

Establishing a Coral Restoration Program on the Private Island of Mustique

Establecimiento de una Programa de Restauración de Coral en la Isla Privada de Mustique

Mise en Place d'un Programme de Restauration des Coraux sur l'Île Privée de Mustique

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Coral reefs around the world are disappearing due to climate change, pollution and poor water quality. Mustique is a private island in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Mustique Company Limited is the company that manages the operations of the island. This includes public services and looking after the community and its natural environment, which is overseen by a board of directors. Within this framework, there are various committees that the company reports to which ensures sustainability throughout all programs. In 2015, the Mustique Company Limited established a coral restoration program through The Coral Restoration Foundation, to improve the health of their surrounding reefs in line with stewardship goals driven by their environment committee. There were specific objectives discussed between The Mustique Company Limited and Coral Restoration Foundation to achieve these stewardship goals which still holds relevance today.

Working with the local watersports team, they installed two coral nurseries using the tree method suspended with floats and anchored to the sea floor- one on the North side of the island in L'Ansecoc Bay and the other on the North-West side of the island in Endeavour Bay. They collected fragments of three different species of coral from around the island; Elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmata*), Staghorn coral (*Acropora cervicornis*), and Fire coral (*Millepora*). As of November 2019, the company has out planted over 7,500 fragments of coral harvested from over 50 trees, along the North and West coasts of Mustique. They have collected data to include out plant locations, genotypes and survival rates and have built local capacity by training all staff and interested volunteers in various aspects of the program from maintenance to monitoring.

The Environmental Manager as well as visiting restoration consultants and interns engage residents and guests to increase participation through presentations, tours, maintenance of the nurseries and out planting. The return on investment can be seen through guest feedback as they have observed an increase in marine life activity in and around the out plant areas. This correlates to our monitoring surveys using the Atlantic and Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment (AGRRA) tool where we have noted an increase in key indicator fish species. The company has not only invested in coral restoration, but also enforces their no take policy within the marine conservation area which is 1000 yards from shore, around the entire island. All harvested coral out plants are located within this conservation area. Overall, this is seen as a success story for the company as it achieves one of the original objectives of the program, in line with their commitment to preserving the island's natural environment.

Sustainable Grenadines (SusGren) is a trans-boundary Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) committed to the conservation of the coastal and marine environment between Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The Mustique Company Limited has worked alongside SusGren and governments from both countries to share best practices since the coral restoration program has been established. Through hosted knowledge exchanges where coral restoration practitioners visit the nurseries and out plant sites, they see where restoration has worked and where it needs to be improved and in turn, the island benefits from regional expertise. More importantly, there is an understanding of the work and management required to maintain this type of program.

Having sustainable financing through The Mustique Company Limited allows for public private partnerships among these stakeholders which further encourages coral restoration around the Caribbean. This was seen as another objective at the start of the program. The company believes it is essential to determine these objectives at the start of program and remain committed to fulfilling them through effective management and communication. Moving forward, the company continues to focus on achieving these objectives by improving the health of the marine ecosystem around the island and knowledge sharing around the region.

KEYWORDS: Coral reef, restoration, Caribbean, hospitality, sustainability