

**COASTAL WETLANDS AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS – OPAAL
PROJECT
A FRAMEWORK FOR REVISION OF
THE SYSTEMS PLAN OF PROTECTED AREAS FOR ST. LUCIA**

Background

The Systems Plan for Protected Areas (SPPA) was developed by an Advisory Committee established under the auspices of the St. Lucia National Trust. The Committee involved a wide range of governmental and non-governmental agencies. The document is therefore a product of an intense process of investigation and consultation that engaged many communities, agencies and people throughout St. Lucia.

The Systems Plan of Protected Areas is therefore offered as an instrument to help arrest the patterns of degradation and destruction and as a guide towards more rational use of the country's rich patrimony.

Protected areas are portions of the national territory of a country, which are placed under special management status to ensure that the resources they contain are maintained and made accessible for sustainable uses compatible with conservation requirements. The purpose of the Systems Plan therefore is to build upon past efforts and to establish a broad network of marine and terrestrial areas to manage the country's biological and cultural diversity.

The initiative to revise the Systems Plan document forms part of activities under the OECS Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods (OPAAL) project. One of the main aims of this project is to engineer the harmonization of legal and policy mechanisms with respect to Protected Areas management in the six (6) participating territories. Formalization of a Systems Plan is seen as a tangible measure towards operationalizing some aspects of the St. Georges Declaration of Principles for the sustainable development of the OECS islands. Opportunities will also be provided for forging linkages with the National Environmental Management Strategy (NEMS) and National Environment Policy (NEP).

The current document therefore defines the objectives, elements and operations of a comprehensive System of Protected Areas, and provides directions and guidelines, which are needed to move from concept to action. The plan was published in 1992.

Implications of an Official SPPA

The value of the Systems Plan for Protected Area document as a major instrument for resource management is fully recognized. The document provides a comprehensive inventory of key natural and cultural resources in St. Lucia. In addition, there is a listing of management categories based on internationally accepted classifications, management responsibilities and proposals for management.

A Systems Plan document would provide the basis for a more organized and systematic approach to development planning and resource utilization in general. These processes and considerations would now be guided by sound criteria based on our obligations to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), other international guidelines and standards, nationally accepted policies and development goals. Such an approach should facilitate greater appreciation and incorporation of sustainable development goals into

development planning. Strategies would have to be developed to operationalize the benefits and responsibilities that relate to the various international conventions linked to the management categories under which the various sites are identified.

Every effort should be made to ensure that the officially adopted Systems Plan document is upheld and utilized as an instrument to enhance, inform and contribute to the coordinated and cohesive management of the use of the country's resources.

Objectives of the SPPA

The development of the Systems Plan for Protected Areas was guided by nine (9) objectives. It would be necessary to review these objectives to determine their relevance in the current context. These objectives are listed below as follows:

1. to conserve all critical and potentially critical habitats necessary for the maintenance of animal and plant species;
2. to protect representative elements of the natural and cultural heritage;
3. to contribute to the maintenance of the country's water supply;
4. to sustain the productivity and quality of critical ecosystems, particularly in relation to forestry, fisheries and tourism;
5. to stimulate the sustainable use and restoration of degraded lands;
6. to encourage research on the cultural and natural resources of the country;
7. to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the natural and cultural heritage of the St. Lucian population;
8. to build self-esteem and a love of the country through the appreciation of that heritage;
9. to provide places for recreation, enjoyment and inspiration.

Management Categories and their Descriptions

There are eleven (11) management categories identified in the Systems Plan document. There are sites listed under nine (9) of these categories. Below is a listing of these categories and related descriptions:

MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTIONS
Forest Reserve	Ref. Soil & Water Conservation Act
Wildlife Reserve	Ref. Wildlife Protection Act. No. 9 of 1980
Marine Reserve	Ref. Fisheries Act
Nature Reserve	An area of land or sea or both designated for the protection of habitat for plants and animals, especially those which are endangered or threatened. Nature Reserves may contain representative samples of marine or terrestrial ecosystems. The size of a Nature Reserve is determined by the area required to maintain the integrity of the site and ensure protection of the habitat.
National Landmark	National Landmarks contain features that are unique or especially significant from a natural or cultural perspective. The size of each of these sites depends on the area required to maintain its integrity and ensure conservation.
Historic Areas and Sites	Historic areas and sites are the key elements of the nation's archeological and historic heritage. They can include pre-

	Colombian villages, sugar factories, forts and other military facilities, “brigand” sites, old cemeteries, or buildings of outstanding architectural merit. The term Site is usually applied to allocation containing a single attraction; the term Area is used when the attractions are more extensive and diverse.
National Park	National Parks comprise large areas of land or sea or both with diverse natural or cultural resources.
Protected Landscape	Areas of outstanding natural beauty, which give character to the national landscape. They may be coastal or inland areas where the diversity and juxtaposition of natural and cultural features combine to produce scenic landscapes. They may also contain critical habitats for plants or animals.
National Trail	National Trails are instruments for discovery and appreciation of natural and cultural heritage resources, which may or may not be part of the System of Protected Areas, and as such provide major access routes for non-motorized travel within and between management areas of the system.
Biosphere Reserves	Biosphere Reserves provide a framework for the integration of conservation and sustainable development. Certain protected areas assigned to national categories but meeting Biosphere Reserve criteria can be elevated to the international status under this designation.
World Heritage Sites	Ref. World Heritage Convention/Operational Guidelines

