

Roots and Reef

12 February 2012

FREE

Sitting On The Beach - Watching The Waves

A Thank You to Teacher Rosie

By Charles Leslie Jr.
Placencia Village Council Chairman

Today, I take this opportunity to thank one of the greatest educators this community has ever seen.

I don't even know where to start, for Ms. Rosie Eiley, affectionately known as Teacher Rosie, has played a significant, positive role in who I am today and has played a significant role in many people's lives.

I attended St. John's Anglican Primary School in the late 80's going through the early 90's; I graduated from Primary School in 1994. However, in the early years of Primary School, especially around Standard 4, I was not an erudite student when it came to book learning. I considered myself more of an explorer, and my apathy towards education was reflected in the fact that many of my subject grades used to read "incomplete" and my conduct report was "fair to poor."

I simply did not see the point of school at that time in my life. However, when I failed and had to repeat Standard 4, my parents cracked down on me and became very serious about my getting an education. Most teachers, especially Teacher Rosie, actually care about their students' education and she dedicated a lot of extra time, effort and patience in helping me comprehend how important it was to have an education. I would have never finished school and I cannot contemplate what type of man I would have been today without all those positive elements in my life at that time.

I am proud to say that after repeating Standard 4, I buckled down and graduated from Primary School with a scholarship to Independence High School, and went on to Ecumenical Junior College with another scholarship, where I earned my Associates Degree in Economics, Business Management and Accounting.

I am astounded that after all these years, Teacher Rosie is still teaching, still helping to shape our young people to grow up to be constructive, positive members of our society. This, in itself, is emblematic of her dedication to her profession of educating. It also shows passion in this art. Yes, I consider teaching an art. Teachers have to present information to their students in a manner that can be more easily absorbed and comprehended, and it gets harder, for the teacher also has to develop unique approaches for almost every student. A teacher has to be talented to artistically present information to students in the most pragmatic manner for it to be easily absorbed and comprehended – and Teacher Rosie is definitely a talented artist when it comes to education.

In closing, I would like to quote the late, great John F. Kennedy, "Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength of the nation."

I appreciate all you have done for me, Teacher Rosie, and this community certainly appreciates all you have done. You have touched many of our lives and continue to do so.

The moral of this story is, "It does take a village - a positive attitude, caring village - to raise a child."

Big Creek Dredging Threatens Placencia Lagoon

by Adrian Vernon



How many of you know about the port expansion at Big Creek? You may or may not know of the dredging they've done and about the continued work to deepen the channel.

This, however, is only the beginning of this project and the impacts so far have been deep and extensive.

In December of last year I flew over the Big Creek area where dredging is occurring and was very disturbed by what I saw - so disturbed that I took a boat out to look at the area up close.

What I found was that the Big Creek dredging has caused thick layers of silt to pass through the mangroves covering the shallow Lagoon sea grass beds and created an almost unseen boating hazard.

These spreads of mud blend perfectly with the natural shade created by the mangroves and look just like water.

It also seems that the Big Creek expansion alongside the Malacate Beach will completely clear and fill all of the existing mangrove and shallow Lagoon between Malacate Beach and the mouth of the Lagoon out to Sea. I believe this will cause our Lagoon's environmental system to suffer greatly and also result in our losing another piece of our history and culture, an ancient Maya site where the Maya collected salt, fish, and shells. Specialized tools used in certain ceremonies have even been found on this site.

In addition, the dredging at Big Creek has stressed the manatees into leaving the area because of siltation, boat traffic and destruction of sea grass beds. Luckily they've been able to move further up into the Placencia Lagoon to safety.

PCSD has contacted the Departments of the Environment and Geology with information about the devastation being caused in the Lagoon by the Big Creek dredging, but we have received no response from Government. We have also been unable to obtain a copy of the Environmental Compliance Plan (ECP) for the Big Creek dredging, even though ECPs are public documents.

Please help us get Government's attention on these problems before it's too late by contacting the following individuals:

- Gaspar Vega, Ministry of Natural Resources: minister@mnrei.gov.bz, 802-2711/322-1506
- Melvin Hulse, Area Representative: nemobelize@nemo.org.bz, 822-2679, 621-4426
- Martin Alegria, Department of the Environment: envirodept@bt1.net, 802-2816
- Craig Moore, Department of Geology: geology@mnrei.gov.bz, 802-2178, 802-2651, 802-2232
- Marcello Windsor, Department of Forests: windsorbelize@yahoo.com, 802-1524

We Won!



Initiative, see related article on page 8 of this issue.)

The Responsible Tourism Awards are the most competitive of their kind in the world and are a collaboration between online travel directory responsibletravel.com which founded and organises the Awards; UK media partners Metro Newspaper and Geographical Magazine, and World Travel Market which hosts the presentation event. The central tenet of the Awards is that all types of tourism - from niche to mainstream - can and should be operated in a way that respects and benefits destinations and local people.

At a ceremony hosted at World Travel Market (WTM), Docklands, London, on Wednesday 09th November, the Awards were handed out by Justin Francis, managing director of responsibletravel.com, organisers and founders of the Awards, and Amanda Wills, managing director of Virgin Holidays, headline sponsor of the Awards.

Justin Francis, founder of The Responsible Tourism Awards and managing director, responsibletravel.com, organisers of the Awards said:

Right now it's tough times for business – industries the world over are facing difficult questions from a public who want to know if business can be a force for good. Tourism is no exception, and thankfully our winners are on hand with the answers. Where travellers ask for authenticity, our winners are there with genuine experiences.

Amanda Wills, managing director, Virgin Holidays, headline sponsor of the Awards said:

For the fifth year running, Virgin Holidays is honoured to be involved in celebrating the humbling and hugely inspiring winners of these awards. Everyone in the travel industry can and should learn from them and seek ways we can work together to make a meaningful and ongoing commitment to responsible travel. The example set by the winners shows that fairness in travel can be good for us, good for our customers and suppliers, and most of all good for the communities and destinations with which we work."

**Elizabeth Simpson
PCSD Volunteer**



When Elizabeth Simpson showed up in Placencia in early November last year, Placencia had no idea what a gift it was about to receive.

Elizabeth took an early retirement from teaching in Ontario, Canada, tried selling real estate, but decided that her bones needed some warmth and sun. So Elizabeth hopped in her motor home and headed to the southern United States.

But it still was not warm enough for Elizabeth, and she traded in her motor home for an airline ticket to Belize. Elizabeth explains her decision:

“Belize was an easy flight from the US, English was spoken, and money was easy to convert. But, more importantly, the weather and the beaches were beautiful.

“I spent a week in Belize City, exploring all the streets, then decided to explore more of Belize by bus, and I kept traveling south, stopping and checking out every town along the way. I was a little discouraged that the towns did not look as good as they did on the internet.

“That is, until I came to Placencia!

“What a sweet little village, this Placencia! Neat little shops looked as if everything one would need was available, gorgeous beach, friendly people with big smiles. I stopped at Miss Lydia’s Guest House and found a landlady who was most caring of her tenants – and who has become a good friend.

“Somewhere along the line, I picked up a copy of *Roots and Reef*, and I was so impressed by the caring attitude PCSD had for the environment.

“Lucky for me, PCSD was looking for a volunteer to help with office management. I had always looked after my husband’s private investigation office and have volunteered most of my life to non-profit groups in order to give back and be useful, so it was just a natural step for me to answer the ad.

“Since then, I think I have learned more than I have been able to contribute. I admire the energy and dedication of their Board of Directors and their Program Director, Adrian Vernon. I will strive to help all I can during my six-month stay here.”

Elizabeth, are you sure you won’t stay here longer?

To that question, Elizabeth responds, “I will

“We’re sorry for the massive disruption it’s caused their lives. There’s no one who wants this over more than I do. I would like my life back.” —BP CEO Tony Hayward, on the oil spill disaster that claimed 11 lives and has since spewed 20 to 100 million gallons of toxic oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

Antillean Cage Fishing Banned by Fisheries

Belize has fish, and the Jamaicans want them. After depleting their own marine life using destructive fishing methods such as dynamite, chemicals, and cages, Jamaicans have turned to Belize to feed their people.

