

**VIRTUAL TOWNHALL CONSULTATION ON THE OVERARCHING POLICY
FOR JAMAICA'S PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM (GREEN PAPER)**

July 16, 2024



Canoe Valley

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Prepared by Maxine McDonnough

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Acronyms

CARICOM	Caribbean Community
EFJ	Environmental Foundation of Jamaica
FD	Forestry Department
GEF	Global Environment Fund
GOJ	Government of Jamaica
HDRC	Heritage Development Review Committee
IOJ	Institute of Jamaica
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JNHT	Jamaica National Heritage Trust
LFMC	Local Forest Management Committee
MDAs	Ministries Departments and Agencies
MEGJC	Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MRC	Ministry responsible for Culture
MRE	Ministry responsible for the Environment
MRF	Ministry responsible for Fisheries
MRLG	Ministry responsible for Local Government
NCTFJ	National Conservation Trust Fund of Jamaica
NEPA	National Environment and Planning Agency
NFA	National Fisheries Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRCA	Natural Resources Conservation Authority
PA	Protected Area
PAC	Protected Areas Committee
PAS	Protected Areas System
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

Background

A protected area is a clearly defined geographical area of land and or water that is dedicated to and managed for the long-term conservation and sustainable use of its ecological systems, biodiversity and/or specific natural, cultural or aesthetic resources. A protected areas system may be defined as a “set of protected areas, comprising a combination of two or more protected area categories, whose activities are coordinated to achieve the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources”.

Protected areas are established to protect Jamaica's biodiversity and cultural values. Indeed, protected areas which are appropriately governed and effectively managed have benefits which include: safeguarding biodiversity, providing ecosystem services, providing genetic resources for food and agriculture; conserving water resources; mitigating the impacts of natural hazards as well as climate regulation acting as natural carbon sinks, contributing to poverty alleviation by providing employment opportunities and livelihoods to people living in and around them and providing opportunities for research.

Jamaica's protected areas are managed under law by four public entities, namely the National Fisheries Authority (NFA) formerly the Fisheries Division, the Forestry Department, the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) and the Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA)/National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA). Management of protected areas is also undertaken in collaboration with other government entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In 1997, the Policy for the National System of Protected Areas was approved by Parliament. The Policy envisaged the core of the System as being the areas established under the mandate of the Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA), which would be the lead entity with responsibility for the protected areas system. The roles of the JNHT, the Fisheries Division, the Forestry Department, the Institute of Jamaica, the Water Resources Authority, local government agencies and NGOs were also addressed in the Policy. It was anticipated that the Policy would result in “enhanced cooperation and coordination of management activities among the many stakeholders in proposing, planning and managing protected areas across the country”. It is considered that this goal was not fully realized as there are still areas for improvement.

There have been fundamental changes in the institutional arrangements related to protected areas management since 1997 for example, the merger of the NRCA, Town Planning Department and the Land Development and Utilization Commission to form NEPA and the establishment of the Protected Areas Committee (PAC). Other developments include the establishment of the NFA under the Fisheries Act, 2018, NEPA and the Forestry Department becoming Executive Agencies (under the Executive Agencies Act) as well as the approval of the Forest Policy (2016), the National Forest Management and Conservation Plan and the Protected Areas Regulations under the Natural Resources Conservation Authority Act. At the time the 1997 Policy was approved, many parts of the System were only in the early stages of formation, while others were still being planned. The Policy stated that in order to facilitate the further development of the System, a protected areas system plan would follow, outlining the steps and actions to be taken. Following reviews of the Policy and its implementation, and a re-statement in 2019 of the need for a plan for the protected areas system, between 2004 and 2005 a project funded by the Environmental Foundation of

Jamaica (EFJ) prepared some elements of a system plan. In order to meet obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA), other elements including Jamaica's National Ecological Gap Assessment Report (NEGAR), Sustainable Financing Plan for Jamaica's System of Protected Areas (JPAS) 2010 – 2020 and the National Report on Management Effectiveness Assessment and Capacity Development Plan for Jamaica's System of Protected Areas were prepared starting in 2005, for a protected areas system master plan which was funded by the Forest Conservation Fund (FCF).

The Protected Areas System Master Plan: Jamaica 2013-2017 (PASMP) was prepared in 2013 and approved by Cabinet in 2015. A project entitled "Strengthening the Operational and Financial Sustainability of the National Protected Areas System" (NPAS) was approved and implemented over the period 2010-2017 with funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF)/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project's goal which was to "safeguard Jamaica's globally significant biodiversity", also supported the implementation of the PASMP. Among the outputs of the NPAS Project were an enabling policy for the protected areas system (draft Overarching Policy for Jamaica's Protected Areas System), preliminary drafting instructions for Overarching Protected Areas legislation (Protected Areas Act for Jamaica) and the National Conservation Trust Fund of Jamaica (NCTFJ) which was established to provide financial support for the operation of the protected areas system.

The 1997 Policy for the National System of Protected Areas is being replaced by a new updated policy which will incorporate some of the provisions of the previous policy, include elements of the PASMP and guide new legislation related to the protected areas system. (Taken from the Overarching Policy for Jamaica's Protected Areas System – Green Paper).

Welcome: Debbie Bissoon, Moderator

Ms Debbie Bissoon, moderator of the Virtual Townhall Meeting on Jamaica's Overarching Protected Areas System Policy, welcomed presenters, panellists and attendees at the virtual public consultation held July 16, 2024. She stated that this consultation was one of the most critical and far-reaching policies to impact Jamaica's present and future sustainability. The panel discussion was hosted by the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation (MEGJC) which has responsibility for policy formulation among its other portfolio responsibilities.

Ms Bissoon introduced the presenters including Senator the Honourable Matthew Samuda, Minister without portfolio, MEGJC with responsibility for the environment, water and climate change portfolios in addition to the blue and green economies; Mrs Arlene Williams, Permanent Secretary, MEGJC; Mrs Lorna Bailey, Director of Public Education, Public Relations and Communication, Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT); Mr Philip Cross, Principal Director, Legal and Forest Enforcement Division, Forestry Department (FD); Ms Deandra Roberts, Research Officer, National Fisheries Authority (NFA); Ms HuGarcia Green, Coordinator, Protected Areas Branch, National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA); and Dr Toni-Ann Miller, Director Natural Resources and Environment and Risk Management Branch, MEGJC. She noted that later in the meeting Ms Gillan Guthrie, Chief Technical Officer, Development Planning, Environment and Management Division, MEGJC; Ms Andrea Donaldson, Conservation and Protection Division, NEPA; Mr Stephen Smikle, Principal Director, NFA would be joining the panel. She advised that the presenters and panellists were drawn from agencies with responsibility for the management of protected areas.

To set the context of the afternoon's discussion, Moderator Bissoon provided the definition of a protected area for the audience:

"A clearly defined geographical area, whether on land or sea, that is managed for the long-term and sustainable use of its resources whether it is biodiversity ecological system or specific natural, cultural or aesthetic resources".

The many benefits include safeguarding biodiversity, and providing ecosystem services, conserving water resources, and mitigating the impacts of natural hazards. With Hurricane Beryl being a very recent memory, this service is particularly important. Protected areas also help to regulate our climate and provide employment for people living in and around them thereby alleviating poverty. A system of protected areas is necessary to ensure that Jamaica's diverse ecological areas, culture and heritage are effectively protected and managed.

