

The European BEST Initiative: An Opportunity to Strengthen the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in the European Overseas Entities

Iniciativa BEST: Una Oportunidad de Mejorar la Conservación y el uso Sostenible de la Biodiversidad en los Ultramarés Europeos

Initiative BEST : Une Opportunité de Renforcer la Conservation et l'Utilisation Durable de la Biodiversité dans les Outre-Mer Européens

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the Caribbean, 15 islands are European Union overseas entities politically attached to United Kingdom, France, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Figure 1). Those entities are very rich in biodiversity and natural resources and contribute to the Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot (Myers et al. 2000, Mittermeier et al. 2005). They host a high number of endemic species and are home to several Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), globally important for the biodiversity worldwide. However, serious threats are being faced by biodiversity there, such as the destruction and fragmentation of habitats, spreading of invasive alien species, pollutions to the natural habitats, and climate change.

For this reason the BEST initiative – which stands for Funding scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas – has been launched in 2010 by the European Parliament to promote conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in EU overseas territories.

From 2014 to 2018, a study commissioned by the EU and carried out by IUCN, SPAW- RAC and Réserve Naturelle de Saint-Martin in close conjunction with key institutions and existing networks will be conducted to ensure the sustainability of the BEST scheme and a better integration of the European territories in the Caribbean networks and activities.

Regional ecosystem profiles based on key documents, scientific data and on consultation with local or regional stakeholders and experts will be developed in order to identify marine and terrestrial KBAs. This assessment relies on the methodology developed by Langhammer et al. (2007) and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). Species and sites outcomes will be identified using the list of globally threatened species (IUCN RedList), geographically restricted species, congregatory species, habitats and ecosystems of ecological integrity and naturalness, ecological corridors.

The ecosystem profiles will also provide an overview of the socio-economic context, the local actors involved in biodiversity and conservation, and the threats affecting biodiversity. The current investment in biodiversity will be identified in order to define niche for investments and establish a five year Action Plan to submit to the European Commission. This Action Plan will highlight KBAs in the European Overseas Territories and Outermost Regions of the Caribbean region in order to set out a financial mechanism for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services

KEY WORDS: European BEST Initiative, biodiversity, conservation, species and sites outcomes

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Figure 1. Map of the 15 European Overseas Regions, Countries and Territories in the Caribbean region.

