggled for years with the focus and critical factors for success in co-management. A central consideration of this struggle has always been the lack of funding required to operate and maintain the areas entrusted to their care and management. This strategy also allows advantage to be taken of the ability of CBO’s (community based organizations) and NGO’s (non-government organizations) to attract donor funding where governments are not able to do so. This funding comes from foreign governments, other non-governmental organizations as well as private sources and are complemented with revenue means such as user fees. The aims and objectives of co-management fall under two distinct sets of perspectives - national and local community.

Government, being the national authority and not having the wherewithal to manage the large number of conservation areas in Belize, is more concerned with conservation. Community groups also have of an interest in protection and conservation but also have an economic perspective. Most of these conservation areas are located close to communities of low employment and low economic activity especially amongst women and youth. Communities have had to develop plans for controlled use, conservation and sustainable use. Since operating or developmental funding is rarely provided by the government the communities have also had to develop the ability to attract funding and/or earn user fees. These efforts have met with mixed success.

A reasonable level of experience and skill is required in the managerial approach, operational and technical capabilities, institutional capacity as well as marketing in the co-management of protected areas. This is necessary in order to rationalize use and foster development. The experience and performance of the Itzamna Society, co-managers of the Don Elijio Panti National Park (EPNP) is the focus of attention for this diagnosis, situational analysis and profile.
GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTATION
The consulting team was engaged to prepare, present and discuss with IS and GPAP-UICN a proposal for eco-touristic positioning of the IS which required:

1. Identification of management and leadership skills within Itzamna;
2. Preparation of a proposal of strategies to strengthen the institutional capacity of Itzamna to deliver more effective services, respecting gender, ethnic diversities and incorporating indigenous knowledge.

As a result of the foregoing, the desired deliverables and results would include:

1.0 Under the Terms of Reference, the scope of services is defined to be achieved through preparation of a document for the positioning of Itzamna as an eco-tourism provider:

   1.1 Conducting a situation analysis of Itzamna and its eco-touristic potential, addressing the following - external environment, stakeholders, eco-touristic potential, capacity of Itzamna to develop community eco-tourism, ability to be improved.

   1.2 Identification of the products that have potential to be offered to potential users of the subject area,

   1.3 Outlining through consultation a sales/marketing strategy and the eco-tourism services suitable for hotels and tourism services clients.

2.0 Identifying benchmark organizations and best practices that will contribute to the work of Itzamna by providing models and allow sharing of experiences.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS
This report is confined to diagnosis of the Itzamna Society as it pertains to the management of the EPNP. This is not an analysis of the Itzamna Society in all its functions except as related to or reflect upon the co-management of the park. This report does not address the other party involved which is the Forestry Department except with reference to certain key events in the boundary development and recent changes of the park's allocated area.
METHODOLOGY
Wiezsman Consulting used as guidance the Terms of Reference and utilized a structured evaluation format for preparation of a diagnosis, reduction into the form of a profile and situation analysis, recommendations for strategic issues and a very basic marketing plan.

The consultancy team approached the task against the backdrop of a standard business plan which is a practical way of assessing the IS in the context of a business operation since revenue and expenses are involved. The pillars of Total Quality Management – Management Commitment, Customer Service, Improvement Initiatives, Measurement Systems, Systematic Support as well techniques such as SWOT’s, Cause and Effect Analysis, Gap Analysis were used to assess the operating capability and capacity. A prognosis and set of recommendations along with realistic projections were prepared where required. The methodology employed met the objectives as set out in the Terms of Reference.

Consultations, meetings and interviews were conducted with the IS, stakeholders, tourism services providers such as guides and hotels, industry organizations and the general public. Site visits were conducted to assess the physical nature of the park and capabilities as well as the characteristics required of the users.
History and Organization of the Itzamna Society and the EPNP

There are three communities that occupy the northern foothills of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forestry Reserve - Cristo Rey, San Antonio and El Progresso (Seven Miles). Members of these communities had watched with alarm the rapid changes that had been taking place in areas adjacent to the communities. Destructive activities such as deforestation, conversion of tracts of land to farming, hunting and extraction of flora and fauna had instigated the communities to act in order to conserve the area and rationally define utilization. They decided to form an association to look after their common interests and to explore an opportunity to create a national park to be managed by the Itzamna Society (IS).