She said that the experts from the ministry and the agencies were present to shed light on the content of the Overarching Draft Policy on Jamaica's Protected Area System with a view to finalising the Green Paper and submitting it to Cabinet for consideration as a White Paper and eventually a policy.

Ms Bissoon reminded the audience that their input was important and asked that they send questions and comments to megjc_jm or JIS YouTube pages. She advised that the Policy could be downloaded from the ministry's website at www.megjc.gov.jm. Comments might be submitted by email at ermb@megjc.gov.jm with the subject line Protected Areas Policy of Jamaica. Hard copies of written comments may be sent to the Environment and Risk Management Branch, Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, 16A Half-Way-Tree Road, Kingston 5, no later than July 30, 2024.

Moderator Bissoon invited Permanent Secretary Arlene Williams to deliver her remarks.

Opening Remarks by Mrs Arlene Williams, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation

Permanent Secretary Arlene Williams extended a warm welcome to all gathered in the studio, the staff of the Public Broadcasting Company of Jamaica (PBCJ), and virtual participants. She acknowledged that Senator the Honourable Matthew Samuda, Minister without Portfolio in the MEGJC and Ms Gillian Guthrie, Chief Technical Director, Development Planning, Environmental Policy and Management Division in MEGJC. Permanent Secretary Williams also acknowledged the presenters – Mrs Lorna Bailey, Director of Public Education, Public Relations and Communications, Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT); Mr Philip Cross, Principal Director, Legal and Forest Enforcement Division, Forestry Department (FD); Ms Deandra Roberts, Research Officer, National Fisheries Authority (NFA); Ms HuGarcia Green, Coordinator, Protected Areas Branch, National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA); and Dr Toni-Ann Miller, Director Natural Resources, Environment and Risk Management Branch, MEGJC.

Mrs Williams noted that the Policy had been tabled in Parliament as a Green Paper in March 2024. Its aim was to manage protected areas equitably and sustainably and to ensure the conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage while also delivering social and economic benefits. To achieve this the government would develop enabling policies and legislation to strengthen governance arrangements. The completed overarching protected areas policy would inform the development of an omnibus protected areas legislation to address governance and institutional arrangements for Jamaica's PAS.

Mrs Williams reported that in June 2024, the Environment and Risk Management Branch of the MEGJC undertook several consultations on the draft policy involving public and private sectors, NGOs and academia. These discussions provided meaningful comments which were used to bolster the draft Policy. She said that the aim was to ensure that the white paper produced would have benefitted from the recommendations from a wide cross-section of persons resulting in the production of a robust document. The final session, the town hall meeting, was intended to provide an opportunity for the public to share their views on various related topics including sustainable financing mechanisms and strategies to preserve Jamaica's natural and cultural heritage. The government, she said, was committed to building and maintaining a representative, interconnected and resilient PAS that supported ecological processes, promoted human wellbeing and conserved our natural and cultural heritage.

She observed that the protected areas were crucial in providing food and water, regulating climate change and sustaining livelihoods. Once finalised the Overarching Policy for Jamaica's PAS would complement key national policies such as the 2024 Watersheds Policy for Jamaica, the 2023 Climate Change Policy Framework and the 2017 Forest Policy. She advised that the MEGJC was currently working with the Forestry Department on a new Forest Act and with NEPA on an amendment to the Natural Resources Conservation Authority Act as well as the Wildlife Act to allow for an increase in fines and custodial sentences. These policies and legislative developments would further strengthen the island's protective areas network.

Permanent Secretary Arlene Williams declared that bold and decisive actions were needed to forge partnerships among all stakeholders to effectively manage the country's protected areas. Collective action

would conserve biodiversity, protect our cultural heritage, promote community wellbeing and pave the way for a sustainable future for all.

She reiterated her warm welcome to all and looked forward to a constructive and fruitful exchange of ideas and perspectives to assist the Ministry in revising the draft policy for submission to Cabinet for its consideration and approval in short order.

She declared the meeting officially open.

Keynote Address: Senator the Honourable Matthew Samuda, Minister without Portfolio in MEGJC

Senator the Honourable Matthew Samuda acknowledged the presence of PS Arlene Williams, Master of Ceremonies Debbie Bissoon, all esteemed panellists and senior members of staff present. Minister Samuda commended the Ministry's Environment and Risk Management Branch for its work on the draft policy which included hosting several stakeholder consultations during which several key issues relating to the management of protected areas were discussed. These included: the provision of adequate financing; strengthening of monitoring and enforcement regimes of the regulatory authorities; identification and employment of strategies to reduce pollution, particularly from land-based sources as well as the mitigation of the impacts of climate change. He noted that teams from NEPA and the Forestry Department were currently on the ground conducting assessments of the impact of Hurricane Beryl on the island's natural resources.

He noted, also, the importance of increasing public education and awareness of the goods and services provided by healthy protected areas. This would encourage public participation, particularly from the youth and the elderly, in decision-making in all aspects of the management of the PAS. Senator Samuda emphasised that the proactive engagement of stakeholders in the decision-making process was crucial for the successful formulation of national policies, programmes and management of the island protective areas network. This approach, he opined, fostered greater ownership and collective responsibility in achieving common goals. As part of this process, the government utilised stakeholder consultation as a critical tool to gather information and data through feedback about concerns regarding national development imperatives including management of the country's protected areas.

An integrated PAS was critical to protecting biodiversity, ecosystems and Jamaica's cultural heritage ensuring the conservation of vital resources for sustainable use. This was important as it was estimated that over a million species, worldwide, were facing the threat of extinction. The draft Policy emphasised enhanced partnership and collaboration among entities responsible for the regulation and management of these areas as well as other key stakeholders including the general public. Such a coordinated approach, he said, would foster more effective management of Jamaica's natural and cultural assets.

He advised that there were over 350 declared protected areas in Jamaica which encompassed diverse ecosystems such as the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park; forest reserves such as the Cockpit Country; game reserves such as the Glistening Waters Reserve; Marine parks such as the Montego Bay

Marine Park; and fish sanctuaries such as that located in Oracabessa. He observed that Jamaica had significantly increased its protected areas network over the last five years.

Recently, the government declared the Cockpit Country, the Pedro Cays and surrounding waters, and the Black River as protected areas. Additionally, in the 2023-2024 fiscal year the government introduced protected areas regulations under the NRCA Act. This year, the Ministry, in collaboration with NEPA and the Forestry Department, would commence work on the declaration of four new protected areas under the NRCA Act – Canoe Valley, Montpelier, Industry Cove and Bengal, in addition to the over 20 parcels of crown land to be declared as forest reserves and forest management areas under the Forest Act. These declarations, he pointed out, would help Jamaica to contribute to the global target of protecting 30 per cent of its land and 30 per cent of its exclusive economic zone by 2030 commonly referred to as the 30X30 target. Jamaica was, however, far advanced in terms of its terrestrial protected areas with approximately 25 per cent of the country's land declared as protected under existing legislation. The country was on track to achieve the target of 30 per cent protection by 2025 a full five years ahead of the stipulated date. He noted that there was some catching up to be done in terms of the marine areas which stand at approximately 15.4 per cent but work was continuing to meet the target of 30 per cent by 2030.

He observed that with the exponential increase in protected areas and the strategies outlined in the draft Policy including the realisation that adequate and sustainable financing was critical for protected areas management, MEGJC and its agencies – NEPA and the Forestry Department – were working diligently to secure the necessary financial and technical resources to support the protected areas network. He emphasised that the consultative session was an opportunity for the public to discuss resource mobilisation along with several other issues related to protected areas management in Jamaica and to make recommendations to further refine the draft policy.

