

ABSTRACT

Ecological and Socioeconomic Issues in the Establishment of a National Park in Matura, Trinidad, West Indies.

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Successful conservation of tropical forests requires an improved understanding of the available biological resources and the users of the resources. Assessing the activities and impacts of the two major resource users (hunters and recreational visitors) in Matura is important for the effective management of the proposed National Park.

An ecological assessment was done by comparing aerial photograph for 1969 and 1994, field reconnaissance and a comparative analysis of hunting data (primary data collected from this study and secondary data from published information). A socioeconomic assessment was achieved through analysis of primary data collected in this study and secondary data collected from past surveys (1990 Government Household Census and the Eastern Northern Range Project Report).

The ecosystem is still intact, however identified threats to the ecosystem status quo: increased clearing activities by returning private land owners, squatters, loggers and marijuana cultivators.

The game species population was also shown to be under pressure from an increased hunting effort.

The local population depended upon hunting for both subsistence and cash income. Matura and Salybia benefited by an estimated \$154,000.00 per year. Matura was also an important site for recreation hunting by non-resident.

Over 50,000 recreational visitors visited the area for mainly beachfront activities and limited forest activity (hiking). This could be a catalyst for development in the area, as user fee of about \$2.00, as suggested by most users, could generate over \$100,000 per year. However, visitors are only willing to pay for facilities such as toilets, bathrooms, garbage bins, car parking, proper signs, improved hiking trails etc.

The study suggests that the establishment of a national park at Matura will cause some initial displacement and loss for unsustainable and illegal users - hunters, marijuana cultivators and loggers. However, if the new benefits are properly directed to the local communities for creation of employment and training, losses by those affected will be reduced. Hence, the success of conserving the natural resources in a park at Matura depends upon the controlled utilization of the said resources and the extent of cooperation from the various users and other stakeholders.

In addition, the park should be established as part of a wider land-use management plan for the Eastern Northern Range or expand the existing boundaries to ensure adequate lands for zoning of land-use activities.

There are those however, who deserve special mention.

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