A source in the Fisheries Department confirmed that Rainforest Seafood of Jamaica has commissioned Belizean fishermen, mostly from Monkey River, to construct and fish with Antillean cages. The Jamaicans are buying these fish from Belizean fishermen.

According to a source in the Belize Fisheries Department,

Antillean cages wiped out the fishing industry in Jamaica, and several months ago, Fisheries Department decided to ban them here in Belize, Fisheries is very unhappy with this activity. Fishermen were instructed to pull up and remove all cages by the end of January.

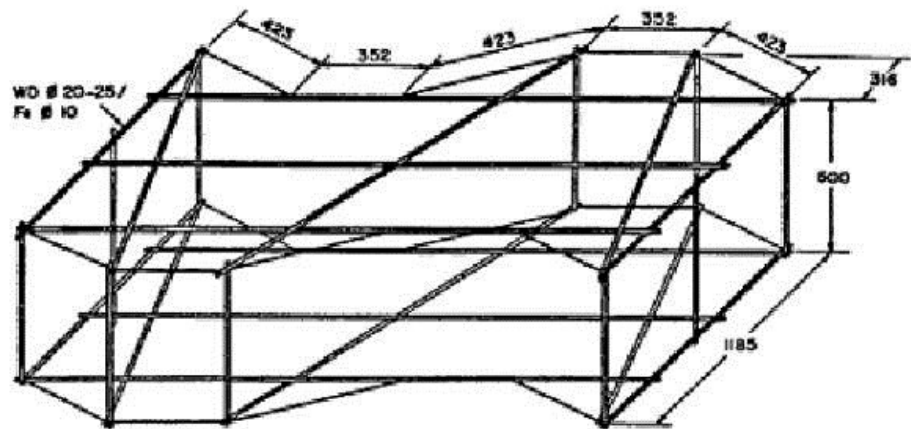
These cages are larger than Belizean cages, have two entrances (Belizean cages have only one) and are too efficient. At the end of the day, the rate of fish taken out is not sustainable. These cages exhaust our resources by removing not only too many fish, but they also disrupt the ecological balance of the reef. You take out too many grazing fish, you also affect the algae. There is a natural relationship in the Sea, and the indiscriminate taking of fish from all spectrums of the Sea is disruptive of this balance. Antillean cages are set in the Sea, whereas Belizean traps are usually set in the sheltered bogue, in a deep mangrove channel.

A significant number of these traps are saturating the waters off Monkey River, Punta Gorda, and Punta Negra. Before Antillean cage fishing, Rainforest Seafood used to export one container of fish per month to Jamaica. Now with these cages, they are exporting two containers per week. Fish production is up tenfold, but this practice of cage fishing is not sustainable. Fish being trapped include snappers, groupers and even reef fish (such as doctor fish) that we here in Belize do not eat.

No one has been arrested, but Fisheries will be monitoring and enforcing our demand for the removal of all these cages from our Sea by end of January. Fishermen who have not complied will be prosecuted.

When asked why the export permit for Rainforest Seafood had not been revoked, our source replied, “It is the Belizean fishermen who are breaking the law, not the Jamaicans.”

Use of Antillean cages in the Caribbean region dates to the early Spanish occupation. The most common cage being used currently is shaped like a Z with two down-curving “horse-neck” entrance funnels. (See diagram below.) They are dropped to the bottom of the Sea, and dragged along, destroying everything in their way.



The use of Antillean cages for trapping fish is only the most recent story of Jamaicans making plays for fish in Belize waters. In December 2009, the Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment (TIDE) sponsored a public meeting in Punta Gorda in response to a joint venture between Rio Grande Fishermen Cooperative (PG) and PG Fisheries Company (Jamaica). That deal would have allowed the Jamaicans to fish in Belizean waters by using fish traps to catch 40,000 pounds of fish every month for up to thirty or more years in Belizean waters, and export all but 10-15% back to Jamaica.

Because of public controversy, the deal fell apart. However, it seems that Jamaica is still getting what it wants from Belize – fish to satisfy the demand in Jamaica because Jamaica destroyed its own fisheries. And, Jamaica is getting what it wants with the active participation of Belize’s own citizens.

Alexandra Cousteau and the Blue Legacy



Alexandra Cousteau, granddaughter of Jacques-Yves Cousteau, famous French explorer and filmmaker, visited Placencia in October 2011 to scout the area for a film highlighting Belize’s sea, reef and lagoons.

During Ms. Cousteau’s visit, PCSD took her, her crew and members of the Placencia and Seine Bight Village Councils and Rotary on a boat tour of the Placencia Lagoon. The tour focused on the threats to the Lagoon, its critical importance in protecting the Peninsula from storms, providing food for local residents, shelter for marine and wildlife, and the desire of local communities to preserve the Lagoon environment.

Ms. Cousteau is a dedicated environmentalist and founder of Blue Legacy, a nonprofit organization that engages communities and individuals around the world to address water issues.

A Day In The Life: David Torres



You know that big water tower at the northern end of Placencia?

The lower base of that tower holds 100,000 gallons of water, and the elevated tank holds 20,000 gallons of water. Our water source in Independence pumps 450 gallons a minute into this tower via 3 miles of underground six inch PVC pipes, and then another three miles of polyethylene pipes under the Placencia Lagoon.

Placencia alone uses 250,000 gallons per day in the off season, and 300,000 gallons of water per day during the peak season.

We turn on our water taps, and there it is—pure, clean water.

We have a strong, committed Placencia Water Board team to thank for this, but it is David Torres, field supervisor, who makes sure that it all works 24/7.

David lives and breathes water. Says, David, “This is what stole my passion from football. I’ve never had a day where I ever wanted to walk away from it. This is it.”

Good thing for all of us he feels this dedication to keeping our water clean and available around the clock, because his day begins before the sun comes up.

David is at the water tower seven days a week at 5:30 am to start the first booster pump.. He clicks the second booster pump on at 6:15 am. After a short break for breakfast, David returns to work at 8 am, when his other official chores begin.

“This job has its routine, but it has a lot of unexpected moments,” David explains.

“On the fifteenth and sixteen of every month, my assistant and I have to read all the water meters from as far south as the Point to as far north as Wild Orchid, and even on the cayes in the Placencia Lagoon. Then a week later, it takes us two days to distribute the bills to each and every home and establishment.

“Not only is my job technical, but I am always dealing with people. There are some folks who do not pay their bills, and I have to disconnect them. That is the toughest part of my job. I’m a very sympathetic guy. I like nothing better than reconnections.

“I also have to deal with all kinds of emergencies. Big leaks can drain the water tower, so they require immediate attention no matter the time of day or night. About four or five times a month we have after hours emergencies. This job occupies my mind all the time. There’s always *what next, what if?*”

And those unexpected BEL outages that we all love to complain about? During those times, David has to do everything he can to manage and maintain our water service.

“We have a generator over here in Placencia, but no generator at our water source in Independence. I know people are unhappy sometimes with low water pressure, but it can’t be helped because we don’t have a generator in Independence.

“When I took over this job eight years ago, I thought I could never do it. Miss Janice Leslie told me, ‘What are you afraid of? You can do this job.’

“Miss Janice, Miss Louise Wade and Miss Lydia Villanueva have been great motivators to me, and my work has made me a better person. In my daily challenges I have learned responsibility and patience.

“I can’t do this job alone. We’re all a team. Brandon Torres is my assistant in the field. Marissa Godfrey, the office manager and Samantha Betancourt, front desk clerk, keep things running smoothly. Jerome Garcia, security, provides me all kinds of help and support, too. And special thanks to Mr. Percy Neal, for his valuable advice. Yes, that’s our team!”

Not content in what he already knows, David has taken correspondence courses from California State University in water system maintenance, operation, and distribution. He is waiting to hear what sewer system will be implemented in Placencia, so he can take the appropriate courses to benefit our system.

“Sewage and water are serious subjects related to each other, and I want to know as much as I can about them both. I am looking to the future.”

David’s day ends officially at five pm, but he returns again to the water tower at 9:30 pm to prep the timers on the boosters for the next day’s start.

