

PROTECTING OUR PROTECTED AREAS (ST. VINCENT)

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the King's Hill Forest Reserve by the King's Hill Enclosure Act, proclaimed on April 2, 1791, was the beginning of the protection of natural resources in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Since that important piece of environmental legislation, probably one of the first in the Caribbean, the government and people of this nation have recognized the importance of establishing forest reserves and protected areas for the protection of forest and other natural resources. Over these 200 plus years several additional reserves have been established. In this 32-island nation, with increasing population and increased and diverse demands for land, the protection of natural resources has become more complex. The forest reserves are constantly under pressure of encroachment, also upper watersheds, vital for the constant supply of water, are under threat of deforestation.

The forest resources are now being recognized for more than just timber, wildlife, and water. The recreational and aesthetic values along with the numerous minor products for crafts, horticulture, and medicines are being recognized. Thus, our approach to forest management must not be aimed at keeping the people out of the forest but must be geared to involving the people in its management and protection. Other resources such as coastal and marine must be protected for their ecological and economical importance

HISTORY OF RESERVES

The first forest reserve established in St. Vincent was the King's Hill Forest Reserve, established by the enactment of the King's Hill Enclosure Ordinance No. 5 of 1791. The reserve is a 21.2 ha (55 acre) dry woodland climax forest situated on a 220m high hill on the east coast of the island (fig. 1). On August 22, 1912 there was a proclamation that reserved all crown lands situated 1,000 ft above sea level. Estimates of the size of this reserve was 13,600 ha, approximately 40 percent of the

island's total land area. The 1946 Forest Ordinance declared the Central Reserve which encompassed all crown lands lying on the central ridge and mountainous interior of the island. This reserve encompassed all the forested areas south of Walliabou and Rabbacca rivers that form natural boundaries separating La Soufriere from the rest of the island.

In 1948 the crown lands forest reserve order established the following reserves: Soufriere Forest Reserve, Mesopotamia Forest Reserve, and Colonarie Forest Reserve. The Soufriere Reserve encompassed all crown lands on the volcanic mountain, its foothills and the mountainous interior north of the Walliabou and Rabacca Dry Rivers (Fig. 1). The Mesopotamia Forest Reserve encompassed the crown lands lying upon the catchment area of the Yambou River, including the Petit St. Andrew and Grand Bonhomme peaks. This area is the upper watershed area of the Yambou watershed. The Colonarie Reserve encompassed the area of crown lands lying within the catchment area of the Colonarie watershed (fig. 1).

PRESENT STATUS OF RESERVES

The King's Hill Reserve still exists today, intact. The easy access for monitoring, and the community interest in this reserve have kept its boundaries intact. According to Trevin et al. (1993) the forest is expected to continue evolving naturally as long as disturbances continue to be both small and infrequent. The reserves established by the 1946 Proclamation have been affected by clearing for agriculture. The Colonarie and Mesopotamia Reserves have had most of their areas cleared, with only the upper watershed areas and steep slopes, and very highest areas remaining untouched. The

Upper part of the Soufriere Reserve has not been severely affected by humans. However, periodic volcanic eruption does affect the vegetation cover. This area has recovered from a recent eruption in 1979.

These forest reserves, with the exception of the King's Hill Forest Reserve, have been encompassed by the National Forest Boundary, which was surveyed and marked during the five year Forestry Development Project of 1989-1994. In addition to the National Forest Boundary, the Forest Resources Conservation Act (Act No. 47 of 1992) lists three forest reserves. The reserves listed are the King's Hill, Cumberland, and Tobago Cays Reserves. There are other reserves which include the Colonarie, Campden Park, Soufriere, Mt. Pleasant, Kingstown, Dalaway, and Richmond. However, these have been awaiting gazetting and enactment by law since 1994.

The Wildlife Protection Act (Chapter 55), first passed in 1987 (St. Vincent and the Grenadines Government 1992), established the St. Vincent Parrot Reserve which covers the interior of the island. The boundaries of this reserve are included in the National Forest Reserve surveyed and demarcated as part of the Forestry Development Project completed in 1994. This Act also listed several islands, cays, and islets found along the coast of St. Vincent and in the Grenadines as wildlife reserves, the total being 24 (fig. 2). The Tobago Cays, one of the wildlife reserves, had legislation passed in late 1995 to make it St. Vincent and the Grenadines' first national (marine) park. At present, the preparatory activities to develop and manage this park are being done, with major funding for this project provided by the French Government.

RECREATION SITES

The Forestry Division has developed and now maintains recreation sites. These include a nature trail (Vermont Nature Trails) in the St. Vincent Parrot Reserve water falls, and historic site and a coastal tidal pool. These sites were developed by the Forestry Division for education, recreation, and protection from uncontrolled use by the general public. Since their development, the Division has recorded

increase use, and they have been included in the eco-tourist development and promotion of the island. However, these sites do not come under direct protection of the Forest Conservation Act, with the exception of those that fall within the boundaries of forest reserves or wildlife reserves.

CONCERNS OF PROTECTION

In the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Environmental Profile (Caribbean Conservation Association 1991), the following were listed as some of the factors contributing to a lack of enforcement and management of the forest reserves:

- Outdated forestry legislation
- Lack of power of arrest for Forest Officers,
- Lack of surveyed and demarcated forest boundaries,
- Increasing population,
- Shortage of man power,
- Lack of transport for officers, and
- Legal, political, and social problems associated with the eviction of squatters from crown lands.

