



Distr, LIMITED

UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.22
10 March 2021

Original: ENGLISH

Ninth Meeting of the Scientific and Technical
Advisory Committee (STAC) to the Protocol
Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
(SPA) in the Wider Caribbean Region

Virtual meeting, 17–19 March 2021

REVIEW OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC'S PROPOSAL FOR LISTING OF THE COTUBANAMA NATIONAL PARK UNDER THE SPAW PROTOCOL

For reasons of public health and safety associated with COVID-19, this meeting is being convened virtually. Delegates are kindly requested to access all meeting documents electronically for download as necessary.

ACRONYMS

SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
MPA	Marin Protected Area
PA	Protected Area
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RAC	Regional Activity Center
SPAW	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
STAC	Scientifical and Technical
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
EIA	Environmental International Agreement
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement

REVIEW OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC'S PROPOSAL FOR LISTING OF THE COTUBANAMA NATIONAL PARK UNDER THE SPAW PROTOCOL

SUB-GROUP OF EXPERTS

Ana Maria Gonzalez Delgadillo, *Colombia, Ministry of the Environment and sustainable development*;
Nacor Bolaños-Cubillos, *Colombia, Coralina*;
Gonzalo Cid, *USA, National MPA Center*;
Samantha Dodwell, *USA, NOAA*;
Emma Doyle (Observer), USA, GCFI.

INTRODUCTION

1. The proposal of the Dominican Republic for the inclusion of the Cotubanama National Park in the SPAW listing sites has been submitted to SPAW secretary for review on the 24th of May 2019th. Acknowledgement of receipt was sent on the same date, as of the 24th of May 2019 by UNEP secretary.
2. Based on previous reviews, the SPAW-RACs proceeds as follow in order to evaluate proposals:
 - i) Some PA Working Group experts review the proposal;
 - ii) A provisional report is done; including the points dimed lacking;
 - iii) It is sent to the country for additional information;
 - iv) The information received is communicated to experts for final review;
 - v) The experts group concludes if they support the proposal or not (unanimously, to the majority, with reservations...).
3. The review of the proposal by the experts of the PA Working Group has been mentioned at the first Working Group meeting, on the 18th of March 2020.
4. As of March 2020, three (3) experts chose to focus on the proposal's review.
5. The proposal has been submitted to a series of reviews, carried out by the experts. Final version of the review was translated in Spanish and sent to the Dominican Republic's Government on October 10th, 2020.
6. Comments and justifications from the Dominican Republic were sent on November 3rd, 2020th.

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

- The proposal does not state clearly how the management plan has been implemented;
- Lack of focus on management criteria *per se*;
- Lack of details on the monitoring and evaluation of the site;
- Need to foster the focus on education and climate change.

I. REVIEW BY THE EXPERTS

September 2020

Review of Dominican Republic's proposal for listing of the Cotubanamá National Park under the SPAW Protocol

SPAW STAC Protected Areas Ad Hoc Working Group

Reviewers

Ana Maria Gonzalez Delgadillo, *Colombia, Ministry of the Environment and sustainable development;*
Nacor Bolaños-Cubillos, *Colombia, Coralina;*
Gonzalo Cid, *USA, National MPA Center;*
Samantha Dodwell, *USA, NOAA;*
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INTRODUCTION

7. First and foremost, we would like to thank the Government of the Dominican Republic for submitting the Cotubanamá National Park for inclusion in the SPAW list and for its renewed efforts to comply with the Cartagena Convention - SPAW Protocol.
8. The Cotubanamá National Park represents an important coastal-marine ecosystem (land-sea interaction) in the south-east end of the Dominican Republic. The area has the characteristics of a protected area - natural, cultural and social value - and represents one of the oldest national parks of the Dominican Republic.
9. In principle, the proposed area fulfils the general protected area criteria of both Article 4 of the SPAW Protocol and the UNEP-CEP General Guidelines for SPAW-listed sites. The ecological and cultural/socio-economic aspects of Cotubanamá described in the proposal align with almost all the characteristics of SPAW listed sites described in the guidelines. The challenges of the national park and its environment are mostly associated with overexploitation of native species outside of the park borders and pressure from visitor use (tourism).
10. The park has a very descriptive management plan (MP), which seems to be outdated (5-year plan from 2013 to 2018). The MP states goals and objectives with very specific actions to be achieved (MP page 6-7), and indicators with expected results for each one of the specific objectives (MP page 59-65). The MP also includes an implementation plan, including monitoring and evaluation activities (MP page 71).

