

Updating Management Plans for Protected Areas listed under the SPAW Protocol

Actualisation des plans de gestion des aires protégées listées dans le protocole SPAW

Actualización de los planes de manejo de las áreas protegidas incluidas en el Protocolo SPAW

LABBOUZ LUCIE

SPAW Regional Activity Center (SPAW-RAC), DEAL Guadeloupe – Saint-Phy 97102 BASSE-TERRE
, lucie.labbouz@developpement-durable.gouv.fr

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

The Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region governs the SPAW Protocol, which aims to safeguard “specially protected areas and wildlife.” One primary objective is to identify and manage ecologically important zones across the Caribbean. In 2023, a network comprising 37 SPAW-listed protected areas was established. This collective initiative seeks to enhance collaboration among managers and stakeholders to improve the effectiveness of protected area management. Following recommendations from the 12th Conference of Parties, SPAW RAC undertook a study in 2024 to analyze current management plans and offer actionable updates to enhance their functionality and compliance with international standards.

METHODOLOGY

The project methodology combined a desk study and stakeholder consultations:

Desk Study: Analyzed existing management plans for structural completeness and relevance across 37 SPAW sites.

Manager Interviews: Conducted interviews with area managers to validate findings and understand practical challenges.

Template Development: Suggested management plan framework emphasizing key components like vision, resources, biodiversity values, and stakeholder integration.

Evaluation Criteria: Plans were assessed using a scoring system:

3 Points: High usability of plan elements.

2 Points: Present but insufficient detail.

1 Point: Missing or inadequate.

RESULTS

The analysis highlighted significant variability in the status and quality of management plans:

24% of SPAW protected areas had current management plans.

40% had outdated plans exceeding five years.

High-scoring elements included biodiversity value identification, thematic scope, and threat analysis.

Core weaknesses included resource allocation, time planning, and defining actionable objectives.

Managers emphasized the need for:

Financial Support: Adequate funding to maintain and implement plans.

Expertise and Training: Assistance in translating plans into actionable strategies.

Stakeholder Engagement: Strengthening collaborative decision-making.

DISCUSSION

The findings underscored a critical gap between the availability of management plans and their practical application. Even well-designed plans face implementation barriers such as limited funding, insufficient technical capacity, and stakeholder alignment challenges.

Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach:

Capacity Building: Develop training modules for area managers.

Template Standardization: Establish a universal management framework tailored to Caribbean protected areas.

Pilot Projects: Test and refine methodologies to update management plan in a few protected areas before broader adoption.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The 2024 study marks the first step toward standardized and effective management planning for SPAW-protected areas. The next phase involves:

1. Piloting management plan updates in 2–3 sites.
2. Scaling successful methodologies across the SPAW network.
3. Providing tools and guidance to ensure long-term plan relevance and alignment with the SPAW Protocol.

By fostering a collaborative network of empowered managers, SPAW RAC aims to enhance biodiversity conservation outcomes and contribute to achieving global targets such as the **30x30 Goal**.

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KEY WORDS: Network Of Managers, Protected Areas, Caribbean, SPAW Protocol, Management Plan