Other concerns include the following:

- Lack of an integrated approach to the management of natural resources and protected areas
- Unclear responsibility for development and management of recreation sites, and
- Improperly coordinated approach by NGO's interested in protecting protected areas.

PROTECTING THE PROTECTED AREAS

Legislation

The passing of the Forest Conservation Act in 1992 (St. Vincent and the Grenadines Government 1992) addressed some of these concerns, such as the powers of arrest for officers, and provided up to date legislation sensitive to social and ecological problems. However, the Act is somewhat handicapped by the absence of accompanying regulations that have been written but are

awaiting passage through, and acceptance by, Cabinet. In 1987, Barbara J. Lausche, legal drafter with the World Wildlife Fund, Drafted the National Resource Conservation Act 1987 (Lausche 1987) that contained selected sections for forest, parks, wildlife, and watersheds. McHenry and Gane (1988) also produced draft legislation on forestry, wildlife, watersheds, and parks for the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The present legislation for forestry and wildlife do show some application of these drafts. However, legislation for parks and protected areas have not been developed.

National Forestry Policy

The National Forest Policy forms a part of the National Forest Resource Conservation Plan, and can be summarized as follows: The goal of the National Forest Policy is the conservation management, development, production, and enhancement of the country's resources in harmony with national programmes and development plans. These objectives are to be accomplished through

- Increasing the Contribution of the forestry sector to the country's social welfare and forest economy;
- Establishing, measuring, and maintaining the Crown Forest Estate;
- Managing the Crown Forest Estate;
- Developing forest industries;
- Providing areas and facilities for outdoor recreation, tourism, natural resource education and education, the conservation of genetic resources, and environmental protection;
- Protecting, managing, and utilizing wild flora and fauna which occur naturally on Crown and private lands and have economic, scientific, aesthetic or cultural value, or have a site protection value;

- Establishing and utilizing facilities for educating and training personnel to serve at different levels in the Forestry Division, in other Government agencies and in the private sector for management, development, and use of the natural resources within the Forest Estate; and
- Executing and promoting research to provide information and technology development which will permit better management and utilization of natural resources on Crown and private land.

This Forest Policy has been accepted by the administration of the Ministry of Agriculture, and up to this time the Division is unsure of its acceptance and enactment by Cabinet.

National Forest Resource Conservation Plan

The National Forest Resource Conservation Plan (St. Vincent and the Grenadines Government 1994) is the first for country, and was prepared for period 1994-2003 in accordance with the provisions outlined in Section 6 of the Forest Resource Conservation Act. No. 47 of 1992. In the Plan, the nation's forest resources which consist of (1) timber and other forest produce; (2) water resource; and (3) soils, wildlife, recreation, and other natural resources, were assessed in terms of current amounts, condition and status and compared to the national demand for each resource. The plan also addresses the threats to the sustainability of the forest resources loss occurring on crown land in sensitive upper river basins. The Plan also addresses the establishment of other forest reserves with accompanying management plans. Watersheds management plans are also to be developed for the 13 watersheds on St. Vincent and those in the Grenadines. These would be developed from model Colonarie Watershed Management currently in its implementation and analysis stages.

The successful implementation of the Forest Resources Conservation Plan relies on the fundamental

assumption that the required funding for proposed activities is available. To maximize efficiency, the Plan also proposed changes to the organizational structure, and increased staffing. However, the fulfillment of these assumptions is slow in coming. The Plan's success also depends on incremental budget increases. However, as in most small developing countries with limited finances, the incremental increase has not materialized. The Division's activities produce limited revenue, but other revenue generating areas such as user fees and licensing are still to be addressed.

The Plan and Conservation Act also promote the integrated approach to management of the forest resource. This would be achieved through the submission of all management and development plans to Governmental Departments such as Central Planning, other organizations such as the utility companies and all organizations who directly use the resource, for their review and consultation.

Education

Education plays a pivotal role in the success of the Forest Resources Conservation Plan by promoting public recognition of the importance of the nation's forest in protecting the environment, in maintaining water quality and creating wildlife habitats. The recreational value and benefits to ecotourism will also be promoted. The Forestry Division has recently completed a successful information exchange session centered on the Vermont Nature Trails. This program involved two sessions. The first informed the communities about the Division, the site history and its development. The second session was used to gather information on attitudes, willingness to assist in managing the site, and willingness to do surveys with the community.

Conclusion

The passing of laws and establishment of reserves have always been done in St. Vincent and the Grena-

dines. These are, however, not adequately enforced, protected, or managed due to restrictions of infrastructure, financing, and knowledge of their importance to the nation's development. Recent developments in Forestry and Parks have been greatly attributed to external funding. However, with the absence of external funding the process of development of natural resources becomes almost stagnant. For management and protection of the nation's forest resources and protected areas, the following must be achieved:

- Full government recognition and participation in policy and finance of the Forest Resource Conservation Plans,
- Integration of all the resource managers and exploiters for the sustainability of the resources,
- Participation of the public management at all levels to attain sustainability,
- Recognition and promotion of the Forestry Division as the lead agency in forest resource management
- Development of a protected areas plan including a park systems plan, and
- The development of appropriate revenue generating systems to reduce the dependence on government funds for protected areas management

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