He pointed out the significance of educating and engaging Jamaicans on the importance of the protected areas by strengthening communication, education and public awareness thus fostering a culture of conservation and securing the involvement of local communities. He said the insights shared, experience and recommendations would be invaluable in finalising and implementing the policy. Through collaboration and active participation, we could develop a policy that would address the issues and needs of all stakeholders. Collaboration, cooperation and engagement among government, community-based organisations and NGOs, academia and the private sector were being encouraged to effectively and equitably manage our protected areas. The preservation of natural and cultural heritage was to be seen not just as a duty but as a legacy to be protected and left for future generations. Together, Jamaicans could build a PAS as a testament to our commitment to conservation and sustainable development.

He thanked all participants for their attendance and said he looked forward to insightful discussions and collaborations on our protected areas

Moderator Debbie Bissoon thanked Senator the Honourable Matthew Samuda and PS Arlene Williams for their presentations. She then invited Mrs Lorna Bailey, Director of Public Education, Public Relations and Communications, JNHT, to expand on Jamaica's national heritage.

Protected National Heritage, Lorna Bailey, Director Public Education, Public Relations and Communications, Jamaica National Heritage Trust

Mrs Bailey reported that the Jamaica National Heritage Trust was a statutory body established by the JNHT Act of 1985 and fell under the purview of the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport. Its mandate was to oversee and:

- Promote the preservation of national monuments and anything designated as protected national heritage for the benefit of the Island;
- Conduct such research as it thinks necessary or desirable for the purposes of the performance of its functions;
- Recommend or undertake development deemed necessary for the preservation of national monuments or heritage sites; and
- Record any precious objects or works of art to be preserved and identify and record any species of botanical or animal life to be protected.

The functions of the JNHT included:

- Legally protecting heritage sites and buildings;
- Conserving archaeological objects;
- Providing technical advice to owners of heritage sites;
- Guiding the development/restoration of heritage sites and buildings, through its Heritage Development Review Committee;
- Conducting archaeological and historical research; and
- Providing archaeological and heritage impact assessments.

Legal Framework

Mrs Bailey advised that the Act identified a national monument as any building, structure, object or work of man or nature whether above or below the surface of the land or on the floor of the sea within the territorial waters of the island or within an area declared in an order made under subsection (2) to be within the maritime resource jurisdiction of the island.

The term/designation protected national heritage meant: any place name; any species of animal or plant life; or any place or object (not declared by the Trust to be a national monument), designated by the Trust to be a protected national heritage.

Preservation Notice

In cases where it was feared that a site, that had attributes of national heritage, was imperilled, a special mechanism, called a preservation notice exists for its temporary protection. The preservation order had a life of six months to allow time for research and investigation to determine whether the imperilled site should be declared protected national heritage or not.

Criteria for Declaration/ Designation

The criteria for declaration or designation of a national heritage were outlined in section 12, subsection 1 of the JNHT Act of 1985 which stated that “any structure the preservation of which is, in the opinion of the Trust, a matter of public interest by reason of the historic, architectural, traditional, aesthetic, artistic, scientific or archaeological interest attached thereto”.

Protected Sites under the JNHT Act

Mrs Bailey reported that as of June 2024, 319 sites had been protected under the JNHT Act – (292 national monuments and 27 protected national heritage sites). Of this number, approximately 16 were reported to be natural sites or had natural features.

Expenditure

She observed that these sites required funding for their maintenance and of the over 300 sites under the JNHT Act the JNHT owned or leased 30 sites.

For the financial year 2023/2024, some \$72 million was spent on the general maintenance of these sites. She shared that the JNHT did not have a source of funding to assist privately owned properties or properties owned by other government agencies.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Mrs Bailey pointed out that the JNHT did not attempt to carry out its functions on its own but collaborated with various stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, nonprofit organizations, and international partners to achieve its objectives. Through partnerships, these entities were able to leverage resources, expertise, and support to safeguard Jamaica's natural heritage.

Moderator Debbie Bissoon thanked Mrs Bailey for her presentation and invited Mr Philip Cross, Principal Director, Legal and Forest Enforcement Services at the Forestry Department to share information on Jamaica's protected forests.

Jamaica's Protected Forest, Phillip Cross, Principal Director, Legal and Forest Enforcement Services at the Forestry Department

Mr Cross informed participants that the Forestry Department was the executive agency charged with managing Jamaica's forests and conserving Jamaica's forest resources, particularly those situated on state-owned/crown lands. He noted that 47 per cent of Jamaica was forest cover and the Forestry Department managed 23 per cent of this area. Based on the last land change assessment report, 527 hectares represented 47 per cent forest cover and 23 per cent represented 122 hectares which comprised some 248 forest areas managed by the Forestry Department.

Mr Cross next described the different categories of forests. Among the island's main forests were closed broadleaf forests which were the most pristine forests which feature very limited anthropogenic impacts, if any. These comprise the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park located in the eastern region of the island – Portland, St Thomas, and parts of St Andrew. In the northwest, he pointed to the Cockpit Country. He also noted the disturbed broadleaf forests which were also high quality but, invariably, had certain levels of anthropogenic impacts and thus not as ecologically strong as the closed broadleaf areas. He added that there were also categories of timber plantations, swamp forests, and mangrove forests.

Mr Cross observed that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the national Protected Areas System Green Paper, thus, the two closed broadleaf areas mentioned were key examples of what the meeting would explore.

The Blue and John Crow Mountain Forest Reserves covered 45,000 hectares of closed broadleaf forest and encompassed the national park managed by NEPA in conjunction with other entities. He noted that the area also encompassed several national heritage sites and was, thus, of interest to multiple agencies.

He noted, also, that in 2015 the Blue and John Crow Mountains were designated a UNESCO world heritage site both for its cultural and natural value. In discussing the protected areas policy, it must be ensured that all the different criteria for declaring an area protected were captured in the manner in which they were managed by the different entities. He also cited the Cockpit Country, the largest stand of closed broadleaf forest in Jamaica comprising over 70,000 hectares of broadleaf forest. Gazetted in March 2022, it contained 25 forest reserves, forest management areas and five forest estates – areas that have not yet been designated under the legislation.

In addition to the forest reserves and forest management areas, the Forestry Department consistently worked to increase the level of protection granted to areas managed. He noted that there were 20 areas that had been verified and submitted to MEGJC for designation and five additional areas that had been verified and awaiting approval in preparation for designation. This comprised 1,440 hectares of forest increasing the area managed by the Forest Department but included areas already managed. It would, however, improve the level of legal protection.

Mr Cross went on to describe the functions of the Forest Department, beginning with the listing of legislation, policies and plans for the protection of forests including the:

- Forest Policy (2017);
- National Forest Management and Conservation Plan, (2016-2026); a ten-year plan prescribed by the Forestry Act which is to be updated periodically and which guides the Department's year-to-year activities within the forest reserves and forest management areas.
- Forest Act (1996);
- Forest Regulations (2001); and
- National Mangrove and Swamp Forest Management Plan.

Provisions of the Act

Mr Cross cited Section 5 – 7 of the Forest Act which outlined provisions relating to reserves and forest management areas including:

- The conservation of existing natural forests;
- The provision of land for the development of forest resources, including the establishment of forest plantations;
- The generation of forest products;
- The conservation of soil and water resources;
- The provision of parks and other recreational amenities; and
- The protection and conservation of endemic flora and fauna.

