



## GRANDE RIVIERE

Story

2013 WIDECAST Annual Meeting  
Baltimore ~ February 2-3

### GRANDE RIVIERE NATURE TOUR GUIDE ASSOCIATION

Grande Riviere Nature Tour Guide Association is a community based, volunteered driven organization established in 1999.



# Where we are and Our Vision

To place Trinidad & Tobago as  
“the Premier Turtle Tourism Destination Globally”



CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



Grande Riviere Village



# WHO IS The Grande Riviere Nature Tour Guide Association ?



Founding Sponsor.

**MINISTRY OF  
TOURISM**  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

**Atlantic**  
*Moving a generation ahead*

**bhpbilliton**  
resourcing the future

The story starts with these guys





**What we do as a group:**  
Balancing development and conservation of  
regional resources to benefit Community People







## FOCUS

- **Research and Monitoring**
  - Tag animals and collect scientific data (Research)
- **Protect Habitat**
- **Reduce Mortality**
- **PROGRAMMES**
  - Beach Patrols
  - Advocacy for Protected Areas



## A UNIQUE SITE

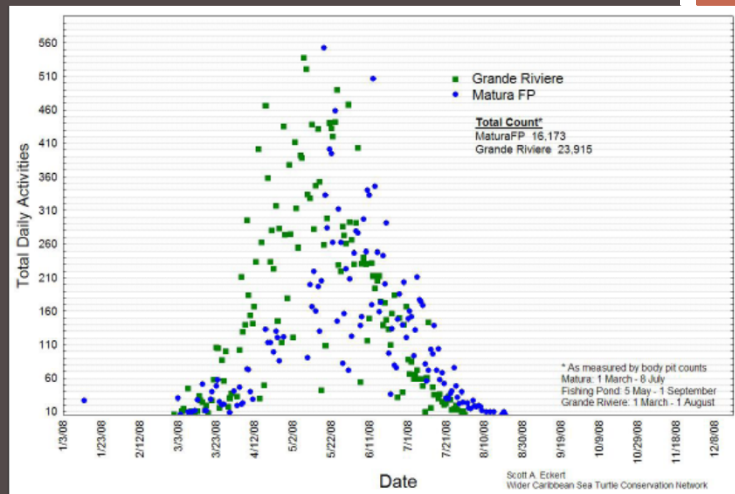
Grande Riviere has as many as 500 turtles per night nesting on a beach 1.2km which is nestled in the heart of our community of 380 persons.





Highest density nesting site globally.

## Leatherback sea turtle nesting activity\* for Trinidad



## 2012 International Incident

# The Grande Riviere Story

# TROPICAL DEPRESSION – DEC 2011

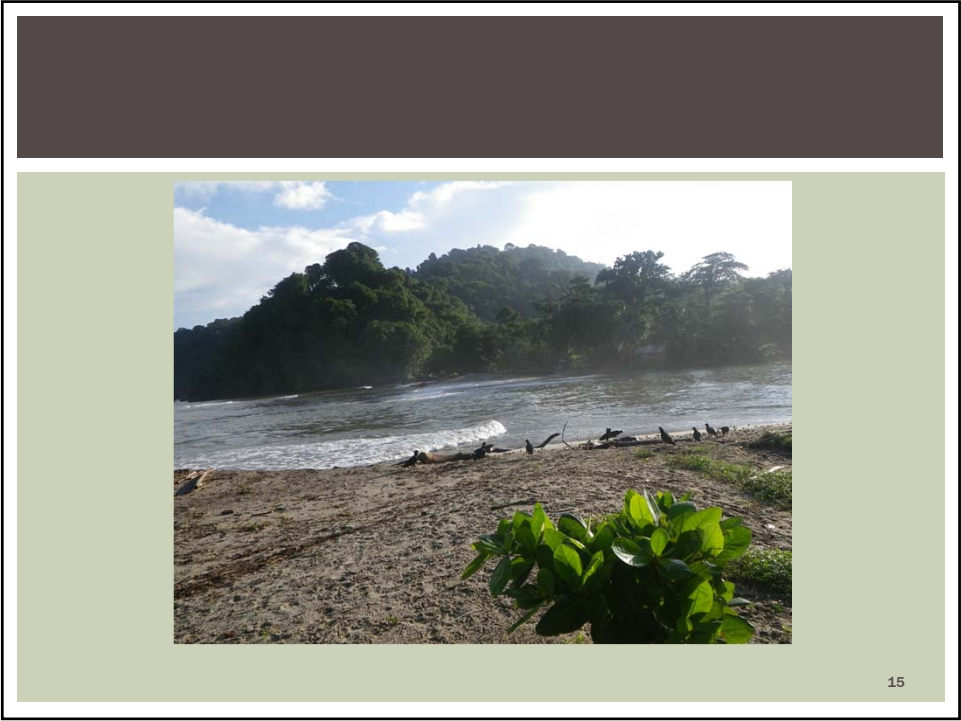
Date	Incident/Activity
Dec 3, 2011	<p>Due to the heavy rainfall caused by the two day passage of a Tropical Depression, the Grande Riviere River behaves erratically and overflows its banks. There is unprecedented flooding in the village and all fishing boats sink. The boat owned by the Grande Riviere Nature Tours Guide Association (GRNTGA) is also damaged.</p> <p>At this time, the river is running in its normal northerly direction. An elderly resident says that several years ago the Grande Riviere river behaved in a similar fashion, also causing severe flooding and damage to the village.</p>