Oh, and let’s not forget that from 7 to 9pm, David now coaches Placencia’s football team, the Assassins.

What was clear to me during this interview with David is that he thinks outside himself and beyond his village. He concluded this interview with these comments:

“We need to empower ourselves to the importance of water and not let a few dollars threaten that. A pocketful of money can’t quench your thirst. Independence, Seine Bight, and Placencia all share the same water source, and all three of our communities must come together

Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan

The Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI) expects to complete its Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan by March 2012 and has scheduled a meeting for the Peninsula on local coastal zone plan requirements for 16 February 2012 at the Placencia Village Community Center. (Time of meeting not yet available.)

The goal of the Management Plan is to impose a rational decision making process for coastal development and management using government-endorsed guidelines that control what can and cannot be developed in each part of the coastal zone, including the cayes.

The decision making process will be guided by local knowledge and tools currently being developed by CZMAI including Marine Invest, a Global Information System (GIS) that allows CZMAI to run models of the effect of different kinds of developments in the coastal zone.

According to an article by Adele Trapp in the 20 January 2012 edition of the *Amandala*, *Belize moves to finalize Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan*, Marine Invest allowed CZMAI to run a model of what would happen if all the mangroves in front of Belize City were removed – and the results were disastrous. Marine Invest also allowed CZMAI to determine that a proposed housing development on the coast was in a flood plain and should not be used for housing.

Please plan to attend this very important meeting on the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan for the Placencia Peninsula area on 16 February – the CZMAI Management Plan will affect all the communities on the Peninsula.

WHO SAYS WE CAN'T WIN?

Ever heard of the company Skydrop?

No? Neither had I until I read about it on the Internet.

Skydrop is a tiny company that isn’t traded on any stock exchange, but it’s every bit as important as General Motors or Fortis.

Skydrop is a company in Kenya that captures falling rain water in a series of giant tanks before purifying and bottling it for sale on the commercial market.

And, it was started by Joel Mwale, an eighteen year old Kenyan who turned his bout with dysentery into a clean water business for his community.

The Kenyan student became sick after drinking contaminated water provided by his municipal council during Kenya’s annual dry season.

As he lay sick in bed, he thought, “What if this thing keeps on happening, year in, year out, what if next year the same problem happens again and again? . I should do something. I’m not just going to sit back and watch things happen.”

With the help of local volunteers and his entire life savings of US\$95, he dug a deep well in his village that reached the water flowing far beneath the ground.

Mwale and his volunteers put in the pipes, infrastructure and mechanical system that would extract the water.

That was four years ago, and to this day, that underground water source still provides clean water to about 500 households.

But Mwale did not stop there.

“One day while I was walking around my community, it was raining and I saw water running off the ground,” explains Mwale.

“So I said that if there’s anything that I can do to be able to trap this rain water, store it in a reservoir, then be able to purify it and sell it to the public, this can be a good idea.”

With a small loan from a local farmer, Mwale invested in the necessary equipment to implement his idea.

Within a matter of months he had founded Skydrop, which now provides clean drinking water throughout Kenya and helps keep dysentery out of local communities.

Says Mwale,

The most important thing is that in order for Africa to realize its goals ... youths and everyone will need to embrace the true spirit of entrepreneurship

While Belize is blessed with good, pure water, all of must be aware of the preciousness of our water supply and work to keep our water pure, clean and available to everyone. And, although Joel Mwale was concerned with water, his willingness to work to solve a problem that affected not only himself but his entire country is a lesson that we all should take to heart.

nated, and we must fight to keep it that way. What we have is good, and all three communities must join hands together to address our challenges, not just with water, but with tourism and development and our common good.

“If our communities could all sit down at a table together, even if just once a year, to talk about our common needs and goals, that would be a great start.”

So, next time you turn on your tap for a drink of good, clean water, you might think about raising your glass in a toast to the integrity, hard work, dedication and perseverance of David Torres.

Update on our Water and Oil Exploration in Independence

by Terry Brooker, Petroleum Engineer
Los Porticos, Placencia and Calgary, Canada

In early December 2011, PCSD organized a research trip to Independence to view the Treaty Energy oil drilling operations and the Independence/Placencia Peninsula/Big Creek water supply wells. As reported in the October 2011 *Roots and Reef*, Treaty Energy Corporation, a public US company, has been granted permission by the Government of Belize to drill a number of oil exploration wells in the area west of Independence. The purpose of the trip was to better understand the Treaty operation, as well as learn more about where our drinking water comes from.

Our Water Supply: In November 2011, PCSD collected a number of water samples from the water wells, and from taps in Placencia and in Seine Bight. The samples were taken using proper sampling techniques and sent to Alberta for testing. The results confirmed what we all know – Placencia has great drinking water!!! In fact, our water is significantly better than the Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines in almost every category, and the full test results are available from the PCSD office.



Drinking water in this area comes from a series of wells drilled possibly to supply water for a logging operation or for oil exploration in the Independence area. One well is currently being used to supply Seine Bight and Placencia, with a pump installed to the bottom of the well at about 120 feet below the surface. The water is pumped directly into the Placencia and Seine Bight water towers where it is treated for distribution on the Peninsula. A second well in the same area is also pumped and the water is treated on site before distribution to the Big Creek area. A

third well supplies Independence and Mango Creek.

PCSD consulted a number of experts on geology and drilling (all of whom volunteered their time and expertise – so we thank them very much for that contribution) who explained to us that detailed information on the source of our water is currently impossible to obtain, but most likely our water originates as rainfall in the Maya Mountains and flows to Independence through a series of underground sandstone rocks that filter and clean the water as it travels underground to Independence.

Since 1996, the current well serving Placencia/Seine Bight is pumped on average about 16-17 hours per day, increasing to 20 hours per day during busier times of the year. The two wells for Big Creek and Independence have been operating for many more years, although exactly how long both have been in operation is not known. So far, this mostly continuous pumping has had no noticeable impact on the amount of water that can be pumped every day.

However, the supply of water is obviously not limitless, so tests need to be done to determine the maximum amount of water these wells can produce without seriously reducing the amount of water available to Independence, Big Creek, Seine Bight and Placencia. Therefore, the maximum acceptable water demand from future developments that want to use the existing water system must be determined to prevent us from one day not having enough water to go around.

Treaty Oil: At the time of the visit to the Treaty site, the Treaty Energy drilling operation was suspended. Treaty reported on 8 December 2011 that they “were able to halt operations temporarily” to attend meetings with the Belize government to “assure our compliance with their regulations.”

Treaty finally announced on 20 January 2012 that it would resume drilling. Our experts say that exploratory oil well drilling, if done correctly with proper mud systems (the fluid in the hole while the well is being drilled), and properly designed casing programs (steel

(cont. in next column)

Festival del Mar Forum on Environmental Law and Water

Water, water everywhere and none to drink?

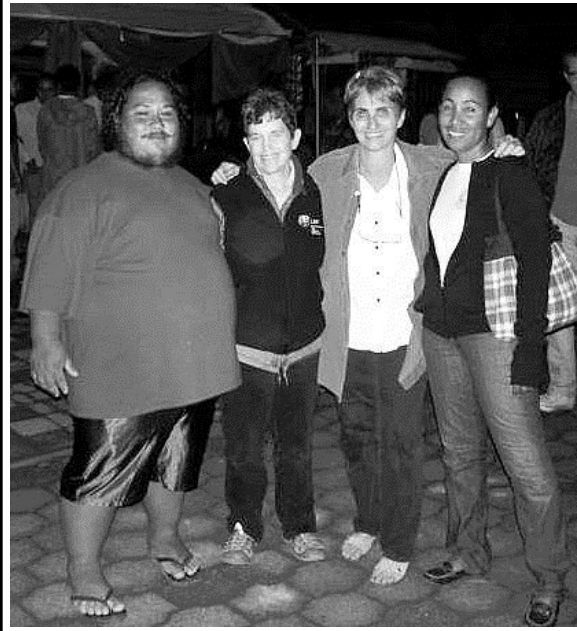
Hopefully not any time soon.

