

FINAL DRAFT

**SAINT LUCIA
FOREST POLICY**

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FOREWORD

[To be prepared by the Minister of Agriculture, Forest and Fisheries]

BACKGROUND

As a small island economy, the forest resources of Saint Lucia are highly valued by nationals and residents for the wide range of services, functions and utility products that the forests contribute to rural livelihoods and the socio-economic stability of the country. Principal among these are the conservation of water and soil resources, both of which are crucial to maintenance of life itself, as well as the sustainability of forest habitats for protection of biological diversity, for production of wood and non-wood products and for enhancement of the natural environment that supports outdoor recreation and ecotourism for both foreign and local visitors.

Since the island gained political Independence, successive governments have pursued these benefits without a formal policy statement. Indeed, from Colonial times, there has been an implied policy in the principal documents that guided the administration of forests, viz the 1946 Forest, Soil and Water Conservation Act and the 1970 Wildlife Protection Act, followed by the Forest Management Plan (1992-2002), together with various multilateral environmental agreements that the country has ratified. In recent years, the promulgation of other sectoral policies, such as the National Land Policy (2007), National Water Policy (2004), Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (2003), Social Policy (2003) and the Biodiversity Action Plan, has impacted on the forestry administration which consequently has felt the need for a forest sector policy statement to guide sustainable forest development and collaboration with related sectors.

Note is taken of the international forest policy dialogue that has been under way in the United Nations Forum on Forests and in other forest-related international instruments, particularly the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as the FAO Committee on Forestry, all of which have reinforced political commitment for conservation of forests and their sustainable management. Saint Lucia has adopted these principles and has sought to ensure that its forest resources and forest lands are managed and used sustainably to fulfill the social, economic, ecological and cultural needs of its present and future generations. However, in spite of progress made, there is still the risk of deterioration and degradation of forest cover and wildlife habitats, hence the imperative need to intensify and solidify efforts to achieve increased success.

Therefore, in keeping with current trends pursued by other Caribbean territories and tropical developing countries, Saint Lucia has decided to adopt this national forest policy statement at a time when the entire World is being subjected to serious economic crises concerning the threat of food insecurity, loss of biodiversity, the escalating cost of energy and the impact of climate change resulting from global warming. To ensure that the challenges of globalization are faced nationally, the development of the policy statement has been implemented by a participatory process to obtain the views, support and consensus of stakeholders throughout the country, and subsequent action will be pursued within the framework of a National Integrated Development Plan.

This policy statement is therefore truly national in scope and provides for enactment of new forest legislation and updating of existing wildlife protection laws, ultimately towards a development of a National Forest Management and Conservation Plan aimed at sustainable delivery of valued goods and services that emanate from the forests. The statement therefore embodies the commitments already made on behalf of the people of Saint Lucia through the

various bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements and conventions that are relevant to conservation and management of the country's forest resources. In that regard, the statement is endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers and will be approved by Parliament as the basis for enactment of a new Forest Act that will improve forestry administration and management towards the nation's sustainable development.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

Vision

The vision is for the effective protection and management of Saint Lucia's forests, soils, water supplies and biodiversity resources to ensure their sustainable contribution to the social and economic development of present and future generations.

This vision recognizes the forest resource as a national asset of major importance that occupies some 38% of the island's land area and provides natural habitats for wildlife, protective cover for conservation of water and land resources, sources of wood and non-wood materials (including charcoal and natural economic products), attractions that enhance the country's vibrant tourism industry, and the basis for educating the society to raise awareness about forestry and environmental values in a small island economy.

Goal

The National Forest Policy is to conserve and manage the forest resources of Saint Lucia for protection of water, wildlife and soil resources and to sustain the forests' contribution to the country's socio-economic development and the livelihood of rural stakeholders.

Guiding Principles

This National Forest Policy is guided by the following principles:

- All citizens have the right to enjoy the sustained benefits of well-managed forest and wildlife resources of the country and to exercise responsibility for ensuring that such natural resources are properly protected, effectively managed and used sustainably;
- Administrative decisions regarding management and utilization of forest resources are most effective if they are made transparently with inputs from stakeholders, based on sound advice, valid technical information and shared values;
- Public awareness and education are essential elements for developing well-informed and committed stakeholders needed to support the forest policy and legislation and for effective implementation of related plans and programmes;
- Financial support and appropriate incentives can go far in facilitating, encouraging and motivating the willing participation of all stakeholders in efficient management of forest resources;
- National, regional and international policies and agreements to which the country has given its commitment.