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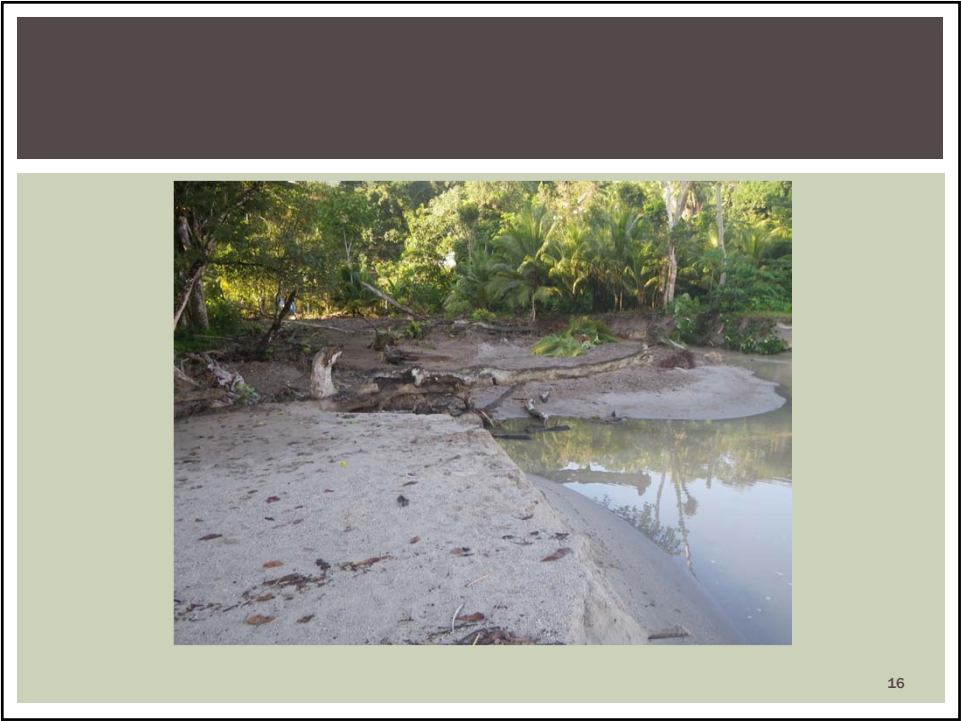