Provisions of the Forest Act

He advised that there were provisions in the Act that allowed the leasing of lands for the establishment of Forest Reserves but had to comply with specifications listed in Section 6(2):

- The land may only be used for purposes listed under subsection 1; and
- If the parcel of land included any crown lands the Commission of Lands should not grant a lease without the approval in writing of the Conservator

He pointed out that the uses to which the land was put must be consistent with the activities listed under Section 6(1).

Distinguishing features of protected forest areas

Mr Cross described the distinguishing features of forest reserves and protected forest management areas and what was looked at in making these designations.

Criteria for designation include forest cover, the quality of the forest cover and existing conditions in the area such as whether it was disturbed or whether it remained natural. The potential for economic opportunities inherent in resources within the area is also considered. He explained that in a forest reserve, there would be limited permission to utilise the resources including what was commonly referred to as non-timber forest products – resources within a forest but not timber or fruit. In a forest reserve access to those resources was limited. Forest reserves would be comprised primarily of broadleaf forest cover with minimal presence of agricultural and other anthropogenic activities. He explained that anthropogenic meant human influence.

He emphasised that the forest management area still had conservation value and was important to the preservation of ecosystems, but these were secondary or plantation forests and would be allowed permission for the sustainable use of resources within the areas.

Financing for Maintenance and Conservation

Mr Cross reported that the Agency's maintenance and conservation efforts were financed by a general budget of approximately \$1.07 billion that finances all the activities for the Forestry Department which, among other things, addressed the improvement of the island's forests. He said the Department also received support from various donors for different projects with J\$166 million donated for two projects:

- The Jamaican Mangrove Plus project financed by GEF (Global Environment Fund)
- The BIOPAMA Project financed by the IUCN.

Marine Protected Areas in Jamaica: Fish Sanctuaries; Deandra Roberts, Research Officer, Protected Areas Branch, National Fisheries Authority (NFA)

Ms Roberts explained that the marine protected areas in Jamaica – fish sanctuaries – were managed by the National Fisheries Authority (NFA). The fish sanctuary, she said, was one of the most well-known strategies for the sustainable management of coastal fisheries resources to protect them from overexploitation. She noted that the setting aside of selected marine areas to provide refuge for various species was introduced in Jamaica by J.L. Munro and colleagues after they had made thorough investigations of the biology and ecology and fishery dynamics of the important commercial reef fishes in Jamaica's coastal waters and Pedro Bank (offshore).

Munro's colleagues, Aiken and Haughton, were the first to set out a management plan for Jamaican fishery resources which included a section on the establishment of fish sanctuaries. Later, they identified 12 locations for the first fishery reserves or marine protected areas in Jamaica.

Ms Roberts listed the benefits of a fish sanctuary as follows:

- Increase in the fish populations affected by overfishing, habitat degradation and land-based nonpoint-source pollution;
- The spillover effect which would see an increase in fish stock not only in sanctuaries but also in adjoining areas;
- Maintenance of the genetic diversity of marine species within Jamaica's water
- Enabling species to reach full sexual maturity;
- Improvement in the catch per unit effort for fishermen;
- Increased opportunities for eco-tourism growth; and
- Provision of environments for further research and development initiatives.

The selection of fish sanctuaries was based on habitat assessment, stakeholder consultations and the existence of an entity to partner with the NFA. These consultations ensured that all participating stakeholders agreed on the location of the sanctuary.

Ms Roberts described the management arrangements which were generally put in place for the administration of fish sanctuaries.

- Sanctuaries were managed by public-private partnerships which required the signing of MOUs between the parties.
- If no partner, NGO could be readily identified in a particular location, the Fisheries Division assumed the management of the Sanctuary

- Training, budgetary support, research and development, instituting policy and enabling legislation, and monitoring control and surveillance of the Sanctuary.
- There were two types of management systems. Some sanctuaries were managed by donor parties, and some were supported by subventions from the government

Current Status of Fish Sanctuary Work

Ms Roberts outlined the status of fish sanctuaries on the island. She noted that, since 2010, Jamaica has established a network of 20 fish sanctuaries (see table below) to conserve and sustainably manage the island’s marine fisheries resources. She said two new fish sanctuaries were declared this year – Grange Pen in St James and the Lucea Fish Sanctuary in Hanover. These sanctuaries spanned an area of 10,895.32 (ha). She explained that fish sanctuary status was declared by the Minister of Agriculture under orders privileged through Section 17 of the Fisheries Act, 2018. Illegal activities in these areas are punishable by law. It was intended to increase the area of our coastal fisheries waters being managed as sanctuaries to 20,000 hectares by 2027.

	Names Of Declared Fish Sanctuary	Parish	Year Declared	Managed by	Approximate sizes (Ha)
1	Three Bays	St. Catherine	2009	C-CAM Foundation	1,261.3
2	Galleon Harbour	St Catherine	2009	C-CAM Foundation	1,872.7
3	Salt Harbour	St Catherine	2009	C-CAM Foundation	1,022.1
4	Galleon St. Elizabeth	St Elizabeth	2009	The Breds Foundation	260.6
5	Sandals Whitehouse	Westmoreland	2012	Sandals Foundation	294
6	Bluefields Bay	Westmoreland	2009	Bluefields Bay Fisherman’s Friendly Society	1,359.409
7	Orange Bay	Hanover	2009	Negril Area Environmental Protection Trust	535.514
8	Montego point	St James	2009	Montego Bay Marine Park Trust (MBMPT)	302.796
9	Discovery Bay	St Ann	2009	Alloa Fisherman’s Cooperative	168.385
10	Sandals Boscobel	St Mary	2010	Sandals Foundation	99.115
11	Sandals Boscobel East	St Mary	2016	Sandals Foundation	18.7
12	Sandals Boscobel West	St Mary	2016	Sandals Foundation	21.0
13	Oracabessa Bay	St Mary	2010	Oracabessa Bay Foundation/ Fisherman’s Group	83.7
14	Bowden Harbour	St Thomas	1986	National Fisheries Authority	455
15	Bogue Island Lagoon	St. James	1979	MBMPT	450.0
16	Alligator Head	Portland	2016	Alligator Head Foundation	538.0
17	Bird Cay	Pedro Bank	2012	National Fisheries Authority	1,515.0
18	White River	St Mary	2017	White River Marine Foundation	150.0
19	Lucea	Hanover	2023	Grand Palladium Hotel	341.0
20	Grange Pen	St. James	2023	IberoStar Hotel	147.0
		TOTAL (Using Google earth)			10895.32 (ha)

Moderator Debbie Bissoon thanked Ms Roberts for her presentation and invited Ms HuGarcia Green to present on behalf of NEPA.

National Environment and Planning Agency and Protected Areas, HuGarcia Green, Coordinator, Protected Areas Branch, NEPA

Ms Green advised that her presentation would cover those protected areas that fell under NEPA's purview. She described the Agency's core function as taking the necessary steps to effectively manage Jamaica's physical environment to ensure the conservation, protection and proper use of its natural resources, with special attention paid to the management of protected areas.

Declaration of Protected Areas Legislation

Ms Green identified the relevant legislation, administered by NEPA and which governed protected areas. These included the:

- *Natural Resources Conservation Authority Act* which regulated national parks, marine parks "protected areas". NEPA had already declared 12 protected areas, with other areas to be declared from ecologically sensitive areas
- *Beach Control Act* ("protected areas") with two areas declared
- *Wildlife Protection Act* (game reserves/sanctuaries) with 20 areas declared
- Additional protected areas to be declared are Canoe Valley along the coast of Clarendon and Manchester and Montpelier in St James.

