

***"Strengthened management planning and implementation underway
in the Portland Bight Protected Area, Jamaica"***

Port of Spain, 23 January 2023 – The Portland Bight Protected Area (PBPA) Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) is one of the most biodiverse areas in the Caribbean region. Not only does it include the largest mangrove system and dry limestone forest in Jamaica, but it also provides essential habitat for a significant number of threatened endemic species, such as the endangered Jamaican Iguana (*Cyclura collei*). It is a multi-use protected area that integrates conservation of its interdependent terrestrial, freshwater, marine and wetland habitats and the ecological services they support with sustainable human economic, social and cultural activities.

The biodiversity of the PBPA is, however, under threat from both large- and small-scale pressures, including pollution, mining, charcoal burning and the invasion of alien species. These threats are also aggravated by the disruption of livelihoods and the local economy, which drives illegal and unsustainable human activities in the PBPA.



View from Portland Ridge to West Harbour, Jamaica © Dr. Ann Sutton

For the past 25 years, the Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation (C-CAM) has actively been working towards the sustainable development of the PBPA by promoting collaboration and partnerships between community groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector and government departments and agencies for the effective co-management of the area.

With support from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), C-CAM has embarked on a new project to strengthen the management of the protected area and mitigate threats. Launched in July 2022, the project, *Management Planning and Implementation in the Portland Bight Protected Area, Jamaica*, is focused on updating the PBPA Management and Zoning Plan (2023-2028) and preparing and implementing conservation action plans for several critically endangered species, including the Jamaican Hutia (*Geocapromys brownii*), the cactus *C. spinosissima*, the Jamaican Boa (*Epicrates subflavus*) and the Jamaican Skink (*Spondylurus fulgidus*).

This project also contributes to the reduction of the threat posed by invasive alien species (IAS), such as the Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) and the Cuban Tree Frog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*), to dry forest trigger species. The early control of these IAS is crucial; were they to become established in the PBPA's forests they would threaten endangered and critically endangered species like the Jamaican Iguana and the Portland Bight Frog (*Eleutherodactylus cavernicola*).

Zoning is a significant advancement towards the sustainable management of the PBPA, as it will lead to the reduction of actual and potential threats to biodiversity from unsustainable land uses. These uses include the development of industrial sites, mass tourism and new towns, the encroachment for small and large-scale agriculture, squatting and the purposeful and accidental release of IAS.

The zoning plan will also involve regulations under several acts, including the Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA) Act, the Town and Country Planning Act, the Forestry Act and the Fisheries Act, among others, to support the legal protection of important biodiversity habitats throughout the PBPA.

C-CAM's ongoing community monitoring/citizen science programme will be expanded to include more detailed monitoring protocols for climate change, air and water pollution and alien species invasion, among others. The citizen science programme gives community members an opportunity to actively participate in managing the PBPA.

This project builds on earlier work by C-CAM funded by CEPF during its first investment in the Caribbean (2010-2016), including sub-area management plans and an innovative conservation garden programme. The latter, for example, will form an important part of C-CAM's work to conserve the critically endangered Grey Bark Birch (*Bursera hollickii*).

"The main challenge in managing mixed-use areas like the PBPA is the various conflicting uses of the area," explained C-CAM Executive Director, Ingrid Parchment. "Because communities have been living in, and using, the space for years, even decades, an effort has to be made to promote public awareness and participation to help them understand the "why" behind the action."

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