CRITICAL REVIEW

11. A measure of MPA management effectiveness is how the site is achieving its goals and objectives, as well as the level of implementation of the management plan and management actions. The proposal does not state clearly how the management plan has been implemented since its approval, nor the review or development of a new MP.
12. In Section VI (Management/*Gestión*) of the proposal, the information provided is mostly descriptive based on action taken and current legal framework, more than detailed information about the results from the management of the park or the implementation of the MP. According to the SPAW guidelines' Section C, the proposed site should have an adaptive management approach (14e), report measurement of objective indicators (14 & 16), address objectives (17a), and demonstrate that the management framework of the area is adequate to achieve goals and objectives (18). These aspects do not seem to be described sufficiently in Section VI of the proposal.
13. In general, the proposal fulfils the ecological, cultural, and socioeconomic characteristics of a SPAW listed site, but the effectiveness of the management actions is not well described. Also, the proposal does not provide any detail on the monitoring and evaluation of the site (Section VII of the proposal), which should be one of the characteristics of good and effective management. Including more detailed information on management actions and evaluation or adaptive management information (Section VI and VII) to the proposal will increase its chances to be selected as a SPAW site.

KEY ACTION ITEMS

14. The proposed addition of Cotubanamá National Park to the SPAW listed protected areas overall has merit. However, a couple of transversal areas could benefit from additional informations to substantiate Dominican Republic's application:
 - i. Climate change: what threats are perceived to the park, its ecology and stakeholders from climate change? What adaptation measures are being taken or are desired?
 - ii. Outreach and education: communications is increasingly critical for MPAs, does the park have a communications strategy? Is this an area of need?
 - iii. Research and monitoring: is there a framework for biophysical monitoring? Or are there desired monitoring activities? They could describe links with GCRMN, AGRRA or others?
 - iv. Fishing: one of the subjects that is recurrent in the proposal is small-scale fishing. What are the social and economic aspects of this issue?
15. More specifically, several particular comments and remarks have been added to the revised DR Proposal annexed to this review. These are summarized below:
 - The texts must be supported by bibliographic citations, in order to know the scientific basis of the information in each part of the answers. For instance in point 13 of the form (Explain why the proposed area should be considered for inclusion in the SPAW list, and in your opinion, the Criteria to which it conforms (Guidelines and Criteria B Paragraph 2)), all elements are exposed. However, it would be interesting if they were further developed and supported by bibliographic

citations. Likewise, exact figures and investigations that can corroborate what is written will help support the proposal.

- Although the proposal states the geographic location and the geographic coordinates, the format requests Contracting Parties to add a separate annex with a geographic map as indicated in the legal declaration of the area) and geographic coordinates (X/Y for the central point, WGS84, UTM projection systems).
- It would be interesting to unify all data throughout the proposal, specially as all along the document, slight variations in the figures undermine the credibility of the proposal. For instance, concerning the area, the proposal mentions an overall 812.31 km², however, further on, this number is divided in marine and terrestrial areas and the Saona Island. It is important that recurrent information (figures and data) in the proposal (i.e. geology, climate, hydrology, threats, species) be consistent and with the same data so that it coincides systematically.
- Points 26. g), 30 and 31 should be further developed, specially as the two latter demonstrate the relevance of including the Cotubanama National Park to the SPAW. In the same manner, it is necessary to respond to the points that have not been answered (22, 27, 29, 34, 35,36, 38, 39).

CONCLUSION

16. In principle, the proposed area fulfils the general protected area criteria of both Article 4 of the SPAW Protocol and the UNEP-CEP General Guidelines for SPAW-listed sites. However, as detailed above, there are missing informations that, if completed, could contribute to reinforcing Dominican Republic's argumentation. Moreover, the National Park could demonstrate several key management efforts to make sure it meets the general SPAW listed sites criteria.