Protected Areas under the NRCA Act
 1) Black River Protected Area
 2) Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park
 3) Cockpit Country Protected Area
 4) Coral Spring- Mountain Spring Protected Area
 5) Mason River Protected Area
 6) Montego Bay Marine Park
 7) Negril Environmental Protection Area
 8) Negril Marine Park
 9) Ocho Rios Marine Park Protected Area
 10) Palisadoes- Port Royal Protected Area
 11) Pedro Cays Protected Area
 12) Portland Bight Protected Area

Management plan

Ms Green provided an insight into the administration of the protected areas which is guided by management plans that describe and set out the vision, objectives, strategies, management programmes and actions to be implemented over a given period for each protected area.

Management programmes implemented included:

- *Biodiversity Conservation* to improve the status of the island's natural resources and included programmes of mangrove planting; cleanup activities of beaches and mangroves; waste management programme competitions, sea turtle monitoring and the installation of signs.
- *Public Awareness, Education and Outreach* which aimed to strengthen public awareness of protected areas, promote sustainable use of resources and stakeholder support involved stakeholder engagement, competitions within schools and community groups; environmental signature day activities sensitization sessions with stakeholders and social media posts/websites (storymaps).

- *Monitoring and Enforcement* ensured a high level of compliance with regulations governing the protected areas as administered by NEPA which included marine and terrestrial patrols.
- *Governance and Administration* covered collaborative and responsive governance and provided the resources required for the efficient and effective management and administration of protected areas. It also included collaboration with NGOs. Partnerships represent an important mechanism through which the PAS is administered. Various types of collaborative arrangements exist as described below.
 - Agreements for the management of protected areas (e.g. Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust, Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation and Montego Bay Marine Park Trust) and to support project implementation
 - Multi-stakeholder Management Committees (in cases where there are no partnership agreements) collaborative efforts were strengthened towards the implementation of management activities within the protected areas

Financing is provided by the Government of Jamaica and the Natural Resources Conservation Authority.

Moderator Debbie Bissoon thanked Ms Green for her informative presentation.

She then emphasised the importance of policies in driving the measures to be implemented in protecting our environment and invited Dr Toni Ann Miller of the Environment and Risk Management Branch of MEGJC to make the presentation on the Overarching Policy on Jamaica's protected areas.

Overarching Policy for Jamaica's Protected Areas System, Toni-Ann Miller, Director, Natural Resources, Environment and Risk Management Branch, MEGJC

Dr Toni Ann Miller advised participants that their feedback would be important in finalising the draft Policy. She shared that hard copies were available from parish libraries and the offices of the island's municipal corporations across the country. Electronic copies might be downloaded from the websites of the Ministry.

Dr Miller noted that the primary objective of the Policy for the Protective Areas is to "effectively and equitably manage protected areas for the protection and conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage as well as for social and economic benefits".

Background

Dr Miller advised that the development of the Policy was guided by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. Section 13(3)(l) specified the rights of all Jamaicans to enjoy a healthy and productive environment free of threat and injury. She pointed out that it was also aligned with, Jamaica's National Development Plan, Vision 2030, with a focus on outcome 13 which focussed on sustainable management of the island's natural resources and outcome 14 which addressed hazard risk reduction and adaptation to climate change.

International Commitments/Country-led Initiatives

The Policy also sought to consider several international commitments/country led initiatives including:

- Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) with the national target of protecting 30 per cent of marine and terrestrial areas by 2025.
- Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People – Jamaica has committed to protecting 30% of its land and marine/coastal areas by 2030 (30X30 target)
- Global Ocean Alliance
- Leaders Pledge for Nature.

Definition of a Protected Area

The definition of a protected area was presented as a “clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem services and cultural values”. Examples of protected areas included: Palisadoes/ Port Royal and the Black River protected areas. The objective of designating these areas is to ensure long-term conservation of biodiversity, with their associated ecosystems services and cultural values.

Values & Benefits of Protected Areas were noted to include:

- Protection and conservation of biodiversity
- Provision of food, water, raw materials, medicinal and genetic resources
- maintenance of ecosystem processes: soil formation, nutrient cycling
- Regulation of climate change
- Opportunities for recreation and support to key economic sectors such as health and tourism
- Enhancement of mental wellbeing
- Cultural identity
- Habitats for plants and animals; food security, safeguards culture
- Protection of coastal and marine communities
- Enhancement of food security
- Provision of employment
- Safeguarding biodiversity and culture.

Status of Protected Areas

An account of the status of protected areas in Jamaica saw approximately 22.71 per cent of Jamaica's land and 15.47 per cent of the country's archipelagic waters are protected. In recent years, the following areas have received designation as protected areas under the NRCA Act: Pedro Cays and Surrounding Waters Protected Area – 2023; Cockpit Country Protected Area – 2022, and Black River Landscape and Seascape Protected Area – 2021. In 2023, 15 ecologically sensitive areas were declared by Prime Minister Holness, four of which will soon be declared as protected areas.

Threats were identified as: clearing of vegetation/forests for agriculture; unsustainable hunting and harvesting; mining and quarrying; habitat conversion; timber harvesting; encroachment; destructive fishing and farming practices; climate change; pollution; illegal fires; Invasive alien species; and mining and quarrying.

Policies and Plans

Dr Miller advised that several policies and plans had direct relevance to the protected areas.

- National Land Policy of Jamaica, 1997 – Currently being updated
- The Forest Policy for Jamaica, 2017
- Biosafety Policy for Jamaica, 2021
- The National Minerals Policy, 2017–2030
- The Climate Change Policy Framework, 2023
- Watersheds Policy for Jamaica, 2024
- National Policy for Gender Equality (NPGE), 2011
- Protected Areas System Master Plan (PASMP)
- The National Forest Management and Conservation Plan, 2016–2026
- Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development
- National Swamp and Mangrove Management Plan, 2023–2033 (draft)
- Ecosystem Restoration Plan (draft)

Main Legislation

Several pieces of legislation also directly impacted the PAS

- Fisheries Act, 2018
- Forest Act, 1996
- Forest Regulations, 2001
- Jamaica National Heritage Trust Act, 1985
- Natural Resources Conservation Authority Act, 1991 and subsidiary legislation.
 - Natural Resources Conservation (Protected Areas) Regulations, 2023
 - Natural Resources (National Parks) Regulations, 1993
 - Natural Resources (Marine Parks) Regulations, 1992
- Wild Life Protection Act
- Beach Control Act

Key Stakeholders involved in the management of protected areas were identified as:

- National Fisheries Authority
 - Fishermen Cooperatives
- Forestry Department
 - Local Forest Management Committees
- National Environment and Planning Agency, in collaboration with:
 - Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation
 - Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust
 - Montego Bay Marine Park Trust
 - Urban Development Corporation
- Jamaica National Heritage Trust

VISION: Jamaica’s protected areas system is ecologically representative and sustainably managed, preserving its ecological functions and services and conserving its rich biological diversity and cultural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

Types of Protected Areas

Types of Protected Areas	Legislation	Equivalent IUCN Categories	
Strict Nature Reserve (new)	NRCA Act	Ia	Strict Nature Reserve
Forest Reserves	Forest Act	Ia	Strict Nature Reserve
National Parks	NRCA Act	II	National Park
Marine Parks	NRCA Act	II	National Park
National Monuments	JNHT Act		
National Monument (natural site)	JNHT Act	III	Natural Monument
Protected National Heritage	JNHT Act		
Protected National Heritage (natural site)	JNHT Act	III	Natural Monument
Fish Sanctuaries	Fisheries Act	IV	Habitat/Species Management Area
Game Reserves	Wildlife Protection Act	IV	Habitat/Species Management Area
Protected landscaping/ Seascape (new)	NRCA Act	V	Protected landscape/seascape
Managed Resource Area (new)	NRCA Act	VI	Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources
Forest Management Area	Forest Act	VI	Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources
	Fisheries Act	IV	Habitat/Species Management Area

Institutional Arrangements- Protected Areas System

The Protected Areas Committee (PAC) was identified as the main body with responsibility for institutional coordination of the PAS and ensuring the effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policy and plans in collaboration with the parent Ministries for the entities with management responsibility for protected areas, including the JNHT, NFA, NEPA and the Forestry Department.

