

Mapping the Future;
Protecting what is Uniquely St. Lucia

The Saint Lucia National Trust (SLNT) is hoping that its second attempt to implement and obtain full legislative support for a System of Protected Areas for Saint Lucia, commonly called the Systems Plan is realized this time around.

Despite its technicality, a Systems Plan is an important document which all Saint Lucians will hopefully learn to appreciate and embrace. But what are Protected Areas and what does a Systems Plan set out to do? According to the World Conservation Union (IUCN, 1994) they are “**areas of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means**”. As such, a Systems Plan seeks to safeguard and realize sustainable use of our environment and ensure its continued contribution to the economic, social, cultural and spiritual well-being of this and future generations.

In 1992, the SLNT in collaboration with national agencies and funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), devised a System of Protected Areas for Saint Lucia, however, it was never adopted by Cabinet. Nonetheless, the SLNT uses the document to advise the Development Control Authority on the sustainable use of lands within Saint Lucia generally, and in identified Protected Areas, in particular.

The Trust, with the support of The OECS Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods (OPAAL) Project and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) just concluded a 2 day visioning and planning workshop at Bay Gardens Inn, Rodney Bay to continue the ongoing review of the Systems Plan. Participants were drawn from the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Forestry and Fisheries, the Ministry of Physical Development and Environment, the OECS, Durrel Wild Life Foundation, the Pitons Management Area Office and the Soufriere Marine Management Area, among others. The outcome of the workshop was the identification of sites to be included in the Saint Lucia Systems Plan, which is expected to be completed by December 17, 2009.

SLNT's Director, Mr. Bishnu Tulsie, said this project is of extreme importance as "we need to keep our historic and environmental resources intact for fear we destroy the very things we're trying to promote; Tourism and Agriculture". He also noted that kindling public support is an integral part of the process in gaining political acceptance for this visionary approach to the long term, sustainable development of our country.

On day one, the facilitators, Mr. David Haffey of Countrywise Consultants Limited and Ms. Ruth Blyther of The Nature Conservancy, set the stage for a vibrant discussion by asking the participants to share their vision for Saint Lucia. They also gave an overview of the outcomes of a recent Protected Management Effectiveness Workshop. The day's proceedings then zeroed in on priority areas in terms of natural (landscapes, specific habitats and ecosystems, terrestrial and marine), cultural and historic features that should be included in the Systems Plan.

The session wrapped up on Wednesday, April 8th with participants attempting to finalize sites for inclusion in the Systems Plan and determining how the selected areas will be categorized, protected and managed. Interestingly, Mr. Haffey said there are many misconceptions surrounding Protected Areas; such as they stifle development and enforce unnecessary restrictions. However, he was quick to point out that this is far from the truth as PAs can bring about not only ecological benefits but vast social and economic advantages to Saint Lucians.

Saint Lucia National Trust
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