



OECS Secretariat, Castries St. Lucia September 8th, 2009: Over the next six months, six Protected Areas in the OECS have been earmarked for increased assistance through funding and infrastructural development. The assistance will be facilitated through the work of two interns who recently joined the OECS Secretariat under the OPAAL project.

The two Caribbean nationals, Thalia Balkaran and Tamika Francis-Ferguson, who commenced the six-month internship on September 1st 2009, will focus their attention on improving access to funds, and job opportunities in and around protected areas in six OECS states. They will also assist with the development of forest trails, interpretation centres, mooring buoy installations and other amenities in selected sites located on Antigua, Grenada, Dominica, St Kitts, Saint Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Local communities, the private sector and government officials are all expected to benefit from the work of the interns. The specific benefits include building of skills, expansion of small-scale markets for arts and craft, water taxi operations and fisheries. In addition, communities will be able to access grants for purchasing equipment and materials for livelihoods in and around their respective protected areas.

The OECS Secretariat anticipates that this internship programme will accelerate the implementation of site level work and particularly fast-track sustainable livelihoods activities in communities situated near OPAAL protected areas.

The OPAAL Project is a five year project funded by the Global Environment Fund (GEF), the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the Fond Français de l'Environnement Mondial (FFEM). The project is geared towards the development of protected areas in the OECS and recognizes the importance of sustainable management of natural resources and rich biodiversity in small vulnerable States, such as those of the OECS.

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