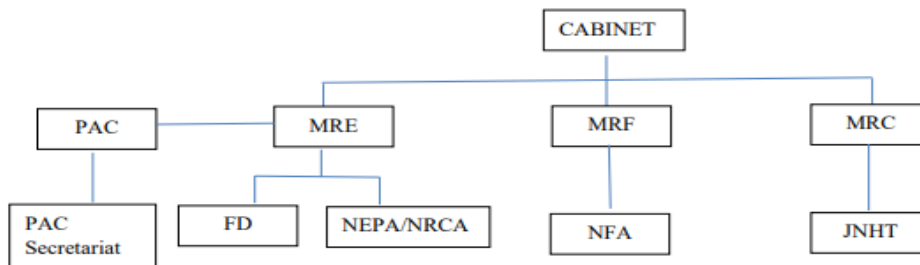


Figure 3: Institutional Arrangements-Protected Areas System

JNHT-Jamaica National Heritage Trust;
 MRC-Ministry responsible for Culture; MRE-Ministry responsible for the Environment
 MRF-Ministry responsible for Fisheries; NFA-National Fisheries Authority
 NEPA/NRCA - National Environment and Planning Agency/ Natural Resources Conservation Authority
 (Secretariat to the PAC)

Dr Miller noted that the PAC will be restructured and its capacity increased. It will be responsible for the implementation of policies and plans related to protected areas. This policy will inform the updated Protected Areas System Master Plan.

Implementation Plan

Dr Miller advised that the implementation plan could be found on pages 73-93 of the policy document. The plan highlights the objectives along with strategies, activities, timelines and indicators, estimated costs for different activities as well as the responsible entities. Her presentation would focus on the six objectives outlined in the implementation plan. She noted that selected strategies and activities would be highlighted with each objective during the presentation.

OBJECTIVE 1: Develop enabling policies and legislation and strengthen the governance arrangements for the effective management of PAS.

Implementation Strategies and Activities

1.1 Implement mechanisms for improved governance

- Enshrine the PAC in the overarching Protected Areas legislation
- Amend Natural Resources (National Parks) Regulations, 1993
- Amend Marine Parks Regulations 1992
- Increase the number of LFMCS and enhance their capacity
- Share current/accurate data and information about new and existing PAs declared/designated
- Increase active involvement of NGOs and CBOs in the planning and management of PAs

Responsible entities: MRE, MRLG, PAC, NEPA/NRCA, JNHT, NFA, FD

1.2 Develop, review and strengthen existing legislation and policies related to PAS management

- Promulgation - Overarching Protected Areas legislation
- Amend Forest and Beach Control Acts

- Mainstream biodiversity conservation and PA management into sector plans and programmes Responsible entities: MRE in collaboration with other relevant Ministries

Responsible entities include the Ministry with responsibility for the environment along with relevant agencies.

OBJECTIVE 2: Build and maintain a representative, inter-connected, resilient PAS that maintains ecological processes and systems, promotes human well-being and conserves, protects and preserves the country's natural and cultural heritage.

Implementation Strategies and Activities

2.1 Declare/ designate PAs to address under-represented coastal and marine, inland waters and terrestrial ecosystems

- Incorporate PAs in development orders, local sustainable development plans and strategies
- Establish and maintain ecological connectivity between PAs
- Where lands contain cultural assets the Commissioner of Lands will include an endorsement on the title indicating same
- Identifying and including national biodiversity conservation targets for PAs in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)
- Implement the National Mangrove and Swamp Forest Management Plan

2.2 Integrate nature-based solutions into disaster risk reduction efforts, strengthening disaster resilience at the local and community levels

- Review parish Disaster Risk Management Plans to ensure nature-based solutions (NbS) and/or ecosystem-based approaches (EbA) are taken into account
- Develop and execute capacity building programmes
- Mainstream disaster risk reduction strategies in PAs

OBJECTIVE 3: Improve protected area management effectiveness

Implementation Strategies and Activities

3.1 Improve PA site-based planning and management

- Prepare, revise and implement management plans and preservation schemes to include ecosystem restoration activities
- Prepare and implement business plans for PAs to facilitate green and blue investments

3.2 Periodically assess the status of keystone, threatened, endangered and rare species to identify appropriate management strategies to ensure their conservation

- Assess the status of keystone, threatened, endangered and rare species in PAs
- Develop and implement management strategies for effective conservation

3.3 Improve monitoring and enforcement

- Increase monitoring activities
- Evaluate current monitoring and enforcement strategies
 - identify gaps and areas for improvement
 - assess new methods for surveillance and enforcement including the effective use of technology

OBJECTIVE 4: Strengthen communication, education and public awareness and enhance and secure the involvement of local communities and other stakeholders in the conservation and protection of the PAS

Implementation Strategies and Activities

4.1 Increase public education and awareness

- Develop and implement strategies, programmes and plans to increase awareness and understanding of the values and benefits of PAs and PAS

4.2 Involve stakeholders in PAs management

- Utilize a variety of mechanisms and programmes to facilitate involvement of stakeholders including local communities taking into consideration youth and gender equity
- Develop and implement legislation for access and benefit sharing- ABS legislation
- National PA Database

OBJECTIVE 5: To provide adequate and sustainable financing for the PAs within the national PAS

Implementation Strategies and Activities

5.1 Identify and generate funds from diverse sources and enhance the effective and efficient use of funds

- Develop and implement sustainable finance plans
- Identify and generate additional funds for PA management
- Identify potential sources of funding to increase contributions to the National Conservation Trust Fund of Jamaica (NCTFJ)
- Secure a percentage of annual revenue generated from the Environmental Levy
- Development and implementation of a PAs resource mobilization strategy.

OBJECTIVE 6: Ensure that scientific and traditional knowledge contribute to the establishment and effectiveness of PAs

Implementation Strategies and Activities

6.1 To utilize scientific and traditional knowledge for PA management

- Continue to pursue formal agreements for partnerships in scientific research
- Develop and implement a national research agenda
- Develop a scientific database on the status of the island's flora, fauna and cultural resources to inform decision-making

- Promotion of scientific research in PAs and appropriate framework developed and implemented which must include free, prior and informed consent.

Dr Miller noted that the Policy has a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (page 94) which includes

- Expected Results
- Proposed Indicators
- Targets
- Means of Verification
- Methods of Data Collection

Dr Miller reported that the monitoring and evaluation of the policy would be led by the ministry with responsibility for the environment MRE) (which was currently MEGJC) in consultation with the PAC to ensure effective implementation. Dr Miller requested that comments be sent to ermb@megjc.gov.jm by July 30, 2024.

