

26 December 2006

No. 3 Warners Terrace
Ch.CH.

The Editor
The Advocate Newspaper
Fontabelle
St. Michael

Dear Sir,

In a recent print media story on Saturday December 03 reporting on the visit by health officials to the Graeme Hall Swamp to look at ways to reduce the presence of the Anopheles mosquito the officials were quoted as saying that “we are calling on the other partners in Government and the private sector to work together to resolve the issues raised including that the appropriate levels of water are maintained”.

The Friends of Graeme Hall, as well as biologists, engineers and various members of government believe the long term solution for drainage and mosquito control in the Graeme Hall wetland must go beyond simple repair or relocation of the Sluice Gate, and be an engineered solution for the entire Graeme Hall area.

Furthermore, the Friends of Graeme Hall urge the Government of Barbados to consider that the solutions for Graeme Hall can be financed and engineered as part of the development of Graeme Hall National Park, and stand ready to assist Government finance these objectives.

The Graeme Hall National Park Initiative (www.graemehallnationalpark.org) proposes a four point technical approach, combined with public/private funding mechanisms. The primary basis for these solutions incorporate the most comprehensive environmental, health and economic study that has ever been done for the Graeme Hall natural area, namely the US\$800,000 Inter-American Development Bank financed 1998 ARA Study, Subprogramme C, which is embodied in the www.graemehallnationalpark.org site.

The civil engineering solutions for the Graeme Hall area to improve the health and welfare of the natural lands and neighborhoods around it would include specific direction from the ARA Study, and the following:

1. The entire proposed 240-acre National Park area at Graeme Hall should utilize assistance from professional consultants who are familiar with multi-use, tropical wetland management systems.
2. The entire area proposed as the Graeme Hall National Park should have a master detention/retention drainage plan that maximizes percolation of drainage water, to substantially reduce or eliminate contaminated storm water onto Worthing Beach when it rains.
3. The existing Sluice Gate should be abandoned, and a new, preferably passive, weir system put in place to control water levels, similar in scope to Stormwater Treatment Areas within the South Florida Water Management System in the United States.

4. Provision for an alternate South Coast Sewage Facility emergency sewage discharge should be engineered to replace the current emergency outfall that empties into the Sluice Gate Canal.

To control mosquitoes, the Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary and the Ministry of Health have had a very progressive relationship over the years. The mission and objectives of both the Sanctuary and the Ministry are exactly the same: Maintaining clear canal channels and optimum water levels prevents stagnation, and promotes healthy fish populations which control mosquito larvae.

Both the Ministry of Health and the Sanctuary have relied upon one another to ensure healthy fish conditions to control mosquito infestations naturally and in fact there have been no major insecticide spray operations in the Western Swamp area in nearly 5 years as a result of this holistic approach.

However, when water levels in the Swamp get too low, such as when the Sluice Gate is not operated properly, canals tend to dry up and “pool” stagnant ponds, which kill fish and increase mosquito larvae.

We believe that if the relevant authorities embrace the recommendations summarised above and detailed in the reference guide for The Graeme Hall National Park at www.graemehallnationalpark.org, this private/public partnership can meet the objectives mentioned by the government officials in your story.

Together we can protect the health of citizens and visitors while preserving the last green space between Bridgetown and the Airport, the last remaining mangrove forest, the last major wetland, the largest inland lake, and the most concentrated biodiversity in the island.

Sincerely,

Friends of Graeme Hall Committee