But, preserving our clean water, both for ourselves and our marine and wildlife, is a serious issue in Central America, including Belize. Therefore, from 1-4 December 2011, representatives from environmental organizations in Belize, Guatemala and Honduras gathered to discuss water issues at the Forum on Environmental Law and Water held as part of the Festival del Mar in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.

Belize representatives were Candy Gonzalez from the Belize Institute for Law and Policy (BELPO), Kirah Forman from Ambergris Caye Citizens for Sustainable Development (ACCSO), and Adrian Vernon and Mary Toy from Peninsula Citizens for Sustainable Development (PCSD).

A major part of the Forum was a gathering of Guatemalan students interested in public service law, and the Belize contingency addressed the students on water issues related to coastal development, mangrove and sea grass preservation and using the law to protect communities threatened by water contamination.

Conference participation was sponsored by Environmental Law International (E-Law), and our Belize representatives were also able to meet with our Guatemalan and Honduran E-Law counterparts to discuss joint efforts to protect coastal waters, rivers, lagoons and wetlands. Continuing and new protection of fish stocks and marine life nursery areas emerged as a common theme from these discussions, with representatives discussing common problems, ways of approaching those problems, and current programs underway in their own countries, including the new protected wetland areas being proposed by ACCSO and the protection of the Placencia Lagoon by the Placencia and Seine Bight Village Councils, with assistance from PCSD.



But, all was not just discussions of serious issues. In the evenings, we were able to visit and enjoy the First Annual Festival of the Sea organized by Puerto Barrios, including lots of great food, reggae and punta music from Belize — dancing in the streets even.

(Who says protection of the environment can't be fun?)

Thanks much to E-Law for providing us with this wonderful and very productive opportunity!

(At left, Adrian Vernon, PCSD, Candy Gonzalez, BELPO, Mary Toy, PCSD, Kirah Forman, ACCSO)

pipe run into the well and cemented in place to isolate the water zones), should pose no risk to the water wells. However despite numerous requests to Treaty, Treaty has not provided any details to PCSD, the Placencia Village Council or the Placencia Water Board regarding the features in their drilling operations to protect our drinking water.

However, the Belize Geology and Petroleum Department has assured PCSD that Geology will make sure that Treaty meets all requirements for safe drilling and that the wells will be drilled properly.

PCSD will continue its efforts to obtain additional information on Treaty's operations, and to document additional details on the current capability of our existing water wells. For the most recent information on Treaty's exploratory oil drilling developments, see page 5 of this edition of *Roots and Reef*.

PCSD Office Information

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Ministry of Natural Resources refutes claim of Oil Discovery in Southern Belize

In a Press Release issued January 31st, 2012, The Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Environment refutes Treaty Energy Corporation's Press Release on [Oil Discovery in Southern Belize](#)

Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Environment
Belmopan, Belize, C.A. ph: (501) 802-2711, (501) 802-2249;
Fax: (501) 802-2333, (501) 802-2083
Email: ceo@mnrei.gov.bz

My Ref: CEO/MNR/07/12 (47)

Press Release

Treaty Energy Corporation's Press Release on Oil Discovery in Southern Belize

THE MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT INFORMS THE GENERAL PUBLIC THAT THE INFORMATION BEING CIRCULATED TO THE MEDIA HOUSES BY TREATY ENERGY CORPORATION RELATING TO OIL DISCOVERY IN THE SAN JUAN #2 WELL IN SOUTHERN BELIZE IS FALSE AND MISLEADING.

THE MINISTRY CATEGORICALLY REFUTES THE IRRESPONSIBLE ACTIONS OF TREATY ENERGY CORPORATION IN ITS MISINFORMATION ON DRILLING SUCCESS AND THEREFORE RESPONSIBLY ADVISE THAT AN INSPECTION CONDUCTED ON THE MUDLOG AND ROCK CUTTINGS FROM THE WELL, BY THE GEOLOGY AND PETROLEUM DEPARTMENT, CONFIRMED ONLY MINUTE TRACES OF TAR WHICH IS COMMONLY OBSERVED IN ROCK FORMATIONS IN MANY WELLS PREVIOUSLY DRILLED IN BELIZE THAT WERE NOT COMMERCIAL.

IT MUST BE EMPHASIZED THAT NO LIVE OIL, IN LARGE AMOUNTS, WAS OBSERVED IN THE ROCK CUTTINGS WHICH NORMALLY INDICATES SOME LEVEL OF POTENTIAL AND WOULD REQUIRE FURTHER ANALYSIS AND TESTING TO DETERMINE WHETHER IT IS COMMERCIALLY VIABLE.

THE MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT ASSURES THE GENERAL PUBLIC THAT ALL CONFIRMATION ON OIL DISCOVERIES WILL BE DECLARED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE AFTER PROPER TESTING AND APPRAISAL. THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT ENDORSE THE DECLARATION BY TREATY ENERGY AND THEREFORE ITS PRESS RELEASE WAS UNAUTHORIZED.

Manatees Return!

by Adrian Vernon

I was sad to see them leave, but who could blame them. Their home, their food, their way of life was being destroyed. They had no choice and they left the Placencia Lagoon for the Plantation and Sennis Creek Lagoons.

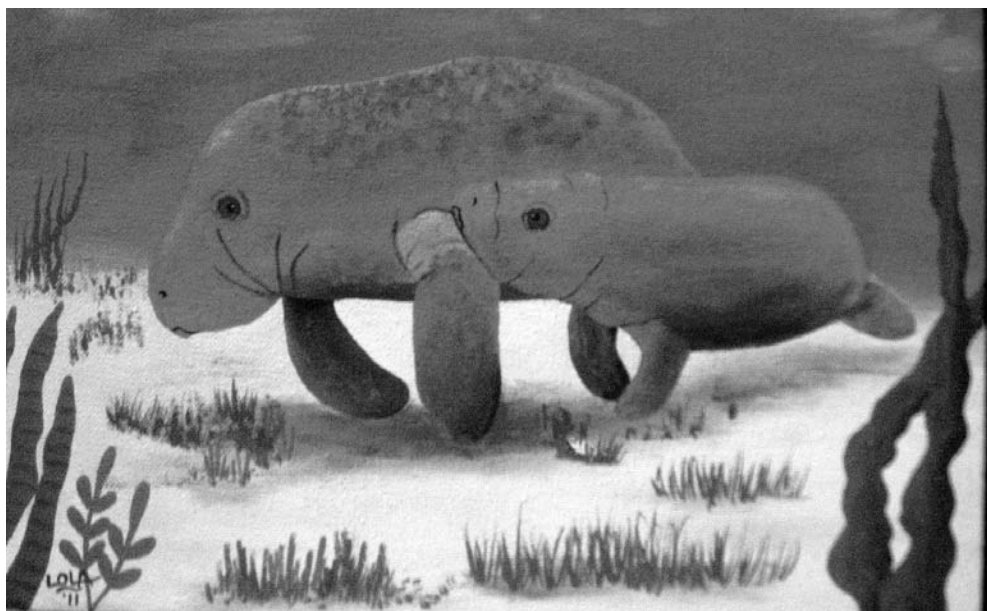
In the last 4 years we've seen new sea grass, clear water, and even the return of our dolphins to the Lagoon, but no sign of manatee, except the occasional male milling around.

So, relaxing in my father's boat in November of last year, imagine how surprised I was to see 5 manatees having fun rolling around. They had sea grass torn up everywhere. It was very exciting for me, and to make it better, it was an old family group I knew -- with a new baby!

I still questioned whether we'd ever see them reestablish their home behind Drunken Caye. I continued to spot them in the lower basin of the Lagoon even in groups of more than ten. I knew they weren't living here, as I had no seen any movement around Drunken Caye.

But, in early December, I got my Christmas gift. Flying up to a Save our Natural Heritage Coalition meeting in Belize City, I saw my family of five. I was so excited I think I woke Mary up when I called her to tell her, "If anyone wants to see manatees today they're back at Drunken Caye!"

Since then I've seen several sightings all over the Lagoon. Tourists and locals report new sightings daily. Things are really looking up for our Lagoon! Let's keep up this trend -- and welcome back our manatees!