Moderator Debbie Bissoon thanked Senator the Honourable Matthew Samuda, PS Arlene Williams and all presenters for their insightful remarks. She reminded participants that their input was valued and thus they should place comments and questions on the ministry's Youtube and Facebook pages at [megjc_jm](https://www.facebook.com/megjc_jm) or the JIS Facebook pages.

Panel Discussion

Moderator Debbie Bissoon thanked participants for staying tuned in for the panel discussion and said she looked forward to an engaging session. She noted that joining the panel for the discussion segment were Mr Stephen Smikle, Principal Director, Capture Division, National Fisheries Authority; Mrs Lorna Bailey, Director of Public Education, Public Relations and Communication, Jamaica National Heritage Trust; Ms Andrea Donaldson, Senior Manager, Conservation and Protection, NEPA; Mr Philip Cross, Principal Director, Legal and Forest Enforcement Division, Forestry Department and Ms Gillian Guthrie, Chief Technical Director, Development Planning and Environment Policy and Management Division, MEGJC.

Ms Bissoon reminded the audience that this was the segment in which their questions and comments would be addressed. She reiterated that their input would contribute to protecting the health of Jamaica's protected area system for present and future generations. She emphasised that questions must be focused on the protected areas.

The first question was posed to Mr Philip Cross of the Forestry Department.

What benefits do the Forestry Department provide when an area is designated as a forestry reserve?

Mr Cross responded that the designation provided legal protection for the area so declared, primarily in terms of prohibiting certain activities. For example, cutting down a tree in a forest reserve made the perpetrator liable for conviction with a fine of up to \$5,000 or imprisonment. He explained that once an area was designated a forestry reserve it would be included in a forest management plan which involved

the removal of invasive species, the replanting of deforested areas, and the establishment of fire lanes to prevent fires from spreading, among other activities.

Mr Cross reminded the audience that private lands could also be designated as protected areas. A private landowner could apply to the Forestry Department to have his/her land designated as a protected area and benefits also accrued to privately owned forest reserves. In these cases, the owner was obliged to prepare a management plan and each year, if compliant, they received a certificate which made them eligible for a reduction in property tax for that area. Mr Cross added that the Forestry Department provided technical support as well as seedlings, usually without cost.

Who controls monitoring and enforcement in forest reserves and forest management areas?

Mr Cross advised that monitoring and enforcement was a part of the mandate of the Forestry Department. He noted that there were several teams of forest rangers led by senior compliance officers, who patrolled on a daily basis to determine if there were any agricultural encroachments and offences – such as the harvesting of timber resources, lighting of fires, and so on. Anyone caught in the act of committing an offence was charged. He noted that the Forestry Department had taken several persons to court.

Does NEPA have the human and financial capacity to implement the overarching policy and what are the plans to implement the policy beyond the monitoring and evaluation section?

Ms Donaldson responded that NEPA did not bear sole responsibility for the Policy and all entities which declared protected areas shared the task of managing the island's protected areas. She cited Dr Miller's overview which had indicated the role of the Protected Areas Committee (PAC) in coordinating the implementation of the Policy. She acknowledged that there was never sufficient human or financial resources for the management of protected areas, consequently, NEPA worked collaboratively with other agencies and NGOs to assist in prioritising the placement of funding. She noted that international funding was available but was generally targeted at NGOs. The agency partnered with NGOs and where funds were available it was used to support the management teams for the protected areas, but there was never sufficient funding, hence the importance of working in partnership with other organisations.

On average, what is the amount of money required to manage the protected areas?

Ms Gillian Guthrie said she didn't have an answer to that question. She explained that there were over 300 declared protected areas which were managed by four different entities – JNHT, NEPA, NFA and the Forestry Department. Each had its own budget for the management of its respective protected areas. She said the amount ran into billions of dollars.

She advised that some funding was allocated from the consolidated fund, but the idea was to identify different sources of funding. She reiterated that those NGOs to which authority had been delegated by the agencies also made efforts at resource mobilisation. She shared that new ideas were being explored such as incentives for NGOs, CBOs and the private sector to invest in the protected areas, perhaps through ecotourism-type activities; implementation of user fees (where they did not already exist); the utilisation of the resources in the protected areas to discover their viability in terms of revenue generation so that they could contribute to supporting themselves. The draft Policy looked at diverse sources of funding to supplement the subventions provided by the government.

What are the challenges related to the management of the national heritage sites?

Mrs Lorna Bailey said that one of the challenges was individuals attempting to squat and farm on these sites. Regular patrols had to be conducted to monitor the sites. Once the agency became aware of illegal activities taking place then officers were sent to investigate and prosecute where necessary. She noted that some perpetrators were cooperative and sometimes the JNHT was able to mitigate against these situations but in general, they dealt with each as it arose. The JNHT recognised the importance and necessity of intensifying public awareness activities.

Moderator Debbie Bissoon raised the issue of a lack of public awareness about these sites. She observed that many people were completely unaware of some of these over 300 protected areas and the regulations which safeguarded them and asked whether improved communications might not be an important strategy in alerting people living within protected areas as to what is involved.

Mrs Bailey acknowledged that more work was needed to sensitize people, especially those actually living in protected areas, on why these sites were important and should be sustained for future generations. The agency utilised its social media platforms, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, to extend its reach. The JNHT also held meetings with communities in the areas. Recently, a town hall meeting was held in Port Royal. She noted, also, that the older generation was taken into consideration in terms of communication channels used. The public education programme extended to schools.

What are the challenges of managing fish sanctuaries?

Mr Smikle observed that fish sanctuaries faced the same challenges as other protected areas in relation to a shortage of human and financial resources. He advised that Jamaica's maritime space was much larger than its land space and thus the need for coverage was much wider. He identified the high-cost factors as the vessels for patrol, fuel and human capacity, particularly in regard to those going out to sea for a 24-hour period. The major challenge in managing sanctuaries was to identify adequate resources to police not just fishers but to ensure that individuals with other interests do not enter sanctuary space illegally.

Do ecologically sensitive areas differ from other types with low impact development and are aimed at biodiversity?

Ms Guthrie responded that the Most Honourable Prime Minister, who is also Minister of Environment, had designated 15 such areas across the island. The designation was to allow the entities and the general public to recognise that their sensitivity was based on their ecological value which supports lives and livelihoods. The idea was that the protected area managers – NEPA, JNHT, Forestry Department and the NFA – would utilise their legislation to declare, as appropriate, the areas to be declared protected areas to give them legal force. There were certain types of activities that would not be allowed in these areas such as high-intensity development and mining and, thus, the Prime Minister determined the types of activities to be prohibited and sent a signal to authorities as well as the public as to how these areas should be viewed and dealt with.

What are some of the investments that would benefit from private sector support in the protected areas?

Ms Guthrie expressed her eagerness for the partnership of the private sector as the government was unable to achieve all the objectives on its own. She suggested that the private sector could pursue eco-

tourism ventures or pharmaceuticals. She pointed out that the protected areas were rich in biodiversity and the government was seeking environmentally sensitive investment which would enhance measures that the policy was putting in place. She made a call to the private sector to partner with the government to identify those opportunities that would enhance the protected areas – the fish sanctuaries, forest reserves and so on.

The suggestion was made by a member of the audience that it was time for the government to collect from tourists specifically for conservation and cultural protection and management. Studies have shown that visitors were willing to pay.

