

January 15, 2007

Subject: **Response to Dr. Karl Watson's
Letter to the Editor as published in The Advocate of January 14, 2007**

Dear Sir,

We wish to thank Dr. Karl Watson, who recently wrote a letter to The Advocate, for his concerns in regard to ensuring proper environmental and biodiversity safeguards for the endangered habitat within the current RAMSAR designated wetlands at Graeme Hall, as well as the associated upland buffers. We know that in the early 1990's, Dr. Watson was instrumental in convincing Mr. Peter Allard to purchase the critical lands at Graeme Hall, and has since continually lobbied Mr. Allard and the Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary (GHNS) to invest in continuous wildlife census and management activities, water quality monitoring, and other environmental preservation and management efforts.

We share Dr. Watson's concerns that environmental policy, as well as preservation and management of the sensitive buffer lands within the proposed Graeme Hall National Park and the lands currently protected by the Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR) should be driven by science.

Dr. Watson's letter of January 14, 2007 refers to a "proposal" by the Friends of Graeme Hall (FOGH), but the document is actually defined as a "Reference Guide" designed to augment the environmental Master Planning process currently underway in the Ministry of Energy and Environment. The FOGH prepared this "Reference Guide" (located at www.graemehallnationalpark.org) for use by scientists, environmental planners and others within government to bring some additional perspectives and ideas to the Master Planning process.

The core solution for the long term preservation of the lands at Graeme Hall must be led by the Government of Barbados. It is the dream of many in Barbados that the combined public and private lands within the proposed 240 acre Graeme Hall National Park can be managed under a single Government-led environmental management plan, one that will allow rehabilitation and management of critical habitat as a wildlife reserve, in perpetuity.

Furthermore, any low-impact recreational activities (walking, bicycle trails, etc.) within the agricultural upland buffer lands, must be managed in a way that would not intrude into the mangrove wetland.

Dr. Watson's observations highlight the recommendations embodied in many Government and private sector environmental studies about the Graeme Hall ecosystem over the past 25 years, as well as in the 1998 Barbados Tourism Development Programme Subprogramme C, a multi-part Study prepared by the ARA Consulting Group for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tourism and International Transport at a cost of US \$800,000, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank.

Specifically, the FOGH and the GHNS have offered to be in partnership with the Government of Barbados, and are willing to support a government-led replicable and pragmatic conservation park model that promises to accelerate habitat preservation efforts for Barbados's imperiled ecosystem at Graeme Hall, monitor wastewater and stormwater management problems, and manage agricultural, educational and recreational opportunities for the people of Barbados.

We commend and thank Dr. Watson for his insights and concerns about the Graeme Hall ecosystem, and encourage him to continue work with those in Government and those in the private sector to meet these challenges. For the National park to become a reality it will require leadership from our political representatives. *We cannot rely solely on the private-sector to ensure the integrity of a 200-300 year National Park Plan.*

We have taken some encouragement from the comments reported on in your newspaper by Prime Minister Owen Arthur while attending the official opening of George Washington House. He is quoted as saying "While envisioning a time in the future when Barbados would be known for the preservation of its heritage sites". Although Prime Minister Arthur was speaking specifically about great houses and buildings it does show that the value of heritage sites is recognized at the highest level of government. We are encouraged by the Prime Minister's remarks and remain hopeful that the course of action set out in the FOGH "Reference Guide- A Vision for Graeme Hall and Barbados" will be embraced and acted on by Government.

In our opinion, as well as The ARA Consulting Group Study, Graeme Hall is a heritage site. Their study says: "Because of its national significance therefore, Graeme Hall forms an important part of the natural and cultural heritage of the Nation. It has provided enjoyment for the country's residents for many years and can serve as a source of nature appreciation and education for the future".

Sincerely,

Friends of Graeme Hall