The IS was conceived in 1998, first registered in 2000 but legally became an NGO following re-registration in 2003. The organization is a multifaceted one and is engaged in eco-tourism, agriculture, silviculture specifically Xate, social and community concerns and activities as well as co-management of a protected area.

After many challenges and some opposition, they assertively secured farm land and identified an additional 13,006 acres, which were to be declared a protected area and eventually placed under a co-management agreement between themselves and the Forestry Department. This area became known as the Noj Kaax Meem Elijio Panti National Park (EPNP).

Social and Political Forces

Community
IS is the union of three communities that have a similar ethnic composition and objectives. External challenges to community definition, growth and development had instigated them to join efforts to mitigate any adverse effects before they could become significant and long lasting. This was the reason given by IS for the action that resulted in aggressive moves to unify the three neighboring communities. The IS interacts with the respective local bodies and institutions such as village councils, water boards, schools, culture groups and these groups are impacted by the multifaceted undertakings of IS. Most of all, IS operates as an active advocate for the rights of indigenous peoples.

External
Continuing conflict issues that can be considered counterproductive to IS efforts are the ones that prompted the formation of the organization and still threaten
their existence. Such issues are land pressure caused by increasing population, sales of land, stressful agricultural practices such as slash and burn, as well as de-reservation in part or whole of certain areas. Critical support was obtained from a political figure at the time who insisted in the importance of organizing themselves for the creation of a national park.

**Internal**
Other issues that drove the creation of IS were social consciousness and environmental awareness gained by individuals and groups within the communities. The social and economic fabric of the three communities had been buffeted as more remote natural resources came into view for exploitation. These pressures were accelerated by the growth of transportation and tourism.

**Ethnic**
The IS bears a distinct Maya/Maya Mestizo ethnic composition since it reflects the character of the people in the three communities. These communities represent the largest single concentration of Maya people in the Cayo District and the largest concentration of Maya Mopan people in Belize. Nonetheless, the membership is not exclusive of other ethnic groups and merely represents the majority of the affected people. The religious, economic and social practices of the Maya provide the distinct flavor and the conscious effort is to preserve this distinction and where possible, enhance it.

**Co-Management Process**
The objectives of co-management according to the statutory instruments are to involve the local population to better manage and control the use of areas such as parks with conservation and sustainability, the principal outcomes. Entities that wish to assume co-management are required to submit a proposal detailing management, operations, staffing, funding, community benefits, beneficiaries as well as to demonstrate strategic fit with national plans. Management means that there has to be organization, planning and control. Management plans are prepared in consultation with stakeholders, approved by the organization and then the government agency. Finally, the agreement is sealed with a Minister’s signature. The IS has organized itself, has been approved and signed the co-management agreement but has not gained approval of the management plan.
FINDINGS

Leadership

Leadership in Mayan communities is characterized by a patriarchal system and built upon pillars of community traditions and values. The coming of higher education, external employment opportunities and outside influences has challenged this structure.

IS is led by a strong female who has had to counter the status quo and traditions of the Maya communities. This attribute led to significant storming initially but the group has settled down to wide acceptance. The current style of leadership is characterized by consensus even as the leader has been in the forefront for a while now. Due to the lack of an independent executive, the leadership plays a significant executive role apart from governance. The board of directors governs relatively smoothly and does not have opposing persons or power groups.

Organizational Governance

The organogram of the IS is very simple. The organization is composed of the governance unit with the operations executive unit operating below in a straight vertical line and indistinguishable due to its composition. The IS is governed by a Board of Directors which is comprised of 7 members representing the three communities and is headed by a President (Chairperson). The president serves with other members who are a Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and one representative from each of the three villages. The president and board is elected in a bi-annual election. Meetings are held once per month and extraordinary meetings convened when necessary.

Operations Management

The operations management functions of IS are carried out by an ‘executive body’ which is derived immediately from the Board of Directors. This executive body meets weekly and is headed by the President of IS and is assisted by the Treasurer. They are the points of contact with visitors and distribute instructions to the line staff who are full time rangers and park wardens. Providers such as tour guides are called up as needed from within the 3 communities.

Management and Operational Philosophy

The IS operates in a basic short term Management by Objective framework. Consultations are held and objectives arrived at by consensus. Although a co-management plan has not been approved some elements are incorporated in the
definition of activities. Managers have been operating with limited management training and operate on the strengths of their individual past employment or village management experience. Formal education in any key area was not identified for any member save for high school. The management culture is imitative of the traditional one in that males are the leaders and decision makers and they constitute the majority on the board.