Ms Guthrie noted that leveraging taxes on tourists was something that would have to be discussed with the Ministries of Tourism and Finance. She emphasised that all ideas and recommendations were welcome in finalising the draft policy. The team was searching for innovative financing mechanisms to protect the system and maintain the conservation value. She reiterated her invitation for individuals to submit ideas.

Wendy observed that over the past 45 years numerous studies and plans for a protected areas system in Jamaica which benefitted from considerable input from scientists and conservation NGOs had been done and suggested she would like to see those efforts referred to in the current policy process.

Ms Guthrie referred to the Protected Areas Committee (PAC) which would be comprised of different agencies from different sectors and thus a multi-sector entity. Scientists and NGOs would be invited to become a part of this committee to help the government in the decision-making process. This collaborative approach was being promoted by the draft policy.

When will Jamaica sign the United Nations SPAW (Specially Protected and Wildlife Protocol) which has its headquarters in Jamaica?

Ms Guthrie advised that this had not fallen off the government's agenda. She reported that when Jamaica ratified any agreement there must be the legislative framework in place to guide compliance. She said that MEGJC, in collaboration with NEPA, was in the process of working on the Wild Life Protection Act. There was an amendment to be made to increase the fines and custodial sentences. The Ministry was working on an overall amendment of the Act and once finalised Jamaica would be able to ratify the Protocol. The ratification of any international instrument was the prerogative of the Cabinet, but the Ministry would ensure that all details were in place to allow the Cabinet to consider the matter positively.

What percentage of coral reefs are currently located within protected areas and are most of them directly managed?

Mr Smikle reported that he did not have enough details to be able to provide a precise response to the question regarding the percentage of coral reefs in protected areas. What he could say was that the fish sanctuaries comprised large coral areas and currently 10,800 hectares of marine space were protected as fish sanctuaries (about 7 per cent in terms of spatial coverage). He shared that work continued to look at gathering details regarding spatial coverage to determine areas in need of special coverage, areas of reefs, mangroves and seagrass. There were projects underway that would provide details in terms of percentages of various habitats cover.

Ms Donaldson concurred that it was difficult to provide precise figures but for every marine area declared under the Fisheries Act or the NRCA Act there were coral reefs, and all our coral reefs were under stress as a result of climate change impacts. Bleaching had occurred with the rise in sea temperatures. Even as efforts had been made to protect coral reefs there were external impacts beyond our control and ability to protect.

Once the Policy is finalised what is next for NEPA?

Ms Donaldson advised that NEPA would continue its regular programmes. There were four new protected areas to declare but there was also an implementation plan to be incorporated into the Agency's operational framework to strengthen the PAS that it managed. NEPA intended to increase partnerships with NGOs and the private sector. She pointed out that the activities in the policy were things the agency already did but which would now be more targeted in efforts to manage protected areas and ensure that communities within the protected areas were aware that they could continue to have sustainable use but were being managed to preserve them for future generations.

Ms Bissoon asked other managers of protected areas to respond to the same question.

Mr Cross said the Policy would be beneficial in providing direction for the Forestry Department. The essence of the policy was to ensure an efficient and coordinated approach to protected areas management. The Forestry Department would have an active role to play on the PAC which spoke to rotating chairmanship seeing periods of leadership and supporting role. It would guide the activities of the Department and enable efforts to complement the actions of the other agencies – JNHT, NEPA and NFA.

Mrs Bailey noted that it would allow all agencies involved to strengthen existing partnerships, be more focussed driven in all that they did to protect these areas and provide direction as they worked to achieve sustainability and promote and preserve the protected areas for future generations.

Mr Smikle said that the Policy enabled a more integrated approach among the agencies managing protected areas in terms of how marine protected areas were declared and encouraged the participation of the public. It would also reduce conflict among the users of the marine spaces. He noted that the consultative approach for fish sanctuaries was not the same as for marine parks. There were sometimes negative reactions from the fishers who may not have been consulted because of a different set of criteria. The policy encouraged consultations with a wider range of stakeholders when declaring a protected area.

Ms Guthrie said that the Policy provided an opportunity for MEGJC to look at gaps in the policy and legislative framework governing the management of protected areas; to look at issues such as resource mobilisation, to see how to build the capacity of protected area managers so that monitoring and enforcement could be further enhanced. Partnerships were critical to managing protected areas and the Policy allowed the exploration of methods for improving the effectiveness of partnerships among protected area managers as well as with other key stakeholders such as the NGOs, and CBOs. The Policy highlighted the need for avenues through which to gain additional information on the resources in our protected areas, noting that data was critical in identifying the holders of this knowledge – NGOs, CBOs, traditional knowledge holders, and scientists. She said that knowledge was power and it was necessary to put the knowledge in the hands of the people to give them the power to advocate for what wanted for their respective protected areas.

The government had recognised these special areas under law. The question was the way one interfaced with protected areas and managed protected areas in collaboration with other stakeholders to conserve biodiversity. This must be discussed and agreed upon. One of the main purposes of the Policy was to give knowledge to the people who in turn will use that knowledge to help to advocate for and manage protected areas.

Moderator Bissoon asked about the timeline of the Policy.

Ms Guthrie noted that this was the final consultation. There had been other consultations. There had been with public sector agencies, including those represented on the platform. She thanked them for their partnership. There had also been consultations with the private sector, the NGOs and CBOs as well as academia. She said that all comments and recommendations received would be reviewed and considered in the finalisation of the document which would then be resubmitted to Cabinet for consideration. She hoped that the document would be completed by the end of December. She stated, with certainty, that Jamaica would have a new protected areas policy by the end of the current financial year, March 2025.

Moderator Bissoon asked panelists to advise members of the public where they may send comments relating to the policy.

National Fisheries Authority: website - [www. Fisheries.gov.jm](http://www.Fisheries.gov.jm); Tel - 876-923-8811-3; website of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining.

Jamaica National Heritage Trust: Tel - 876-922-1287-8; whatsapp - 876-227-3310; email publicrelations@jnht.com

Forestry Department; website – www.forestry.gov.jm; tel - 876-618-3205; email - fdinfo@forestry.gov.jm

NEPA: website nepa.gov.jm; TI - 876-754-7540; email - ceo@nepa.gov.jm

MEGJC: Ms Guthrie reported that the draft policy could be accessed at MEGJC’s website www.megjc.gov.jm; comments sent to ermb@megjc.gov.jm. Hard copies of the draft policy may be accessed from all parish libraries and from offices of municipal corporations across the island. She asked for comments to be sent by the end of August.

Closing Remarks

Moderator Bissoon wrapped up the meeting by thanking all panellists Mr Stephen Smikle, Principal Director, Capture Fisheries Division, National Fisheries Authority; Mrs Lorna Bailey, Director of Public Education, Public Relations and Communication, Jamaica National Heritage Trust; Mrs Andrea Donaldson, Senior Manager, Conservation and Protection, NEPA; Mr Philip Cross, Principal Director, Legal and Forest Enforcement Division, Forestry Department, and Ms Gillian Guthrie, Chief Technical Director, Development Planning and Environment Policy and Management Division, MEGJC. She also thanked the presenters Senator the Honourable Matthew Samuda, Permanent Secretary Arlene Williams, Ms HuGarcia Green, Ms Deandra Roberts and Dr Toni-Ann Miller.

Ms Bissoon thanked all virtual participants for joining the meeting and sending in questions and comments and reminded them that additional comments should be submitted before the end of August.

She thanked the technical teams at the Jamaica Information Service and the Public Broadcasting Company of Jamaica. She shared that the discussion continued on the MEGJC, YouTube and Facebook platforms.