

Abstract

Cost-Benefit Analysis of Eco-tourism in the Nariva Swamp

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The Nariva swamp is the largest freshwater wetland in the Eastern Caribbean, and comprises state lands, including the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary. Due to its significance as a conservatory for a vast array of flora and fauna, it was declared a "Wetland of International Importance" under the Ramsar Convention, to which Trinidad and Tobago is signatory. The Convention is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework to guide national actions for the promotion of the wise use and conservation of wetlands and for international cooperation in these matters. The direct uses of the swamp over the last two decades have been of an extractive and non-extractive nature as well as both legal and illegal. Intense rice cultivation during the 1980's led to significant changes in the hydrology of the swamp, and together with other unsustainable agricultural practices and economic activities, has been responsible for its degradation. A cost-benefit analysis of a sustainable alternative to agriculture to determine its economic viability and hence to inform the actions of decision makers and users of the swamp, was done in this research. This alternative was an eco-tourism project confined to the Bush Bush Island. The process incorporated the use of contingent valuation to determine the value of the non-use benefits of the swamp. The results show the benefits of conducting eco-tourism on Bush Bush Island are substantially greater than the cost of implementing such a project.

Keywords: Kathleen Charles; cost-benefit analysis; contingent valuation; Nariva swamp