Manatee and Baby in the Placencia Lagoon by Lola will be featured on PCSD t-shirts available at the Placencia Sidewalk Arts Festival on 11 February 2012.

Fair Comment

THE WRITING WAS ON THE WALL

Big drama has come to quiet, peaceful southern Belize, and there are many lessons for us to learn from it.

Treaty Energy, a U.S. oil drilling company, selling for just pennies a share, announced that it had struck oil in the Independence area -- just a couple of days after it started drilling.

People who have followed this project for months were suspicious about that claim, and those suspicions were confirmed by the Department of Natural Resources, which stated in a media release that Treaty lied about discovering oil -- and by our Prime Minister who speculated that Treaty announced its oil find to manipulate the price of its stock. (See media release to the left and page 6 of this edition for more information.)

So what is a U.S. oil drilling company with negative cash flow and possibly questionable motives doing in Belize, anyway?

Simple—our Government approved Treaty Energy to do exploratory oil drilling in Belize. This approval was granted without any proof that Treaty had the financial means or technical expertise and experience to do so.

The approval was also seemingly granted without researching Treaty's financial status, or investigating the reliability of its past record of drilling in other parts of the world, or confirming the reputation of its officers and directors. It is outrageous that a company with few financial resources and possibly questionable intentions was allowed to drill into Belizean soil!

Without any questions asked, the Government of Belize ALLOWED this company to drill for oil in an area not far from where we get our water.

And guess what—no Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was required for this company, nor is one required for any other company that wants to do exploratory drilling in Belize. No, GOB did not ask any questions, so no answers were required. There was no avenue for the public to express its concern. And finally, when the Placencia community leaders met with a Treaty Vice President requesting answers from Treaty, those requests were ignored.

Yes, Treaty was allowed to walk right through an open door into our country, and sink machinery and drilling chemicals into our ground without any accountability.

And then, according to our Government, lie about finding oil!

Why would Treaty lie? We can speculate, as the Prime Minister did at his press conference when he suggested that Treaty was trying to manipulate its sagging stock upwards. But that is not the issue here.

The real issue is regulating and setting in place strong guidelines for oil drilling in Belize.

We can start by banning all off shore drilling. No one can question the catastrophe waiting to happen on-land as well as off-shore as amply demonstrated by the overlay on page 6 of this edition showing what would happen to Belize if an oil spill like the BP spill in the Gulf occurred here. Oil spill disasters happen all over the world, and are much too likely to happen here in Belize, with devastating impacts on all our water resources

We must also be careful about onshore drilling -- who does it, where they do it, and how do they do it. Our Government must do its homework before any oil concessions are granted - this laziness and lack of concern for consequences must stop.

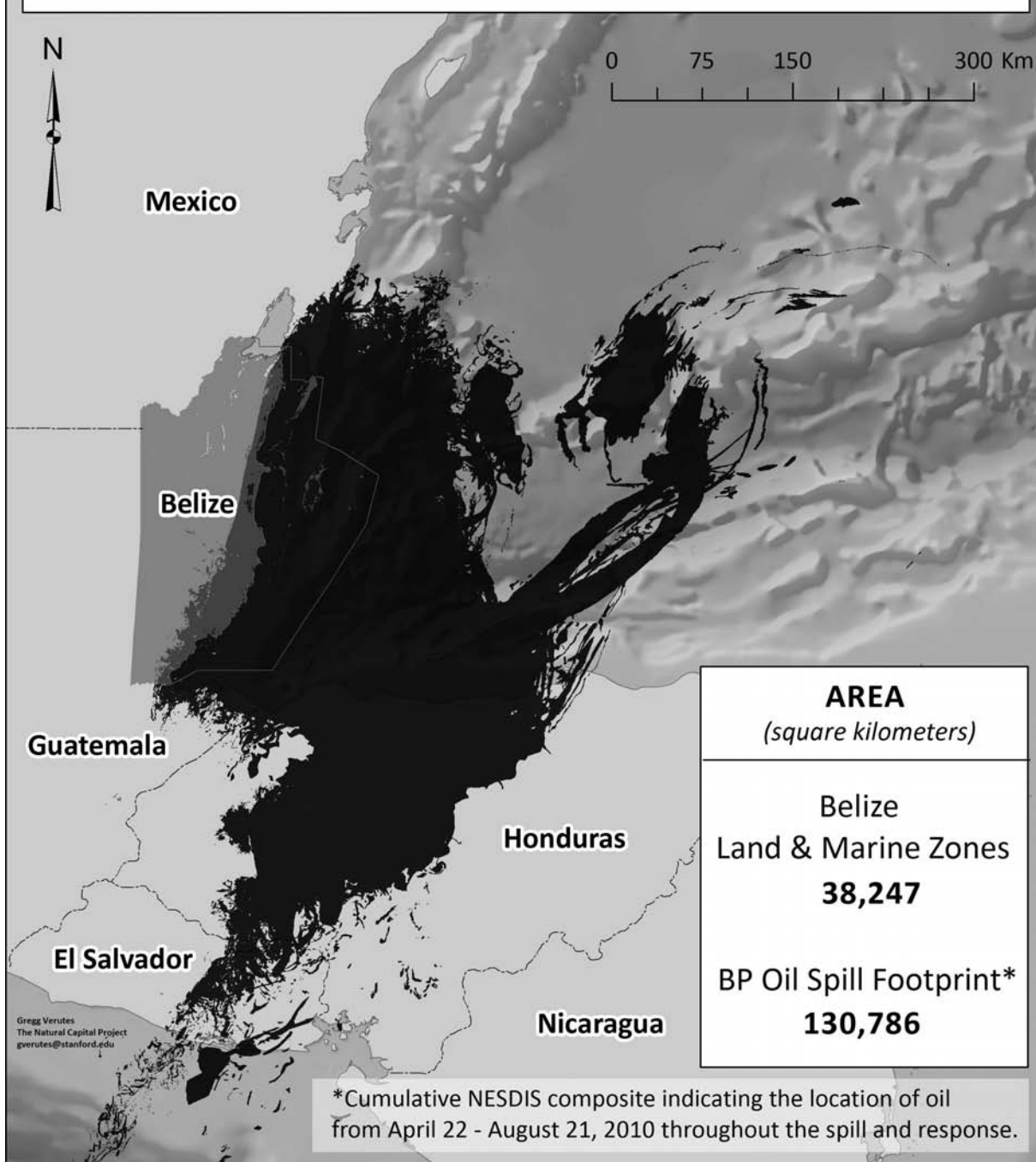
Before any permission is granted to any company that wants to drill for oil in our country, we must demand financial statements that show strong money backing these projects. No money, no drilling. If the CEO or any company directors have a questionable past, no drilling. We must also demand that a thorough and impartial EIA be mandatory and completed before any drilling, including exploratory drilling, takes place (Belize law used to require an EIA before exploratory drilling, but the Barrow administration changed the law.)

A mandatory EIA would involve and inform communities. Facts must be established BEFORE Government issues any permit to drill -- exploratory or otherwise

This must be the cost of drilling for oil in Belize—we Belizeans are worth that. Government must not allow just any company to come in and begin drilling because they have bought themselves a concession. Accidents do happen, and no amount of money can ever replace a water supply once it has been contaminated. An oil company messes up, it packs up and goes, potentially leaving behind communities devastated by oil drilling, as has happened around the world, in Africa, in the Amazon, and even in the United States with all of its advanced technology

Yes, the writing was on the wall. Treaty really did us a favor by possibly lying to us. It has allowed us to look more closely at this oil drilling issue and its potential threat to our water sources and our environment. Government and communities working together can proactively come up with strong laws for on-land drilling outside protected areas and away from drinking water supplies. But, WE must demand these protections from Government, and we must say no to off-shore drilling, drilling in protected areas, and drilling where water supplies may be threatened. Our lives, our livelihoods and our communities are too precious to sacrifice for oil -- or just the mere promise of oil.