Mission, Vision, Strategy
The IS has a large mission statement that defines its mission “to do our part to protect the world, …… guard our lands and create a national park that would be free from the destructive hands of man”.

The vision is that by protecting “our rainforests, all mankind would benefit”. They also envision that “families would secure clean water, pure air and sufficient rainfall for agriculture”, (water now becoming a scarce resource during the dry). The children would “learn about the environment, the benefits of preservation and would choose protection of their lands”. The forest is of immediate spiritual and medicinal benefits for Mayan people and is a reservoir of potential cures.

The strategy is that by acting assertively in a holistic manner and by being the managing organization, “orderly and controlled utilization of this natural area will occur”.

Management Analysis Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Governance</td>
<td>Established with community backing and participation</td>
<td>Needs more structure</td>
<td>Help is available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations Management</td>
<td>Flat structure and voluntary commitment</td>
<td>Inadequate distribute of functions</td>
<td>Greater number of activities and more participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>Insufficient rangers for a large territory</td>
<td>Private participation and contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Director experience</td>
<td>Lack of Budgeting</td>
<td>Lots of benefits to be gained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Some conducted</td>
<td>Not enough or not comprehensive</td>
<td>Help is available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Span of Control</td>
<td>Stakeholders recognition and financial, or capacity support</td>
<td>Limited personnel</td>
<td>Few constrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Good participation by a few doers</td>
<td>Lack of networks</td>
<td>Relatively large population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Identity</td>
<td>Unique experience for visitor</td>
<td>Lack exposure</td>
<td>Flavoring and attractiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPNP Location</td>
<td>Situated near to San Ignacio Town</td>
<td>Weather affects access</td>
<td>Villages as a destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Strong elements for promotion</td>
<td>Insufficient exposure</td>
<td>Large potential in the market - local visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pricing</td>
<td>Good value for money</td>
<td>Insufficient selling</td>
<td>Cooperative means available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products</td>
<td>Variety and Uniqueness</td>
<td>Not properly packaged</td>
<td>Variety and accentuation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carrying capacity

Relatively large population

Lack of sufficiently committed person

Overworked theme and not differentiated enough

Environmental challenge

Inadequate packaging, Lack of competency in selling Too few channels

Loss of prime attraction

Sameness to others
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>developed</th>
<th>Capacity to differentiate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Good cause</td>
<td>Competiton high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low Assertives and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>insufficient capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>Close to major tourist hub</td>
<td>Help is available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service</td>
<td>Friendly and welcoming</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Alliances</td>
<td>Inter-village cooperation</td>
<td>Local and national linkages inadequate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                |           | Help available |
|                |           | Loss of revenue |
|                |           | Major assistance available in several fields |
|                |           | Pace of development too slow |

**Conflict Management**

Externally, the most critical issue facing the IS is the re-designation of a portion of the EPNP and re-alignment of the park which has already been legally effected. The status for a significant part of the EPNP, the south-eastern portion near Blanctaneux/Big Rock/Five Sisters resorts, has been re-designated to 'reserve' from 'national park'. This move represents a serious challenge to the integrity of the idea of a co-managed protected area, since the prime and most accessible natural attractions have been removed from the co-management of IS and passed back into the direct management of the Forestry Department. Negotiations were not conducted with the IS and a new area was defined to be exchanged for the re-designated portion. There have also been reports of promises of significant acreage which contain some important physical attractions as grants and sales to individuals.

Internally, there have been occasional challenges to the style and methodology of the executive but they have not been reported to have risen to the level of conflict. They have been mutually discussed, mitigated and resolved enough that they do not presently pose a major threat enough to render the organization.

**Strategic Plan/Action Plans**

The association is still in the drafting stage for the co-management plan and is operating with short-term planning. The organization does not and has never had executable use and development plans -business plans with annual budgets, annual work plans and a marketing plan. The limit of their budgeting experience was gained from preparation of proposals for funding of projects or specific activities. This deficiency may be due to the social perspective and service orientation of the IS rather than that the EPNP is a real resource for revenue generation. There is even some uncertainty in direction arising out of not having the approved management plan.

**Benchmarking**

Although there have been contacts with a number of CBO's and NGO's over the course of the existence of the IS, the consulting team could not discern a benchmark organization identified for replication of best practices.