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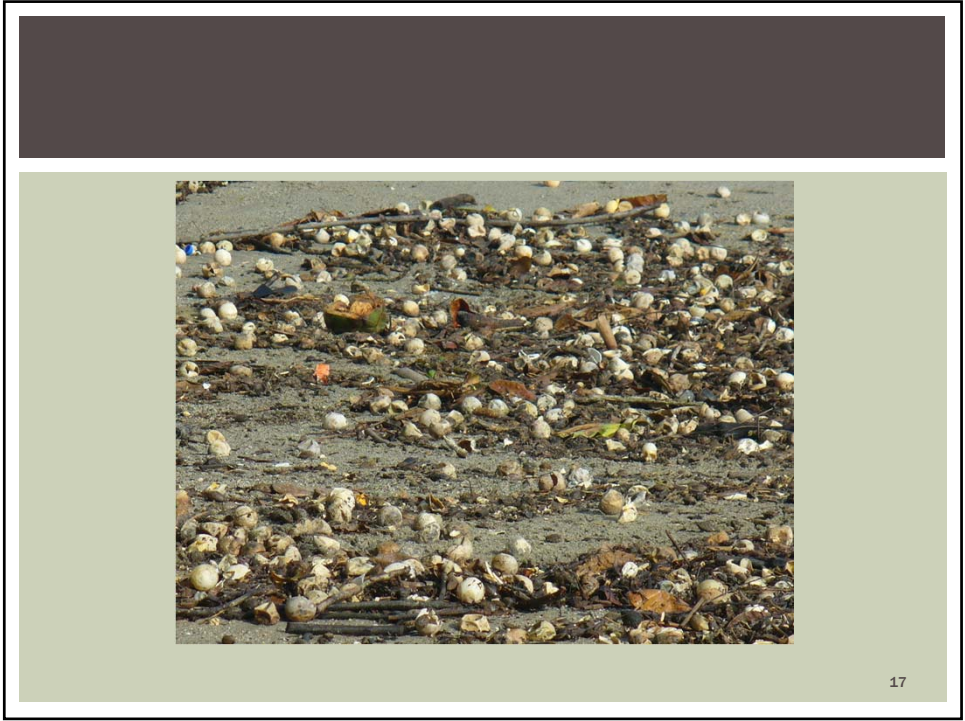




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## MINISTER OF WORKS VISITS

Date	Incident/Activity
Dec 4, 2011	Minister of Works, Jack Warner visits the area and surveys the damage. The Minister's recommendation is that the river be dredged.



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## CONTACTING MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

Date	Incident/Activity
Jan 2012	Grande Riviere fishermen write a letter to the Ministry of Agriculture requesting compensation for the twenty (20) boats that were destroyed in December.  (There has been no response to this letter to date.)

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## “DRY” SEASON

Date	Incident/Activity
Jan – May 2012	Due to the absence of a dry season, the mouth of the Grande Riviere river remains open. The river still flows out to sea, but constant rainfall results in the mouth's location shifting from east and west on a regular basis. All sand in the path of the river is washed away whenever the river mouth's direction changes. The changing direction of the river begins to accelerate erosion of the beach.

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## TURTLE SEASON OPENS

Date	Incident/Activity
Mar 1, 2012	<p>The 2012 Turtle Season commences. The Grande Riviere River now flows east of Hosang Street in the village, cutting through Zone 4 on the beach. The Grande Riviere Nature Tour Guides Association (GRNTGA) commences its nightly turtle patrols.</p> <p>GRNTGA is the only group recognized by the Forestry Department for turtle conservation and tours at Grande Riviere, which is a closed beach. A participant in the National Sea Turtle Tagging and Monitoring Programme, GRNTGA is also the only group given permission to collect turtle census data at Grande Riviere on behalf of the Forestry Department. It has been doing this for the last 12 years</p>

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## ZONE 4

Date	Incident/Activity
Mar – July, 2012	<p>Traditionally, Zone 4 is the largest nesting area on the Grande Riviere beach. However, due to this zone's proximity to the river mouth, it experiences the highest loss of eggs in the nesting season.</p> <p>Between March and July, as a result of the Grande Riviere river's new direction and constant movement from east to west, 1344 turtle nests are lost in Zone 4. Zone 4 is no longer the largest nesting area.</p>