2010 BP OIL SPILL EXTENT OVERLAYED NEAR COASTAL BELIZE



The above graphic shows what would happen to Belize if the BP oil spill had occurred off our coast. Notice that the spill does not affect just off-shore areas but would also have spread inland, engulfing Placencia, Seine Bight, Independence, Hopkins, Belize City, Punta Gorda, Monkey River, Punta Negra and other coastal areas.

Stuff You Should Know

New Fishing Regulations

Statutory Instrument 78 of 2011 prohibits gill netting in the Sea within 5 miles from the Placencia and Monkey River coasts. New regulations also address shark finning, cage fishing, whelk season, nurse shark and Hickatee turtles. These new regulations can be downloaded at www.pcsdbelize.org/si-78.pdf

Off-Shore Oil Disasters in Belize

Marine Oil Spills: Cost Implications for Belize finds that 30 hours would elapse before booms could be deployed if a BNE oil tanker would run aground in the area of Seal Caye, resulting in 125 kilometers of shoreline being polluted, all the way from Seal Caye into the Gulf of Honduras. The cleanup costs would be about US\$277 million dollars, of which the ship owner would have to pay only 3.8%. The rest could likely be recovered by Belize through international treaties - sometime. Full report available at www.pcsdbelize.org/oil-spill-costs.pdf

New Species of Hamlet Fish Discovered in Belize

The Maya Hamlet (*Hypoplectrus maya*), a new species of Hamlet fish, has been documented at Laughing Bird Caye and the Pelican Range in the Southwater Marine Reserve. The Maya Hamlet is a solid deep iridescent blue color and does not have black margins on its fins like the only other similarly colored Hamlet, the Blue Hamlet (*H. gemma*), from Florida and the Yucatan, which has a dark black upper and lower margins on the caudal fin. For more information see the full report at www.pcsdbelize.org/hamlet.pdf

Belize Protected Areas Boosting Predatory Fish Populations

"A 14-year study by the Wildlife Conservation Society in an atoll reef lagoon in Glover's Reef, Belize, has found that fishing closures there produce encouraging increases in populations of predatory fish species. However, such closures have resulted in only minimal increases in herbivorous fish, which feed on the algae that smother corals and inhibit reef recovery." For more information see www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2011-12/wcs-bpa122111.php

Coral Reef Early Warning System Installed in Belize

CREWS (Coral Reef Early Warning System), a state of the art technology that monitors conditions of the coral reef environment will be installed in Turneffe Atoll, Lighthouse Reef Atoll and the Southwater Caye Marine Reserve. CREWS data is published to an online database to provide real-time data on the marine ecosystems. "Real time data transmission as provided by this system is essential for quick action to respond to disturbances such as algal blooms like that which occurred in southern Belize in summer of 2011." For more information see <http://eriub.org/latest-news/crews-to-monitor-belize-s-coral-reefs.html>

HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT TREATY ENERGY

In late November, 2011, Treaty Belize, a subsidiary of Treaty Energy Corporation, a United States oil prospecting company, began exploratory drilling for oil in a 350 acre site near Independence Village, Stann Creek District.

The oil concession on which Treaty Belize is drilling belongs to Princess Petroleum Limited (Princess). On 22 April 2010, Princess and Treaty Belize entered into a 50/50 partnership agreement in which Treaty is obligated to explore and drill for oil, if oil is found, while Princess remains liable for damages caused by exploration/drilling and provides bonding against damages. Princess is liable for up to BZ\$2 million for damages that may be caused by oil exploration/drilling and is bonded for BZ\$4.2 million for Treaty's activities within the Princess concession area.

On 13 October 2011, Placencia Village representatives met with Brian Luczywo, the then-VP of Operations for Treaty Belize. Information about methods of casing and other technical details regarding drilling in Independence were requested by Placencia community representatives because of concerns about drilling and the Placencia Peninsula water supply. These requests were ignored by Treaty.

According to an employee in the Department of Geology and Petroleum (Geology), in early December, 2011, both Geology and the Department of the Environment (DOE) inspected Treaty's drilling site, and temporarily stopped further drilling because of violations including lack of proper site preparation, methods used to collect samples and incorrectly constructed mud pits, among others.

On 19 January 2012, Geology made another site inspection, and on 23 January, Geology approved Treaty's resumption of exploratory oil drilling to a depth of 1400 feet at one well.

Based on videos and photos posted by Treaty on Facebook, Treaty resumed drilling on 24 January 2012.

On 30 January 2012 a Treaty press release announced:

Treaty's Drilling Team Struck Oil on its First Well on the Princess Concession in Belize on Friday, January 27th, at about 4:30 PM-CT - This 1st Well, SAN JUAN #2, will be Completed and Put into Production Following Review by Belizean Regulatory Officials - The Stann Creek Field is Estimated to Contain up to 6 Million Barrels of Recoverable Oil.

Andrew V. Reid, co-CEO of Treaty Energy also stated that:

We will commission third party engineers to confirm our estimates in the coming months.

On 31 January 2012, Mr. Reid announced plans to add two new oil fields to its Belize drilling program, and to "explore, analyze, and drill following permission being granted by Belizean officials."

The new areas proposed for drilling by Treaty are within 20 miles of Treaty's current drilling location. Both of these new areas are substantially larger in size than the currently drilled site of 350 acres.

Immediately after Treaty's announcement of finding oil in Belize, the price of Treaty Energy stock surged from less than US\$0.04 per share to US\$0.13 cents a share. (Treaty is not traded on any established stock exchange, but is a penny stock traded through informal penny stock boards, most of them Internet based.)

On 31 January 2012, the Government of Belize announced that Treaty had not struck oil and Belize Prime Minister Dean Barrow declared in a press conference that:

You have to start to wonder if these people do this so they can talk up their share price because I think it might be a local subsidiary of a foreign company with the same name. You have to wonder if it is a way to try to attract more financing. But as of now, the Department [of Geology] feels that the claim is false.

They Don't Care

On 9 December 2011, the Coalition to Save Our Natural Heritage submitted 20,160 signatures calling for a referendum on whether Belizeans want to allow drilling in Belize's off-shore waters. 17,140 signatures of Belize's registered voters, 10% of the electorate, were required to trigger the referendum.

On 1 February 2012, Prime Minister Dean Barrow announced that the Referendum would not be held on the same date as the 7 March 2012 general and municipal elections.

On 2 February 2012, the Boundaries and Elections Commission announced that 8,040 of the signatures submitted by the Coalition were invalid, primarily due to discrepancies in signatures. The Belize media pointed out that even though many people's signatures differed from the registration cards at Elections and Boundaries, the penmanship for individual voters showed striking similarity, indicating it was the same person signing the petition form.

The Government of Belize seems to be protesting too much. Is it because our Government knows that a referendum vote would clearly prove that Belizeans do NOT want off-shore drilling?

And if that is the case, don't the Government's actions demonstrate that it knows what its constituents want, and just doesn't care?

Actually, "just doesn't care" may be too polite. In reality, what our Government's actions may be saying to us is not only don't our elected officials care what we think, we are irrelevant in our own country.



Press Release

For Immediate Release

Clearing of 66 feet reserve and steep slopes

The Department of the Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment, is hereby advising the general public that it is critically important for persons to respect the 66 feet buffer reserve along all water bodies required under the laws of Belize. Use of this reserve requires authorization/approval from the Lands and Surveys Department. Land owners conducting clearing of vegetation are hereby reminded to maintain the buffer reserve in order to minimize or avoid siltation due to soil erosion, as well as pollution from agrochemical runoff. Respecting the buffer reserve particularly along water bodies will also aid in the survival of many wildlife species. Vegetation along water bodies provides a cool temperature and acceptable dissolve oxygen levels which are important for aquatic species. Clear water ways also allow for the transportation of food and nutrients for many endangered species between land and water corridors.

The Department of the Environment would also like to bring to the attention of the general public concerns with the increase in the clearance of steep slopes/hillsides with a gradient greater than 25° for agricultural purposes throughout the country, especially along the Hummingbird Highway. The potential negative impacts that could result from such activities are many but most importantly the endangerment and/or loss of human life or property. The clearing of vegetation which stabilizes these hillsides and steep slopes can result in landslides, both during periods of drought and heavy rainfall.