**Best Practices**

Best practices could not be determined to be in operation or as a model for planning or behavior.
Team Work
There was some evidence of formal teaming inside the organization as well as with partners from the outside. These partners typically performed infrastructural work such as building shelters, marking trails, improving access and providing training in survival skills. Responsibilities are typically shared amongst individual members in matrix arrangements. Minimal performance reviews are carried out and incrementally organized change although present is not occurring as it would in a quality organization. No reports were made of external audits or diagnostic reviews such as this one.

Personnel
Personnel administration is very minimal as the organization operates with a very small number of people. The organization has a total of 2 direct employees who are park rangers and who are supervised by the part-time office manager who is also the Treasurer of the Board of Directors.

In-service
The IS members have undergone a number of on-the-job training modules, seminars or workshops that have given them opportunities to gain hands-on competency in the skill areas of tour guiding, park management, organic agricultural technology, organization, planning. These short term training courses have been conducted by other NGO’s or by Government agencies such as the Forest and Archaeology Departments.

Marketing
The IS has a very low marketing perception and lacks assertiveness. An internal structure or functional group dedicated to marketing and selling of the park is absent. Interviews with several tour operators, hotels and the general public did not elicit much knowledge about the existence and attractiveness of the park. Contrasting this lack of knowledge about the park is the considerable awareness of San Antonio and its most famous son - Don Elijio Panti. Unfortunately, this awareness and meaning has reached a peak and is fading as time goes on which results in the loss of a marketing handle and to a certain extent an identity.

Financial Management
The organization has performed very good financial management and reporting in project accountability and record-keeping. Financial perspectives are strong in fiduciary ways in those cases where external funding is involved but weakly practiced as a tool of management whether for annual operations or for sustainability and growth.

The society has insufficient financial resources and its accounting needs improvement. They currently use a basic spreadsheet format which does not lend itself to financial management except for straight reporting of revenues and expenses. A set of accounting statements needs to be prepared for the EPNP so that true values can be ascertained as well as to establish equity.
Administration
Given the limited resources and the size of the park including the number and variety of attractions, the span of control is considered to be too wide for the IS. They have not been able to effectively manage and control the area as the rangers are too few in number and have an area of approximately 20 square miles to cover. This has resulted in lack of control of revenue and leakage.

Products and Services
The principal product of the IS with regard to the EPNP is the park itself which encompasses an area of 13,006 acres. The physical attractions and natural features of the park are numerous and include several waterfalls along the entire Privassion Creek, natural pools, caves and multiple types of arboreal areas. The wildlife is very diverse and the area is famed for bird watching. The Maya also consider the area to be a bio-reserve of useful, decorative and medicinal plants. A full and complete inventory has not been completed especially for the high areas.

The physical geography and landform gives rise to many recreational adventure type activities such as hiking, horseback riding, caving and mountaineering not commonly found in other areas. The development potential is magnified by the proximity of EPNP to the major tourist destination/staging point of San Ignacio and location along the path to the Mountain Pine Ridge and the major archaeological site at Caracol.

Access to EPNP is good but movement within the park is poor due to lack of roads and then they are only passable during the dry weather. Although the lack of good roads can be prohibitive to some prospective visitors, to others it is part and parcel of the trip and confers a level of exclusivity. This means that the client base has to be more tolerant and adventuresome. Access to the jump-off points, which are the villages, is facilitated due to improved roads and regular transportation services.

There is more to the EPNP than the park itself as it is the one part of the experience that has been packaged. IS has performed limited marketing of ancillary eco-tourism products and services which include: the villages and inhabitants (living culture, local foods, specialized tours, village stays), arts and craft (embroidered items, slate carvings, clay pottery) and traditional healing. The villages have a range of resorts ranging from the high end eco-chic (Pine Ridge area) through basic (the villages) to rustic ‘tipico’ (north Mountain Pine Ridge road). Additionally a number of gift shops and business establishments are located in every village.

Visitors to the area would normally have an interest in natural and physical attractions such as rivers, streams, waterfalls, caves, scenery, landscape, flora
and fauna especially bird watching, archaeology, ethnic food and customs, tradition medicine, arts and craft.

The overburdening question is that despite all of the above, large portions of potential revenue dollars pass right through the villages and except for the occasional hotel bus or tour bus stopping for soft drinks, very little stops in the villages as they simply pass on through.

