

Institutional Framework

The ancient Maya civic center of El Pilar straddles the contemporary political division between El Peten, Guatemala, and Cayo, Belize. This unusual setting impacts a series of research and development activities focused on all of El Pilar. The size of the civic center is presently unknown as the most comprehensive studies have thus far been concentrated in the eastern sections of the site, in Belize. Despite this, preliminary surveys into the western section of El Pilar, in Guatemala, demonstrate its extensiveness. Moreover, interviews within the Guatemalan community of La Zarca, to the south, suggest that there is considerably more monumental architecture that needs to be identified, mapped and inventoried as part of the greater site core.

The physical situation of El Pilar raises the need for protection both in Belize and Guatemala. This protection needs to address both the cultural and natural resources of the area. The development of biological corridors through the Maya forest is a conservation strategy that depends on regional integrity. Resource management designs for El Pilar need to consider the contiguous sections in Belize and Guatemala as a whole. The natural environment, cultural resources, access for tourism, and adjacent contemporary peoples need to figure prominently in the master plan.

The location of the Maya center of El Pilar advances a number of national and international issues and raises some important questions.

1. How do the legal and administrative aspects of both countries impact management designs and plans?
2. What are the legislative and regulatory framework in each country and how do they compare?
3. Are international agreements required between the two countries in order to implement an integrated management framework for the entire site?
4. What is the potential for involvement of non-governmental management or co-management of the site?
5. What are the security issues posed by the unique location of El Pilar?

These issues and questions are at the foundation of research and development plans for El Pilar and its inclusion is a prominent highlight of the pantheon of Maya sites in the regional tourism arena.