

THE CARIBBEAN CHALLENGE

Building Political Support and Ensuring Long Term Financing to Protect the Natural Treasures of the Caribbean



Photos: Aerial view of Andros Island, The Bahamas. (Above) Green sea turtle. (Right) (c) Jonathan Kerr

The Caribbean

The Caribbean Sea harbors nearly 8,000 square miles of coral reefs that support more than 1,400 species of fish. Its waters are a sanctuary for several migratory species and six of the world's seven species of endangered sea turtles come here during key stages of their lifecycles. More than 300 bird and mammal species are found here and nowhere else on Earth.

Millions of people depend directly on the region's natural resources for food and income. The Caribbean Sea generates over \$80 billion annually through fishing and tourism. The foundation of the Caribbean's culture and economy are healthy and productive land and sea-scapes. The natural heritage and vibrant cultures of the Caribbean face imminent threats such as unsustainable development, tourism and over-fishing that, if not addressed now, will likely lead to irreversible damage.

Currently, just seven percent of the coastal Caribbean is under any form of protection. However, it is well poised for long-term conservation efforts as it is a region with few conflicts, a thriving tourism economy and a high rate of literacy.

International Commitments to Protecting Places

Protected areas are important for human well being as they preserve fresh water sources, and are important supplies of food, medicinal and economic products. They are also integral to maintaining biodiversity in an intact habitat.

In 2004, at the seventh Conference of the Parties under the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-7), the governments of 190 countries signed a unified goal, known as the Programme of Work on Protected Areas, to create a global network of ecologically-representative, effectively managed and sustainably funded protected areas by 2012.

Under this Programme of Work on Protected Areas, the Caribbean nations of Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago have committed to protect 10 percent of representative terrestrial and marine ecosystems by 2010 and 2012 respectively.

The Caribbean Challenge at a Glance:

What: An unprecedented commitment by Caribbean governments to build political support and financial sustainability for protected areas in the Caribbean.

Who: Caribbean National Governments, Bilateral and Multilateral Organizations, International and Local Non Governmental Organizations.

Why: To ensure that countries have the capacity to honor their international commitments to safeguard their natural treasures for future generations.

How: By declaring new protected areas, effectively managing systems of protected areas, creating conservation trust funds and creating demonstration sites to showcase best practices.



Related Initiatives

The COP-7 commitments catalyzed five Pacific Island nations to launch the Micronesia Challenge at the COP-8 conference in Brazil in 2006. The governments of these nations committed to protect 30 percent of their marine and 20 percent of their terrestrial resources by 2020.

Inspired by the Micronesia Challenge, Grenada committed to protecting 25 percent of its marine and terrestrial resources by 2020. Previously, the Bahamas had pledged to place 20 percent of its marine resources under protection. Together, Grenada and the Bahamas spearheaded the efforts to create the Caribbean Challenge.



CARIBBEAN CHALLENGE GOALS

- Helping countries meet their commitments to the Programme of Work on Protected Areas.
- Legally protecting at least 4 million hectares of marine habitat and effectively managing at least 2 million hectares of new and existing marine protected areas.
- Ensuring sustainable financing of these national systems of protected areas through the creation of national level protected area trust funds and other conservation finance mechanisms, such as tourism and development derived protected area fees.
- Creating demonstration sites, showcasing conservation best practices that can be replicated throughout the wider Caribbean.

During the past four years, the governments of The Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Jamaica, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, supported by international and local NGOs, have begun to fulfill these commitments by completing master plans for each country's national system of protected areas. These plans identify the financial, staffing, and biological gaps that hinder the effective management of these systems.

Protected areas around the world and in the Caribbean do not have enough funding or staff to manage the park in a manner that safeguards these habitats. Making the historic opportunity presented by the Programme of Work on Protected Areas a reality requires national level action, regional cooperation and international support for these efforts.

A Vision for Marine Protection

Several Caribbean nations have come together with multi-lateral and bilateral agencies, international and local NGOs, and other stakeholders in an unprecedented initiative to legally protect at least 5 million hectares of marine habitat and to ensure the effective management of at least 2 million hectares of new and existing protected areas over the next six years.

Ensuring the long term sustainability of

these systems will require an ongoing stable source of funds. Via this project the governments will set up national level protected area trust funds.

The protected area trusts will be created with an endowment to provide sustainable funding as well as a revolving fund to manage funding from bilateral and multilateral agencies and from other conservation finance mechanisms, such as protected area fees derived from tourism or development.

Building on Opportunities and Financing this Effort

To assist in these efforts, The Nature Conservancy is committed over the next four years to help Caribbean countries protect their natural heritage by continuing to support the implementation of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas with a focus on enhancing protected areas management, identifying and creating new protected areas, and establishing sustainable sources of funding.

The participating governments will provide support for this project from their protected area budgets and tourism or development fees.

The Conservancy is working with the Global Environmental Facility and Caribbean national governments to attract

other partners and donors, such as environmental NGOs, multi-lateral and bilateral agencies and European entities.

Moving Towards the Goal

The governments of these Caribbean countries are actively working with local and international partners to create an effective and representative system of protected areas as the foundation of a healthy, vibrant and sustainable future. The international funding community and the Conservancy are helping to support these efforts. The Caribbean Challenge will be officially launched at a high level Global Islands Partnership (GLISPA) event at the ninth Conference of the Parties under the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-9) in Bonn, on May 27, 2008.



Photos: Caribbean Beach. (Above) (c) Jonathan Kerr, Fisherman throwing net. (c) Stephanie Wear