The IS faces major problems of lack of management organization and coordination as well as revenue. Revenues were XXXXXX dollars in Yr 2005 which reflected XXXX visitors. Leakage due to undocumented visitors is unknown but has been estimated to be XXXXXXX person yielding XXXXXXX $.

**Local and Regional Industry Analysis**
The three communities operate in the district with the highest level of attractions, visitors, hotels and infrastructure. Statistics indicate that Belize 1,037,000 visitors came to Belize with a breakdown located in the following table. Additionally, the estimate of local visitors should be included since the EPNP would be attraction for them as well.

**Table 1 Visitors - 2005**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Belize</th>
<th>Cayo District</th>
<th>MPR</th>
<th>Caracol*</th>
<th>3 Villages**</th>
<th>EPNP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overnight</td>
<td>237,000</td>
<td>80,000***</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruise</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>270,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>19,361</td>
<td>4,769</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,137,000</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>39,361</td>
<td>16,769</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Caracol is used as an index of people passing through  
** The three villages are used as another index of people passing through  
*** Italized figures are guesstimates

**Market Segmentation**
It is difficult to segment the types of visitors from the point of view of visitors to the EPNP as statistics are not available. It is a fair comment to say that at least twenty-five percent of visitors to the district and 25% of the native district population represent a potential market for visitors to the 3 communities. At least 10 per cent of those who visit the three communities can be sold the attractions of the EPNP.

The consulting team did find concerted efforts to package the attractions of the villages and the surrounding areas but the efforts at promotion were too passive especially given the competition in the district.

**Buying Patterns**
Statistics are not maintained for the visitors that the park has received and so it is hard to determine the buying patterns of visitors. Potential visitors attracted to the EPNP would have several buying modes based on the method of presentation.
Stand alone – hosted by the IS, visit to an single or multiple attraction, single destination
Joint – hosted by IS or others, part of a group of attractions or route

**Main Competitors**
The Cayo District is known as the part of Belize with the highest concentration and variety of attractions. District attractions are complemented by the highest level of support infrastructure such as guides, tour operators, hotels, restaurants, transport, quality of roads, communications and marketing.

The competitors are the Guanacaste National Park, El Pilar, St. Herman’s and the Blue Hole, Mountain Pine Ridge, (southern portion) Caracol, Actun Tunichil Mucknal Natural Monument. These protected areas have developed co-management, proper visitor facilities, are close, more easily accessible, visitor friendly and contain many of the same attractions. In a crowded sellers market, better promotion with differentiated product and service gets the customer.

**Table 2 Ratings of Neighboring Destinations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Proximity</th>
<th>Attractions</th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Friendly</th>
<th>Known</th>
<th>Total*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guanacaste</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Pilar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Herman’s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Hole</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Pine Ridge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caracol</td>
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<td>Archaeological Sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPNP</td>
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The ratings are provided by the consultants based on a composite of characteristics essential to the average visitor/buyer.

All of the competing destinations are well publicized, advertised and promoted in a wide variety of media, channels of providers and potential visitors. Based on the score, it can readily be deduced that the EPNP has the lowest visitation and the lowest current rating. This score can be directly attributed to the lack of development and marketing. This finding can be contrasted against the potential of the villages/EPNP which is very high and as diversified as the best of the competition.

**Marketing**

**Sales Forecast**
The IS does not have a forecast for the number of visitors to the 3 communities and the EPNP.

**Sales Strategy**
Sales strategy is very elementary, passive and cannot be said to arise from marketing of the park or of active selling in the competitive market of attractions throughout Belize.

**Sales Program**
The IS does not have a very active sales program and contacts. Conversion rates of those contacts are unknown.
Sales Literature
The IS has published a tri-folded pamphlet which is of good quality and tasteful presentation. There is a reasonably good collection of technical literature about the geology, flora and fauna of the park but these collections are not in the possession of the IS. Ironically, much has been said and written about its namesake but not much is said about parlaying this exposure into contributions and revenue at the EPNP. IS does not have a website and is not currently operating with a link in other websites such as those that operate on behalf of the general or niche tourist industry of Belize.

Strategic Alliances
The IS does not have any strategic alliance with any organization in Belize for the purpose of tourism but has several alliances or memberships with organizations at home and abroad for social and cultural development.

Environmental Management
Although the IS is charged with co-management of the EPNP, the level of knowledge is more anecdotal than formal or scientific. No member of the group was found to have significant training in natural resource management although some training had been acquired in particular topics. The IS strongly promotes maintaining or not despoiling the environment. It has promulgated a number of rules which are imparted to the visitors and enforced upon completion of the visit with respect to waste.