Rationale for Revision of the System Plan

The Systems Plan represents a comprehensive inventory of sites and elements of the island’s natural and cultural patrimony. The SPPA provides a basis for a cohesive and integrated approach towards resource management at the national level. It also provides a systematic identification and categorization of sites and resources in a manner, which should inform the formulation of zonal development plans and the development of guidelines for assessment of resources. Although some advancement has been made in the formulation of policies, the guiding and operational frameworks are lacking. A revised and updated Systems Plan document will give renewed impetus to efforts aimed at addressing these imperatives.

The justification for a revision of the Systems Plan document is based on the need to make the document more relevant to the changes, which have taken place over the twelve years since its publication. There has been a significant expansion in infrastructural development over that period particularly in the housing and tourism sectors. The

systems plan provides a mechanism to ensure that critical natural and cultural resources are highlighted and that these resources are safeguarded amidst the development thrust. The establishment of “green spaces” and recreational allocations in relation to residential areas will also be promoted within the document.

Although the SPPA was published in 1992 and has been used actively since then by regulatory bodies, resource agencies and developers, it has not been officially adopted by the Government of St. Lucia. The continued use of the document confirms its need and relevance. Its revision will be linked to efforts towards its official recognition and utilization as a key instrument to guide development planning and resource utilization.

Aim

To produce an updated System Plan of Protected Areas (SPPA) document to the Cabinet of Ministers for its adoption.

Outputs

The following outputs are envisaged as a result of the revision of the SPPA:

1. An updated thorough and comprehensive inventory of critical natural and cultural resources.
2. An analysis of each site based on the criteria outlined elsewhere in this document.
3. An Identification and prioritization of each site within the management categories.
4. Development of management guidelines with respect to each site listed in the SPPA.
5. An identification of general strategies and recommendations relevant to the establishment of appropriate management systems/arrangements for each site identified within the SPPA.
6. A strategy aimed at securing official adoption of the Systems Plan by the Cabinet of Ministers.
7. A strategy for public education and awareness on the systems plan.
8. Recommendations on how the SPPA can be adopted among all key sectors and integrated into their programmes.

Methodology

It is proposed that the review process be undertaken by a team of technicians headed by a consultant who will be responsible for coordinating the process and collating the updated/revised SPPA document based on the terms of reference provided. The technicians will conduct the actual site assessments and necessary updates/verification. The field exercises will be incorporate scientific methods of assessment as required. A steering committee will be established to guide and support the work of the technicians and consultant. This committee will comprise the following agencies: St. Lucia National Trust; The Survey & Mapping, Crown Lands, Sustainable Development and Physical Development Sections of the Ministry of Physical Development, Environment & Housing; Forestry & Fisheries Departments of the Ministry of Agriculture; The Bio-Diversity Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture. Consultations will be conducted during the review process at the agency and public/community levels to enable discussion and feedback. The draft document generated will also be reviewed by the St. Lucia OPAAL project Steering Committee.

It is envisaged that the relevant personnel required for the team of technicians can be drawn from agencies with direct experience and working knowledge of the existing resource base. These would include the Forestry Department, Fisheries Department, the Survey and Mapping Section of the Ministry of PDEH, St. Lucia National Trust, Soufriere Marine Management Authority, Folk Research Centre, HERITAS and the Archeological and Historical Society.

Criteria for Determining Relevance of Sites, Ranking and Priority

The following guidelines should serve as criteria for the review process in terms of determining relevance, ranking and priority of sites:

1. Economic, social, ecological and pragmatic factors.
2. Status of land tenure. To what extent has the current integrity of the site been degraded compared to what was contained in the original document.
3. What are the future considerations for the site if any, that may affect its integrity?
4. What is the current status of the integrity of critical habitats and resources within site?
5. What is the significance of these habitats and resources at the national level?
6. Are there any opportunities for exploration of stewardship or co-management arrangements involving the State, private ownership and stakeholders?
7. Are there any legal and institutional support mechanisms or structures in place, which may relate to management of the site or to the critical resources contained therein?
8. Is their potential for sustainability of a management system? That means, what is likely, how is revenue likely to be generated, etc.
9. Accessibility of site for management efficiency and also usefulness as education and /or research.

Timeframe

The onset of preparations for World Cup 2007 is seen as an opportune time to present and market the SPPA document. It is recognized that there will be a number of development proposals as part of preparations for this major event. A new and revised SPPA will serve as instrument, which can be used to identify key areas that must be safeguarded.

The plan is for the all field - work to be completed by the end of December 2005. A submission to The Cabinet of Ministers is to be made by May 30th 2006 following which it is envisaged that a final and approved SPPA document would be available by the end of June 2006.