Policy Objectives

The objectives of the National Forest Policy are to:

- Conserve and enhance the quality and productivity of the country's forest resources (natural and man-made) for ensuring a sustained flow of goods and services;
- Encourage and foster the participation of stakeholders in planning and decision-making for effective protection, management and development of the forests and wildlife;
- Educate and maintain a high level of public consciousness regarding the functions of and benefits to be derived from appropriate forest and wildlife conservation (wise use and protection);
- Conduct research and investigation into all aspects of the flora and fauna of the forests and the influence of forest cover on maintenance of water and soil resources, so as to provide the basis for informed management and development action.
- Establish and maintain effective institutional arrangements and innovative financial structures to ensure the efficient implementation of this policy and relevant legislation, plans and programmes that emanate from it.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Development planning

In collaboration with its stakeholders and partners, the Government of Saint Lucia will adopt the Integrated Development Planning approach to prepare a National Forest Conservation and Management Plan and local forest management plans, in accordance with the provisions of the Physical Planning and Development Act. The local forest management plans will include actions for:

- conservation and protection of water sources, river banks, drainage channels and waterways;
- effective enforcement of the Forest Act, the Wildlife Protection Act and other related legislation, through approved regulations, mutual agreements and procedures;
- encouragement of forest resources management and development on suitable private lands;
- enhanced community participation in implementing and monitoring local forestry plans for sustainable livelihoods;
- protection of habitats for endangered flora and fauna and mitigation/adaptation against the impacts of climate change.

Forest land use for economic development

The Government of Saint Lucia will work with stakeholders and partners to reduce the incidence of deforestation and squatting on forest reserves while providing incentives to encourage private investment in well-managed forestry related ventures whether on public or privately owned lands. Such incentives will include:

- access to the forest for approved eco-friendly ventures like nature tours;
- training and assistance to community-based micro-enterprises like Agouti ranching;
- provision of tangible incentives to owners of private forest land for actions that conform to this policy and related legislation in protecting water supplies and minimizing soil erosion;

- provision of technical advice and planting materials for expansion management of forested areas, eg farm forestry;
- encouragement for increased sustainable use of wood and non-wood products.

Environment and natural resource management, hazard mitigation and disaster management

The Government of Saint Lucia is committed to a number of international and bi-lateral conventions that seek to conserve important ecosystems, including wetlands and wildlife habitats, while sustaining the productive potential of the natural forest resource base. The policy will therefore be directed at conserving the biodiversity of plants and animals life, while minimizing and mitigating the impacts of invasive alien species and climate change on the country's natural resources. Emphasis will also be placed on enhancing community-based watershed management to reduce the incidence of excess run-off and pollution on coastal and marine resources, improve the quality of water supplies for domestic and industrial usage, protect rivers and riparian vegetation in critical areas.

Legal Framework, institutional strengthening and organizational capacity

With the collaboration of stakeholders and partners, the Government of Saint Lucia will enact comprehensive new legislation and supporting regulations to give effect to this policy. The proposed law and amended ordinances will establish the authority for management of the nation's forest reserves as well as local institution for participating in forest management. In addition, provision will be made for encouraging management, development, financing and expansion of private forest resources for protective, productive and recreational purposes. To assist the Forestry Department in certain of its functions, the policy direction envisages the creation of local forest management committees with specific authority for certain forest areas. The policy also recognizes the right of the private sector to form its own interest groups to facilitate efficient delivery of forestry services to the state agency.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Policy linkages and integration

Implementation of the National Forest Policy will be led by the Government of Saint Lucia through the Ministry of Agriculture, and executed by the Forestry Department. In light of policy linkages with existing initiatives and programmes, the department will need to collaborate with other agencies and sectors to ensure maximum coherence and consistency. Where necessary, the Government will establish mechanisms and forums to facilitate integrated and effective policy implementation, for example by promoting the adoption of memoranda of understanding between agencies with overlapping responsibilities.

Institutional strengthening

The Forestry Department will be strengthened both to improve its operational effectiveness and also to increase its public outreach for attaining optimum participation of community groups in practicing informed forest management and conservation. In addition, the department will extend its advisory services to the private sector to encourage and support reforestation and afforestation on private lands for protective, productive and recreational purposes.

Funding and financial support

The Government of Saint Lucia is conscious of the increasing cost of public administration in the present state of the globalized economy, and will be examining various options for

supplementing the financial resources that can be devoted to forest conservation and management. In this regard, the opportunity for creation of a Forest Fund will be studied and appropriate measures instituted if found feasible. For the private sector, the Government will facilitate access to donor funding that is increasingly open to non-government and community-based organizations involved in sustainable environmental activities.

Research, monitoring and evaluation

Saint Lucia is well-known for its rich diversity of wildlife and the Government is committed to preserving such resources, especially those that inhabit the natural forest ecosystems. Efforts will be made to continue the research work that has been underway and to utilize the results to better educate, manage and utilize the flora and fauna of the forests for current and future benefits. This issue will also require increased monitoring and assessment of resource utilization and quality, both within and outside the forest areas, and including a determination of the value of forest assets and their contribution to the national economy.

Public Education and Outreach

The success of forest policy implementation relies to a great extent on the capacity of the forestry administration and the degree of public knowledge and awareness regarding the forests and current laws and regulations. Indeed, the Forestry Department is aware that it needs the support of local communities, and the public at large, to better manage the forest estate. Therefore, steps will be taken to mount a country-wide public education and awareness programme that will impact on schools and communities, as well as on users of the forest resources. The programme will also focus on forming local forest management committees in specific areas to assist the department with planning, implementing and monitoring activities to protect and develop certain critical forest and assist with enhancement of livelihoods derived from timber and non-timber products. It is expected that these approaches will facilitate participatory policy reviews every five years, while making desired adjustments as necessary from time to time.