Improvement Initiatives
Apart from the draft of the management plan, the ENPN does not have a master plan for long term development but the Forestry Department has a master plan for the entire Mountain Pine Ridge. The relationship and synchrony of the two plans are unknown as this time. Major initiatives such as improvements have to be planned and rationalized with an eye to revenue, especially at this time when funding is scarce or unavailable.

Security/Safety Management
The level of medical, emergency and disaster management is very basic and not well organized but elements of it are being slowly addressed through training courses.

Access Roads and Facilities
The number of facilities required for an area of this size is inadequate. New camps with basic facilities are slowly being established but are not being done in compliance with an approved development plan.

Access roads are being improved but only minimally so. The internal road system is poor and reflects the old legacy forestry roads designed for basic extraction access and fire fighting. Work was recently nearing completion of the camp located at the Privassion Creek Falls.
Trails and Signage
Trails are not well designed nor laid out and the park utilization signage leaves much to be desired. A universal system of signage should be implemented. This is an area where strategic linkages could be of mutual benefit.

Measurement and Support Systems
Systems utilized for the management of activities and functions are basic and limited but inadequate for better management. Measurement systems allow the formation of internal benchmarks and the baselines for the improvement of performance. Since the association does not yet have an approved management development plan then it is difficult to determine performance relative to planning.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The Itzamna Society has been charged with carrying out a program of co-management of the Elijo Panti National Park and has gained approval without the completion of its management plan. The consulting team from Wiezsman Consulting has addressed the items identified in the Terms of Reference

1.0 Under the Terms of Reference, the scope of services is defined to be achieved through preparation of a document for the positioning of Itzamna as an eco-tourism provider:

Problem Statement
Item 1.1 Conducting a diagnosis and situation analysis of ITZAMNA and its eco-tourist potential addressing the following - external environment, stakeholders and capacity of ITZAMNA to develop community eco-tourism, ability to improve.

The Itzamna Society is alive and active as an organization. It is located in a favorable area with a very high potential for eco-tourism. It lies in the path of access to other attractions with significant traffic. Its capacity for development of eco-tourism is limited. It is limited by its operating structure which is shallow and lacks focus for what is a major undertaking. The IS has significant assets,
spread throughout the three villages, which can be developed into a prime locus of eco-tourism. These include the river in Cristo Rey, the protected area/national park, cultural resources and a fairly decent road infrastructure.

The Izamna Society has to undergo a shift to a business mentality which entails aggressiveness and positioning of itself in the marketplace. Until now, the contributions have been largely voluntary but more than that is needed. One major gap is the lack of a hostel or hotel located in each village. Cristo Rey has the Crystal Paradise and other smaller hostels, the Pine Ridge has the upscale trio of resorts but San Antonio and El Progresso do not have anything worthy of mention.

**Recommendation**
The IS could do well to study the master plan of area since it indicates potential opportunities for the stakeholders of the entire area. Also absent are community development plans for each of villages and IS could perform a great service by investing effort to get each village to have one.

The management plan has to be approved as soon as possible. However, it must be noted that a management plan is insufficient when taken in the context of lack of funding. Following the acceptance of the management plan, then preparation of a derivative business plan is required.

Since the IS also does not have a business plan, immediate preparation is highly recommended even if in skeletal form and should include at a minimum - budgets, work plans and marketing plans. As a result of these major deficiencies, the IS has been operating a basic management infrastructure with ill-defined goals and objectives, crude developmental ideas rather than a significant road map that is good for several years. The IS has not developed a significant capacity and capability to manage such a grand undertaking as the EPNP but is capable of doing so. The initial ideas for forming and gaining control of the area may have been noble but the follow-up has been lacking.

Running and operating a national park of this size requires an organization, management infrastructure, funding and staffing much larger than is currently provided by or available to the IS. In terms of governance, the present body is adequate but lacks clear mission, vision and strategy for the park and is too much involved in the daily regimen of operating the park. A separate and specific mission, vision and strategy has to be prepared for the EPNP.

**Recommendation**

**Marketing Plan**
The IS is strongly urged to prepare a marketing plan that will more fully address the strategy and tactics to spread information about the communities and the EPNP as well as to outline tactics to get people to come.
In this plan the key areas to be addressed are the competition of local tourist providers, inside and outside of the three communities but in proximity that are groups or independents. Other topics should include properly identified and packaged products, superior facilities, setting standards for trails, signage, security, safety management.