Both of these activities could lead to irreparable damages to the environment, personal properties and the general public on a whole.

With the above in mind, anyone presently clearing or intending to clear riverbanks or these hillsides/steep slopes are asked to cease all such actions for the safety and benefit of all.

Should anyone have any comment, question or would like to report such activities, please feel free to contact the Department of the Environment.

HELP US PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND OUR LIVES!

For further information please contact:

The Chief Environmental Officer
Department of the Environment
Market Square, Belmopan City
Tel: 802-2542 or 2816; Fax: 822-2862
Email: envirodept@btinternet.com; Website: www.doe.gov.bz

END

66 Foot Reserve

by Adrian Vernon

In Placencia, it has become common to build and develop on both the Sea side and the Lagoon side, without considering anything except the appearance of your dock, your coconut trees, or your thatch. Some people may even try to keep people off their docks, sea walls or beach.

The legal reality, however, is that private landowners do not own anything they have placed within the 66 foot buffer (also called the 66 foot reserve, "Crown Land" or the "Queen's Land"). This is land belonging to the public and can only be under the care of the property owner – the property owner does not OWN what is in the 66 foot reserve.

Recently this has become a serious issue for locals and foreigners alike who develop properties and place docks and sometimes even walls or fences to the water's edge. People think they own the beach or the dock they have made and try to stop others from using these public spaces.

Recently the Village has had a problem with the property owners on the Lagoon side not allowing people to use these spaces. How do we fix this problem? The best solution I have heard is to mark all of these spaces as public access, which will not only preserve the public's right to use these spaces, but also make it attractive to tourists trying to find a beautiful sunset.

Keep That Vehicle Engine Running—Or Not?

Ok, you stop in at the bank or the market. What do you do with your vehicle—leave it running or shut off the engine?

Our research indicates that if you have to wait for more than twenty or thirty seconds, you will save gas if you turn off your car – even if you have a diesel.

(It's a myth that leaving a diesel engine running saves gas or wear and tear on the engine.)

In reality, idling wastes fuel which costs you money, gets you nowhere, makes a lot of unnecessary noise and the fumes can make people around you sick.

So help yourselves and others – turn it off!

What's New at PCSD?

Peninsula Citizens for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is no longer the same. We've put on some lipstick, some make up and mascara and put in extensions. O.K., I guess it's the same face just prettied up a bit.

"So, what has changed?" you ask. For one, we have an office. Two, we have a full time employee, Adrian Vernon.

"Does that really change anything? Your office is closed an awful lot."

That's because of all the stuff we're doing outside the office.

Adrian is now our full time Program Director and he manages the office, designs outreach activities for the community and the schools, organizes programs such as our Sandwatch project, visits local schools to give educational talks, takes groups such as developers and real estate agents out to see the Placencia Lagoon, and does fundraising. Oh, and Adrian is also the Village Council's expert on environmental issues, serves on the Executive Committee of the Coalition to Save Our Natural Heritage, and was recently elected to serve on the Board of Directors of the Placencia Humane Society. Adrian's a pretty busy guy.

So, PCSD is taking on an even more active role while continuing to provide local communities with information about developments and environmental issues, monitoring local developments and reporting violations of laws to Government. For example, some of this year's new programs include Sand Watch, promotion of the Lagoon Reserve, a school competition, Lagoon education/guide training, a littoral forest guide and a bathymetry survey of the Lagoon, among many others.

You will be learning more about these programs in the upcoming editions of PCSD's newsletter, *Roots and Reef*. Please feel free to stop by with your thoughts of how we can better serve our community and our environment or simply stop by to visit or gather information. Our office is generally open from 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday (depending on Adrian's schedule). Or you can contact us at: adrian@pcsdbelize.org, Tel: 501-523-3587 or 501-620-2159.

PCSD 2012 PROJECTS

Placencia Lagoon Reserve: The primary goal for Peninsula Citizens for Sustainable Development (PCSD) in 2012 is to assist the Placencia and Seine Bight Village Councils in creating a Placencia Lagoon Reserve to protect the critically important ecosystems of the Lagoon. PCSD's work in this effort will include:

- **Marine & Terrestrial Wildlife Surveys:** These surveys will include sectioning out the Lagoon into workable plots and using seines, cameras and local knowledge to document at least 85% of the wildlife in Placencia Lagoon Ecosystem.
- **Outreach and Sensitization:** PCSD has already started a process of educational outreach and overall sensitization about the importance of the Lagoon's ecosystems to the lives of people in this area, and to garner local ownership of a Lagoon Reserve, including:
 - **Tours and Presentations:** Lagoon tours and presentations are already being conducted to educate different groups about the overall importance of Lagoon's mangrove system and its functions.
 - **Lagoon Ecosystem Model Competition:** The Model Competition involves local schools and their students in actively learning about and valuing the Lagoon ecosystem. The Lagoon models constructed and submitted by students will be displayed at the Placencia Sidewalk Art Festival and members of the public will vote for the Model they think best explains the Lagoon's functions.
- **Government consultations:** Along with members of the Placencia and Seine Bight Village Councils, we will be meeting with the national Government to present our Lagoon Reserve proposal and to determine the form of the Reserve.

Sand watch (Beach Monitoring and Restoration): As development continues on the Placencia Peninsula, we have started to see more and more erosion. To counter this problem, we have designed a program to monitor and, where necessary, to restore area beaches.

- **Monitoring:** A beach measurement program will identify and document which areas of the Peninsula are most at risk of erosion, and attempt to determine the causes of the erosion. PCSD will also be working with Dr. Robert Young, who has been hired by the owners of Chabil Mar Villas, to conduct an erosion analysis of the Peninsula in February 2012.
- **Restoration:** A number of properties on the Peninsula have been severely affected because of the way the properties were first developed. Mitigation will involve assisting property owners with planting and reactivating natural processes so that natural restoration can occur.

Guide Training (Lagoon Tour): Tour guide training will allow local tour guides and tour operators to expand their tour offerings to include Lagoon tours for our visitors. Training will focus on the different ecosystems (seagrass, mangroves and wetlands) and wildlife of the Placencia Lagoon, the importance of the Lagoon to the health of the Peninsula's environment, including our water and food, the role of the Lagoon as a nursery for marine life, and the protection provided by mangrove from storms and climate change. Training will also include Lagoon navigation.

Guide to Native Plants of Placencia: The Guide to Native Plants will identify native plants that can enhance the attractiveness and value of local properties to induce developers to preserve the Peninsula's wildlife and bird habitats and assist in preventing erosion on local beaches.

Peninsula 2020: What You Think Is Best for Our Home

“Where are we going and how should we get there” were the questions at the core of the Peninsula 2020 initiative. Local voices answered these questions to proactively plan for the future of the Placencia Peninsula, rather than just reacting to outside forces.

A local steering committee obtained funding from the World Wildlife Fund and hired consultants John Flowers and Mark Usher to find out what residents want for the Peninsula. Research included public meetings, focus groups, individual interviews and a professional survey of area residents. Every community on the Peninsula participated, including Riversdale, the Plantation, Maya Beach, Seine Bight Village and Placencia Village.

The results of the Peninsula 2020 research, released in December 2011, are very enlightening. For example, the Peninsula 2020 research found that the visions and goals for the Peninsula did not vary greatly among geographic areas, black or white, rich or poor, Creole, Garifuna or Mestizo. Almost all residents share the same set of hopes and goals for the future.

And, the single overriding desire for the future expressed by Peninsula residents is more local control over decisions affecting their lives and future well-being, with this local control issue cutting across social, economic and environmental concerns, as well as geographic, ethnic, and economic lines.

In addition, most everyone on the Peninsula agreed that mass tourism should be avoided in favor of “low impact” tourism, with new resorts falling into the “boutique category,” and specifically encouraging small locally owned bed and breakfasts, prohibiting mega resorts, discouraging all-inclusive resorts, and encouraging low impact resort development rather than more condos or strictly residential enclaves.

