

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

March
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International Day of Forests:

EFJ Strengthens Local Stewardship amid Hurricane Recovery

Local Forest Management Committee members in Jamaica continue their stewardship of forest reserves, even as recovery from Hurricane Melissa reshapes their work.

As the world observes International Day of Forests, the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica (EFJ) is highlighting the important role of communities in protecting forest ecosystems and is implementing an initiative to strengthen Local Forest Management Committees (LFMCs), ensuring they are better equipped to safeguard our forests in the face of mounting challenges.

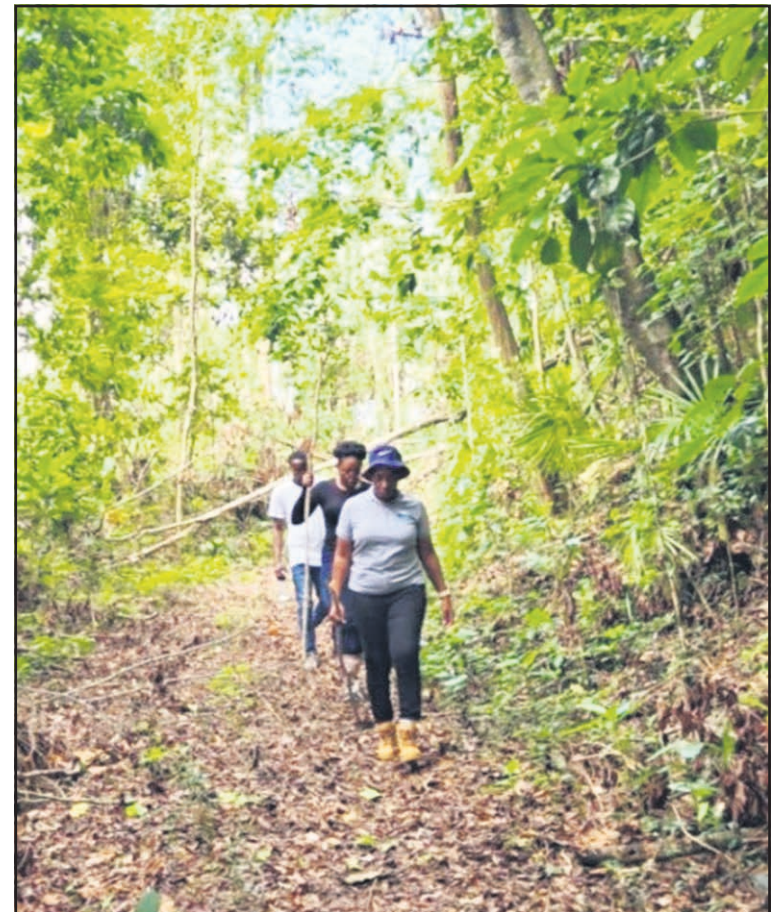
Funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), the programme focuses on LFMCs operating within Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). KBAs are sites of global importance for biodiversity, identified because they host endangered species, unique ecosystems, or critical habitats. In Jamaica, KBAs include the Cockpit Country, a rugged limestone landscape that supports endemic species such as the Jamaican Blackbird and provides vital freshwater through underground aquifers. These forests are central to watershed protection, biodiversity conservation, livelihoods, and climate resilience. As community-based stewards, LFMCs monitor reserves, promote sustainable use, and foster local ownership of conservation.

The urgency of this initiative was underscored

by Hurricane Melissa, which hit Jamaica in October 2025 as a Category 5 storm. The hurricane left billions of dollars in damages and devastated forest reserves, agricultural lands, and community infrastructure. Approximately 51% of Jamaica's forests, or about 270,000 hectares, were impacted, leaving reserves stripped and watersheds compromised. In areas such as Dolphin Head and the Cockpit Country, centuries-old trees were uprooted, trails blocked, and habitats for endemic species severely disrupted. LFMC operations were severely disrupted, with members displaced and livelihoods tied to eco-tourism, bee-keeping, and agroforestry deeply affected. The storm highlighted the vulnerabilities of these grassroots groups and the need for stronger institutional support.

EFJ's programme aims to close these gaps by equipping LFMCs with the tools, skills, and governance structures needed for long-term sustainable forest management. A key part of the programme is reviving the national LFMC umbrella body to bring members across the island together, strengthening coordination, collaboration, and shared learning. With this coordinated body, the LFMCs can speak with a stronger collective voice on conservation issues while improving efficiency and accountability.

Through the strategic growth of LFMCs, these community groups are not only improving their day-to-day stewardship but also building resilience



Dolphin Head forest reserve in the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa.

against future crises. By strengthening governance structures, enhancing disaster preparedness, and developing clear communication strategies, LFMCs will be better positioned to respond to emergencies such as hurricanes and forest fires. This proactive approach ensures that committees can maintain operations during disruptions, safeguard critical ecosystems, and support community recovery efforts more effectively.

The cornerstone of this work is community engagement. By strengthening relations with residents living near forest reserves, EFJ aims to raise awareness, integrate forestry initiatives into everyday life, and inspire a shared sense of responsibility for protecting these vital ecosystems.

EFJ's partnerships with LFMCs have delivered measurable results from reforestation projects, watershed protection and alternative livelihood programmes. In the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa, these achievements are more important now than ever, providing a foundation for rebuilding both ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

Capacity building and strategic planning activities including stronger communication strategies are helping LFMCs build resilience, mobilize resources, and stay active in the face of future storms.

On this International Day of Forests, the message is clear that protecting forests is not only about conserving trees, but also about safeguarding communities, livelihoods, and resilience in a changing climate.

With the Compliments Of the



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of Jamaica

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