Most of all, a clear identity has to emerge which sets this protected area apart from the others.

**Recommendation**
The structure of the governance body is recommended to be kept but a change in the representation is recommended. The three associated villages would send three members each to the governing board and one member to an executive body for EPNP, social and cultural functions. This change would widen the pool of participants and spread the obligations. The Chairperson of the governance body would be elected from the nine representatives.

Executive and operational responsibilities of the EPNP are not delineated well enough and should be addressed. The current board member ‘executive’ simply responds to irregular and sporadic calls from visitors rather than in a purely planned operational sense. An executive “action” body is recommended to be formed and will be composed of 7 members. Three members of this body will be selected based on a particular skill. This separate structure is recommended to bring to bring focus to eco-tourism and the park. Functional responsibilities will include administration and operations, marketing and development of the EPNP. The members will then elect an Executive Director on a rotating basis. The tenure of the executive body should be for two years but they can be re-elected to serve for another term of office as approved by the members. These proposals for re-organization mesh with the idea of equitable and wider representation, transparency and broadened participation of communities. involvement of youth and women. Key areas for consideration will be tours and products, infrastructure development, community liaison and education, marketing.

Assistance in institutional development and practical management is needed in giving fullness to the capability of the governance and executive bodies. This assistance can be obtained from several sources and can be a combination of efforts provided by the Belize Tourist Industry Association or other association and educational institutions.

**Problem Statement**

1.2 Identification of the products that have potential to be offered to potential users of the subject area.

The IS and the EPNP is not fully unassessed in terms of the inventory and potential of natural attractions either singly or in combination with others under a
theme. The same can be said of the assets and products of the communities themselves.

Recommendation
The resources of the park should be organized under singular themes and eventually packaged into tours of one or more over the course of a half or three days. Some examples are:

- Natural World of Water - tracing the Privassion Creek
- Natural World of Animals – identify along with the Belize Zoo the species present in the park and develop a tour.
- Natural Flight – develop a package of bird watching, bats and butterflies in natural settings
- Maya World – modern and ancient habitation including the village experience as well as sites such as caves.
- Maya Underworld – caves and geologic formations
- Maya Food – visit to a farm along with Maya cooking
- Festivals – boost the culture by planning traditional festivals and ceremonies

All these can be achieved through a combination of the following:

- packaging the village experience with the park;
- packaging the attractions by specialties - eg bird watching, ethnobotany etc;
- packaging the culture and traditions;
- cooperatively promoting other endeavors such as fiestas, etc

Problem Statement
1.3 Outlining through consultation and a sales/marketing strategy the eco-tourism services suitable for hotels and tourism services clients.

Marketing Strategy
Strategy and Implementation
The EPNP as a visitor destination is significantly underdeveloped by comparison to the Jaguar Reserve. The park remains relatively unknown even to people in the district and as such is not accorded the recognition nor traffic despite being named after a well known traditional healer who lived and died in the principal village of San Antonio, gateway to the park. This lack of recognition was supported by a random poll of 20 persons in San Ignacio the surrounding communities. Another poll conducted with tour guides and operators showed that they were unaware of the responsible party for the management of the park and the pathway to be utilized for visitation.

Good connections to the general tourist industry and its purveyors are needed to be put into place so that benefits of cooperative marketing and exposure will accrue to the IS.
The strategy required to boost the authorized use and development of the EPNP has to be based upon a well defined and completed management plan which addresses operations and marketing. This plan has to meet the expectations of all the stakeholders and should match an expanded capacity of the IS. The plan should be complemented by a 5 year business and marketing plan. These plans then have to become the focus of the executive of the IS.

These plans have to envelop more than the end destination, the EPNP. This plan should address the infrastructure required to boost the awareness, support the community directly and enhance the visitor experience. The IS requires a physical presence, even if limited to a part of the day, in San Ignacio either through an agent, agency or employee. There are lots of students from the three communities that can be trained and motivated to spread the message especially to Belizeans.

The IS needs to strengthen existing linkages and create new ones through partnering with the various networks engaged in conservation, eco-tourism, scholastic, donor, government, NGO’s, CBO’s, naturalists, supplier associations as well entrepreneurs who have established unique and complementary facilities. The linkages with trade networks prevent re-inventing the wheel, are sources of market intelligence and helpful advice, can extend specialized contacts as well as allow the IS to benefit from the multiplier effects of exposure.