More specific recommendations that emerged from the Peninsula 2020 process include, among other things, the need to:

- Place the Placencia Lagoon under officially protected status;
- Develop programs to encourage locally owned businesses;
- Establish a Peninsula-wide shuttle service for easier and less expensive access to jobs and local businesses;
- Tightly integrate fishing and tourism in terms of culture, tourist activities and supply chains;
- Promote cultural tourism on a Peninsula-wide basis;
- Establish an emergency medical center;
- Upgrade Placencia’s police station commander from sergeant to inspector;
- Create a permanent presence on the Peninsula for the Departments of Environment, Forests and Geology;
- Support the Coastal Zone Management Authority in controlling development on local cayes;
- Create a “best practices” manual for responsible development of coastal areas and cayes;
- Engage a professional urban planner to advise Peninsula communities on physical planning issues;
- Enforce the national building code, particularly setback regulations and building footprint laws, and
- Establish a height limit of three stories across the Peninsula with gradient height regulations in Placencia Village.

The Steering Committee that guided the Peninsula 2020 process included the Placencia and Seine Bight Village Councils, the Placencia Tour Guide Association, the Placencia Tour Operators Association, the Placencia Chapter of the Belize Tourism Industry Association, the Placencia Fishermen’s Cooperative, the Southern Environmental Association and the Peninsula Citizens for Sustainable Development.

The full Peninsula 2020 report will be distributed to everyone who might seek to influence the future development of the Placencia Peninsula, including government, private developers, NGOs, local and international financial institutions and the real estate industry.

While the Peninsula 2020 report is not necessarily legally binding, it does stand as a signpost, the equivalent of a billboard at the Riversdale junction saying:

Welcome to Placencia.

Join us in the Peninsula’s development. Here is our vision. Read it and ignore it at your own peril.

The full report can be downloaded at
www.pcsdbelize.org/peninsula-2020.pdf

Martin Moreira

“I am blind, but I’ve got thinking brains.
I can’t see, but in my mind, I see ”

Martin Moreira is blind.

He lost his sight in 1995, and although his world is darkness, Martin has a vision for life that shames most of us who can see.

Martin and I have been friends for over fifteen years, and in all that time, I have never heard Martin complain or ask the question most of us would have asked: “Why me?”

When Martin and I sat down for this interview, I asked him directly, “How do you manage your life, and how do you do it with such cheerfulness?”

He responded with a chuckle, as if I had asked him the most simple question in the world. “I live day and night in the arms of Jesus. He’s first and I follow Him. If I had thought negative thoughts, I’d be done dead already. God is with me.”

With that faith, Martin’s days are pretty much like everyone else’s days.

“I wake up, say my morning prayers, turn on my radio, brush my teeth, and decide what I will eat for breakfast.”

He cooks and prepares his own meals over an open fire underneath his house.

Martin cannot work. He receives \$40 every month from the Government, so Martin relies on the kindness of those around him.

Seine Bight Water Board provides him with free water. Pastor Jim Mensie and members of Plantation Chapel put a new roof on his house. They took him to an eye doctor in Dangriga, and bought Martin a “talking” watch so he could tell time. They bought him a radio so he stays in touch with the outside world.

Miss Doris, who runs a small shop in Seine Bight, has credited Martin for food for two years. When he gets his money from the Government, he takes it over to Doris to repay her. Even with that small amount of money, he still owes her for his groceries, and she is kind enough to continue providing him with food.

A friend who grew up with Martin in Seine Bight now lives in L.A., and when he returns to Belize to visit, brings Martin clothes.

Martin says, “I accept the help people give me, and I am grateful for it.”

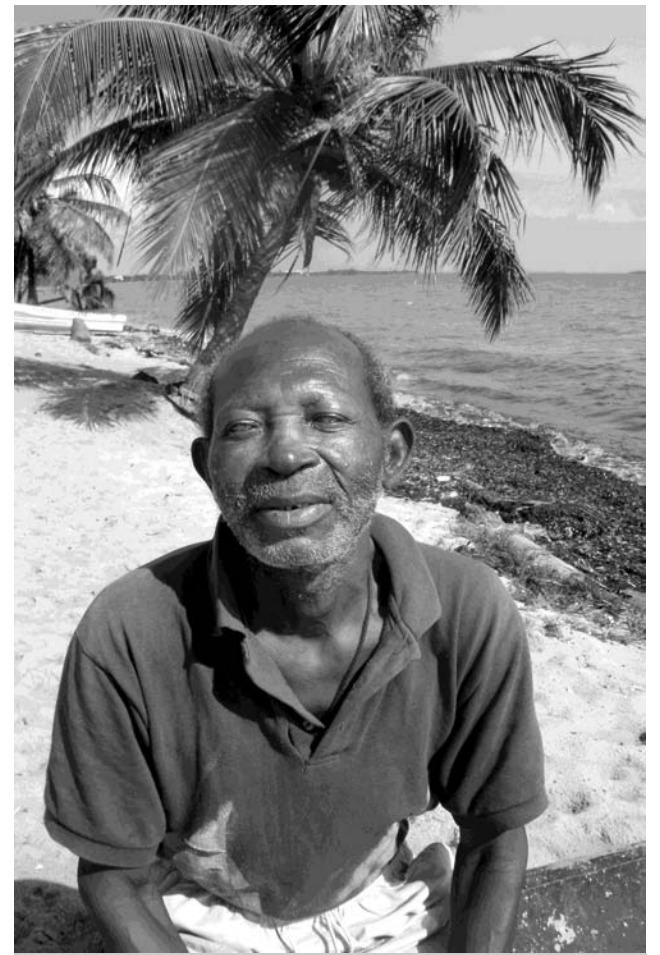
Martin is also grateful for the fond memories of his childhood and the very positive contributions his family made to the community, especially his father.

“I live now on the same property I was born on in 1948. As a young boy, I would wake up at 5am., and head down to the Sea, throw out my fishing line, and within minutes, catch all kinds of fish—jack, mutton snappers, shad, snook, boney fish—it was all so plentiful then. I would walk a few steps back home where my mom had fried jacks ready to go with the fish. I headed off to school with a full and happy belly.

“I loved attending St. Alphonsus School, which was right on the beach. I liked all subjects, but history was my favorite. I wanted to go to high school. At the time, Independence High School was housed in a small wooden building, but it closed after only a couple of years in the early 1960’s because attendance was so low. This high school was rebuilt and reopened many years later, where our students now go to school.”

“At that time, Seine Bight housed the only police station on the Peninsula, and justice was frequently administered by Marcos Moreira, my father.

Martin’s father wore many hats. He was a Justice of the Peace, Village alcalde, and school officer. He made sure students went to school. He carried a billy club and arrested people, if necessary. But, instead of hauling people to the court in Dangriga, Martin’s father



Martin Moreira

heard cases in Seine Bight, and negotiated conflicts such as common assault and disputes.

Martin comments on his father:

He was born to this work. As a retired teacher, he used his skills as an educator to maintain law and order in Seine Bight. He took his responsibilities to his village and his country very seriously. We had a flagpole in front of our house, and I or one of my seven brothers and sisters raised it at 6am every day and lowered it at 6pm every day, no matter the weather.

Not only did my father give to our Village, he also worked as a yard foreman at the lumber yard run by Belize Estate and Produce Company in Mango Creek. People came from all over Belize to find jobs with this company, because it was a very large company. It provided almost all the lumber in southern Belize.

Motor boats were scarce, so people loaded up wooden dories with lumber and paddled across the Lagoon. It was very hard work, and as a young man, I helped some of my friends back haul and transport lumber so they could build their houses.

Martin, of course, like most everyone on this Peninsula, took to fishing as a livelihood, and his price for a string of eight small fish in the 1970’s was \$1.00.

“I never made a lot of money, but I always ate well.

My favorite food is hudut, a Garifuna specialty of boiled and mashed plantain with coconut milk and fish. Hudut is so healthy it makes you grow faster. Just talking about it makes me drool.”

“When I was young, all the children in my family had to go to church on Sunday. If you did not go, you did not get breakfast. But I enjoyed church, and still go to church every Sunday. For me, church is the house of life and truth. God made me, and it is my obligation to serve Him. I owe God my life.”

“I am blind, but I’ve got thinking brains. I can’t see, but in my mind, I see.”