



BRIEF REMARKS
BY
THE HONOURABLE
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MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT
MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT
AND HOUSING

ON THE OCCASION OF

WORLD WETLANDS DAY

Bonefish Pond National Park

Nassau, Bahamas

6th February, 2014

SALUTATION

- Mr. Eric Carey, Director of the BNT
- Ms. Lynn Gape, Deputy Director of the BNT
- Members of the press
- Ladies & Gentlemen

Good Morning!

Ladies and Gentlemen, wetlands are land areas such as marshes, swamps and tidal creeks that are saturated with water, either permanently or seasonally. This ecosystem is a valuable one to The Bahamas and is important because it -

- captures energy;
- supports a wide variety of flora and fauna;
- forms different habitats and ecosystems;
- filters pollutants such as sediments, nutrients, organic and inorganic matter;
- offers protection against floods;
- provides food, water and refuge for many humans and animals especially in times of drought;
- acts as a nursery for fish and wildlife, especially migratory birds;
- provides opportunities for recreation activities such as boating, swimming, bushwalking and bird watching and ecotourism activities; and
- serves as a source of education for the community.

Countries of the world began to notice that wetlands were disappearing at a rapid rate. This led to declining fresh water, fisheries and water fowl populations, and increasing flood episodes. Appreciating the value of this ecosystem, and the need to protect and preserve it, an intergovernmental treaty called the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was adopted on the 2nd February, 1971. This agreement provided the framework for countries to collaborate internationally on the conservation of wetlands, and to determine on a national level what it considered to be the wise use of this ecosystem with its resources. Over 168 contracting countries are presently party to the Convention with some 2,177 areas listed as Wetlands of International Importance.

The Bahamas signed the Ramsar Convention on 7th June, 1997, after adding Lake Rosa, home to 50,000 West Indian flamingoes at the Inagua National Park, as a Ramsar Site of International Importance for The Bahamas. The Bahamas Environment Science and Technology (BEST) Commission implements the obligations under the Ramsar Convention through the National Wetlands

Committee.

This year, the United Nations has named 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming. Therefore, for World Wetlands Day, the Ramsar Convention has chosen the theme: “Wetlands and Agriculture – Partners of Growth.” This is because wetlands provide reliable sources of waters and fertile soils for agriculture. Therefore, it is important that there is sustainable management of wetlands.

Interestingly, the 1280 coastal acres of wetlands on which we stand this morning at Bonefish Pond National Park was once surrounded by agriculture and was a site for indiscriminate dumping of construction materials and cooper burning. With the help of heavy equipment, cooper, other metals and rubber casings were all removed to create an opening to permit water to flow from the sea. With the assistance of some 30 students from the Ministry of Education Summers Camp, the Young Marine Explorers and other volunteers, 600 mangroves were planted along the restored channel. Snappers, shads, barracuda and other marine life have made the Bonefish Pond National Park their home.

Access by the general public was enhanced after the BNT and the Bahamas Government constructed a boardwalk with a covered pavilion. Now, Bonefish Pond National Park serves as an ideal spot for students studying mangrove creeks.

Later this year The Bonefish Pond National Park is earmarked to be a kayak launching site. We trust that previous corporate supporters such as Atlantis Resort, Mr. Tennyson Wells and Bahamas Waste will lend their usual assistance to the BNT in this new endeavor.

The Bahamas National Trust is now recommending to the Bahamas Government to nominate Bonefish Pond National Park, Harrold and Wilson Ponds National Parks and the Andros West Side National Park to the Ramsar Convention to be recognized as wetlands of International Importance.

Ladies and Gentleman the primary threat to our wetlands is a lack of awareness. Most residents are unaware of the importance and function of wetlands. Therefore, there are increased cases of indiscriminate dumping in these ecosystems. Developments of businesses, homes and resorts that often generate jobs can also reduce our wetland acreage. Improperly built or installed septic tanks can lead to contamination that also destroys our precious wetlands. Invasive

species can also overtake wetland spots.

Improving water management, increasing organic farming, reducing water pollution, developing more efficient irrigation systems, drought tolerant crops and methods of treatment of waste water through wetlands are all ways we can conserve and wisely use our wetlands.

February 2nd marked the 43rd anniversary of World Wetlands Day. To celebrate World Wetlands Day, the BNT will be hosting a webinar today at 2:00p.m. entitled "Wetlands and Agriculture - Partners for Growth." The Webinar will focus on the need for the water and agricultural sectors to work together for the best results. It will also highlight the relationship between wetlands and fresh water resources in the Bahamas, and what must be done to conserve them. The Webinar will be delivered by John Bowleg, Hydrologist at the Water and Sewerage Corporation and Chairman of the National Wetlands Committee. Interested parties can contact the BNT for further details.

Ladies and Gentleman, I challenge you to learn more about wetlands, join the global and national activities to protect and preserve our wetlands, engage your counterparts on social media and reach out to those who do not appreciate wetlands. Together, we can maintain what we have, enhance our acreage, educate our populace and devise management plans to protect our wetlands for future generations.

Happy World Wetlands Day – Bahamas!