17. Dominican Republic can therefore reinforce its proposal before submitting its Protected Area proposal.

II. FEEDBACKS FROM DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

- i. The texts must be supported by bibliographic citations, with the aim of knowing the scientific support of the information in each section of the answers.**

18. In relation to this point, I must inform that, in the online document, a bibliographic list was added to support the content of the text that we submitted on the Cotubanamá National Park in the protocol file. However, we are going to send all those bibliographic citations in another email, so that you have them available.

- ii. It is recalled that there must be an annex in front of (although it is stated in the format, it was not found): “Geographical location (include a separate annex with a geographical map as indicated in the legal declaration of the area) and geographical coordinates (X, Y for center point, WGS84, UTM projection systems) 1 ”.**

19. On this point, an annex was sent to respond to that request on geographical location. In the online document, we made the appropriate adjustments to submit this information. Remember that we sent a document in Word, which you later requested, to be inserted in the online file to which we are referring.
- iii. **With regard to the topics of Extension (km²), it is recommended that the data be unified, since an area (812.31 km²) is indicated throughout the text but is later disaggregated into marine, terrestrial and Saona Island.**
20. In relation to this point, the data is disaggregated by virtue of the fact that the Cotubanamá National Park has a land area, a marine area and also includes Saona Island.
- iv. **It is important that the information that is repeated throughout the form (e.g. geology, climate, hydrology, threats, species), is consistent and with the same data so that it coincides systematically.**
21. Regarding the information that is repeated, in one case, it refers to the specific territory of the National Park, and in another case, as requested by the file, geological and hydrology data are included, referring to the regional context where is located the Park, that is why it can be seen as inconsistent.
- v. **One of the topics that develops in a very tangential way throughout the text is the topic of artisanal fishing. It would be worthwhile to deepen this topic within the framework of social / economic aspects.**
22. In relation to artisanal fishing, it is not referred as an activity within the Protected Area, but rather as a service provided by the ecological processes associated with mangroves and marine banks for fishing, carried out by community members of nearby towns. Therefore, what the reporting format aims at demonstrating is how the conservation of this protected area contributes economically to the people. It is not a question of reflecting volumes and economic movements from the activity as such.
- vi. **In point 13 of the form (Explain why the proposed area should be considered for inclusion in the SPAW list, and in your opinion, the Criteria to which it conforms (Guidelines and Criteria B Paragraph 2)), all elements are exposed. However, it would be interesting if they were further developed and supported by bibliographic citations.**
23. In relation to this point, we reiterate that the annexes present a bibliography that supports the criteria that the proposed site must meet.

- vii. **Compared to point 18. c) Biological characteristics: it is recommended to review them against those recorded in the tables presented, so that the data and figures are consistent.**
24. At this point, we would like to know specifically where there is no match.
- viii. **It is interesting that point 26. g) Expected trends or measures of impacts and threats, be further developed.**
25. Regarding point 26, what we have done is to mention that the trend of impacts and threats will be towards their decrease, as a consequence of various aspects related to the management, protection and surveillance work, including the participation of civil society actors and private actors that interact with the Protected Area. The Protection and Surveillance program defined by the Management Plan is an important asset for the reduction of these threats. Concomitantly the public and private actors with incidence in the Protected Area are also incorporated into the management plan so that spaces are opened to resolve conflicts and reach agreements. Furthermore, there are various partners, actors of the Ministry (NGOs and Civil Society) that work in collaboration with the Ministry to ensure the ecological integrity of the site and reduce potential threats. In essence, the paragraph in question 26 is what you want to capture. In any case, if there is any concrete and specific thing that needs to be expanded, it must be indicated straightforwardly.
- ix. **Questions 30. Describe how the proposed site meets one or more of the following criteria, and 31. The Proposed Areas must fit, where applicable, at least one of the three Cultural and Socioeconomic Criteria; They must be better developed. The arguments points which support the relevance for inclusion in the SPAW list are weak, compared to all the environmental, ecological, social values, among others, that the Park actually has. It is recommended to rely on all the investigations carried out in the area.**
26. At this point, as requested by the file, we made a description that includes the basic elements for representativeness, conservation value, rarity, and the other components. However, the bulk of the information on these topics is referred to in the bibliography that we attached both in the Word document that we sent and in the online file.
27. We reiterate the sending of the bibliography and other attached documents on this occasion.
- x. **It is important that the points that were not developed (for example: 22, 27, 29, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39) are answered.**
28. If you observe carefully, point 22 is answered in conjunction with question 23, it is a form of vital repetition. The same happens with points 27 and 28 where the answer is short, based on the fact that we are attaching a wide bibliography. Number 29 is developed for each of the criteria in a summarized form, but is supported by the attached documents and the bibliography.
29. As for questions 34, 35, 36, 38 and 39, short answers are given, but are based on all the processes and procedures that the Management Plan describes for the monitoring and evaluation of management effectiveness, including the application of the METT methodology on management effectiveness. The