**Strategy Pyramid**

A strategy pyramid for marketing the 3 communities and the EPNP will be based on having direct marketing to the potential visitor as the prime strategy. The desired end result is the creation of an appeal featuring awareness and visits to the communities and park. This will take the form of internet-website and e-mails, billboards, visits to schools, establishment of a sales outposts in strategic locations such as Georgeville, San Ignacio, Tourist Village, Belize International Airport, etc.

The second tier of the strategy is occupied by to market to the resellers and re-packagers. These will require direct linkages and communications to ensure that priority is given to the EPNP.

The third tier of the strategy is to market indirectly through the tourism organizations such as the Belize Tourist Industry Association, Belize Tourist Board, transportation associations (buses, taxis) etc. This tier is especially useful for cooperative advertising and cost free publicity.

The target customers are schools and scholars, naturalists, adventurers, hikers, culture seekers and non-committed but more tolerant visitors of foreign and domestic origin.
Value Proposition
One concept in marketing that will prove useful is tying village tourism in with the natural tourism of the protected area. This is a multi-attraction approach and in essence provides “2 for 1” value.

Packaging of the three villages as a tour of its own or part of a larger package with the park is worth examining. Less than half a day would be required to visit the attractions found in any of the three villages. Additionally, another half a day would be required to visit one of the major attractions found in the EPNP. This means that enough attractions are available to be included along with lodging and food to provide a decent package for visitors foreign or local for at least a whole day.

Competitive Edge
The EPNP is a very large area which contains a large number of attractions, some developed and some not. Additionally there are three communities which are attractions in their own right and have a pool of people and services capable and qualified to be organized into a meaningful effort. The attractions are all located in areas that have good trunk roads and highways. There already exists potential visitors especially those people who are en-route to the “sexy main” attractions such as Caracol and the Mountain Pine Ridge system. The variety and range of attractions cannot easily be matched by others. A fair number of eco-touristic resorts are operating in the area that have clients desirous of using the park.

Customer Service
The level of customer service needs to be strengthened to create necessity of contact with the IS. The lack of understanding in the world at large of the responsibility of the IS has had a direct bearing upon the quantum of visitors to the park and especially on the number of unauthorized visitors.

It is difficult to discern the real level of public understanding of the administration of this protected area or that indeed it is a protected area. This can only be countered by a program of continuous education carried out by the IS and supporting public interest agencies.

The consulting team could not find enough evidence to support a significant number or high level of unauthorized visits. Unauthorized visitors are mostly locals and are not great in number. Foreign visitors most likely are in the company of a guide but not necessarily a guide associated with the IS.

Recommendation
A formal program of awareness and publicity must be prepared and carried to the general public, tour guides and operators of tourist facilities. This program should have enough repetition and exposure to ensure continuity of awareness.
A specific formal program of understanding should be presented to the district guide association and operators that sets the limits wherein unaffiliated guides can interact and are allowed to proceed. The communities and the EPNP require specially trained and locally knowledgeable guides to maximize the experience for the visitors.

2.0 Identify benchmark organizations and best practices that will contribute to the work of Itzamna by providing models and allow sharing of experiences.

There are several examples of eco-touristic community experiences in Belize although this mention does not judge their success.

Recommendation
Investigate governance and executive structure of several organizations to find best practices especially where the marketing of the protected area is concerned.

One of the oldest and still active is the Community Baboon Sanctuary which covers a relatively small area and limited number of attractions in a relatively remote area outside of the main transit ways. They very actively and very pointedly promoted the item of interest – the baboons, with a heavy message of conservation. The fundraising and revenues yielded enough to build the infrastructure and benefits accrued to the communities to the point where the baboons are important but are not the only important attraction.

Another interesting case is the Toledo Ecotourism Association which has a very interesting governance and operations structure. The principal feature of this structure is the degree of the spread of involvement in both the horizontal and vertical directions while at the same retaining a measure of individual character for each village.

The Cockscomb Jaguar Reserve is another example of good planning and execution. This protected area is similar in many respects to the IS and the EPNP. The protected area features a key theme - jaguars even though it is unlikely that visitors will see a live feral one. Nonetheless, the attractions and potential for a unique experience is built up to make people want to visit.