Management Plan also explains how relationships with the communities occur and how they are taken into account, both in the preparation of the Management Plan and in its implementation.

30. On the other hand, with regard to the Management Plan, it has certainly not been updated. The Directorate of Protected Areas is currently working on this issue, and the Word document that we sent explains that the Management Plan is implemented from a Plan Annual Operational (POA) that is prepared each year.
31. The evaluation of the protected area and the follow-up are realized with the implementation of the Management Plan through the POAs and it is summarized in monthly and annual reports prepared by the National Park Administration and then compiled by the Directorate of Protected Areas in its Annual Report of the National System of Protected Areas.
32. Regarding the effects of climate change in the online file, we made reference to the fact that the Protected Area is located on the path of hurricanes and that therefore, this has an impact on its ecological structure and its biodiversity component. The response to these threats is based on natural solutions based on the resilience of their ecosystems. Undoubtedly, this topic will need a more in-depth approach in the preparation or updating of the next Management Plan.
33. Regarding dissemination and evaluation, both in the file and in the online document, the actions that are carried out for socialization issues of the Park before society are reflected in some way. The Management Plan addresses a line of dissemination on the Protected Area that is specified with specific actions in the medium of communications: radio, television, written, reports, interviews, and environmental education activities in various target groups of the region and is part of a general strategic component of the Ministry of the Environment with the focus of the programs and guidelines of the Management Plan.
34. Regarding the research and monitoring, and if there is a framework for biophysical monitoring, I am not certain about what they are referring to. However, the Directorate of Protected Areas monitors all aspects that derive from the management of the area and obviously all those related to the biotic and physical elements of the Protected Area. In addition, the Biodiversity Directorate and other civil society actors carry out monitoring activities to determine, in the first place, if the Park is fulfilling its purposes and objectives and if its natural conditions are being maintained or if changes or alterations occur in its ecological structure, whether due to anthropic or natural conditions, including hurricanes, storms and other events.
35. There is no link with GCRMN, AGRRRA, however, Civil Society organizations such as Reef Check, work in collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment on coral reefs.
36. On the subject of fishing, we have already referred to the context in which we address it in the file and a description of its social and economic impact is made even though, from what we have already explained, it is not used to supply data on volumes of fishing and economic movement.

III. CONCLUSION

37. Experts recommend giving full support to the proposal from the Dominican Republic to include the Cotubanama National Park into the SPAW listing sites.

38. They also recommended that all new applications must include a current management plan and performance evaluation report in order to be considered for listing.

Further considerations:

39. Experts support that effective management criteria, including (self) evaluation of the management action, i.e., how well the site is achieving its goals and objectives and the process for updating the management plan, should be stressed on as they are key aspects of the protected areas.
40. Experts suggest to have further discussions on revising the protected area listing process to have a stronger emphasis on management effectiveness, and less of an "inventory" approach describing the resources. Opportunities to streamline the process must be considered.
41. Experts support a strong focus on capacity development for SPAW sites to help address management effectiveness needs, e.g., through CaMPAM.