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## ZONE 4: THEN AND NOW



*August 2006*



*July 2012*

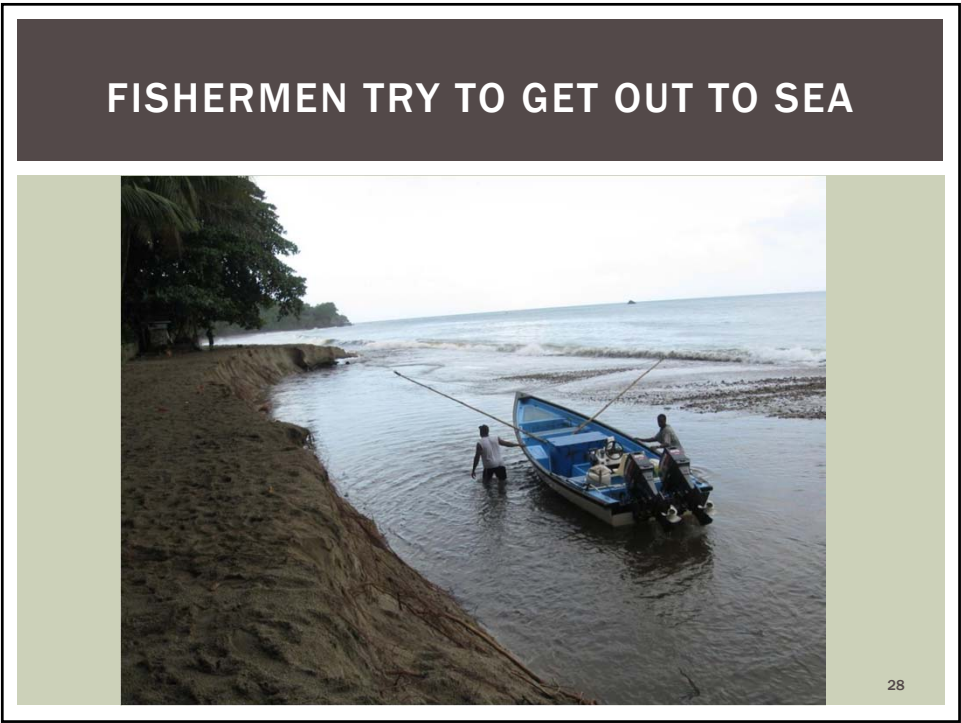
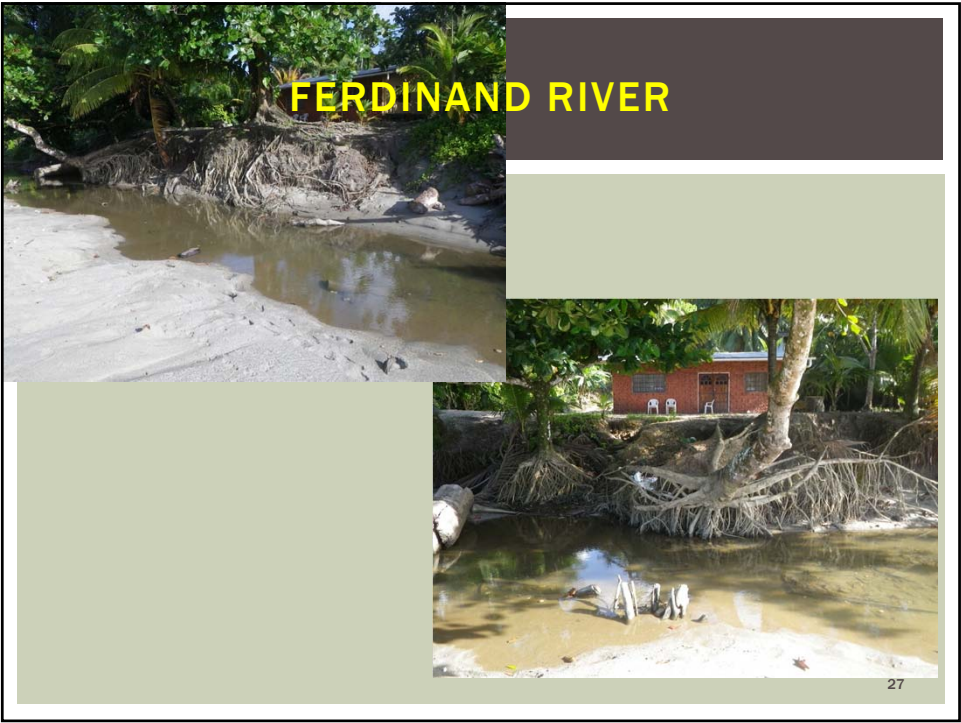
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## THE COMMUNITY IS MAROONED

Date	Incident/Activity
June 2012	<p>The change in course of the Grande Riviere river affects livelihoods in the village.</p> <p>People impacted include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 40 fishermen who are now unable to navigate safely out to sea</li> <li>• 60 persons attached to GRNTGA</li> <li>• 12 persons from Sans Souci to Matelot employed by Mt. Plaisir Hotel</li> <li>• 25 persons employed by the Le Grande Almandier Hotel</li> </ul> <p>The Grande Riviere community is now marooned by river. The Ferdinand River, which is situated in the middle of the beach (Zone 3) also begins to change its course. The Ferdinand River now runs in a westerly direction behind Zone 3 and has begun to erode Zone 2 on the beach. People's property is being eroded and homes are threatened. Viable turtle nesting sites are being damaged.</p>

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## CONTACTING STATE AGENCIES

Date	Incident/Activity
Week of July 1, 2012	<p>As the situation worsens, the Grande Riviere community initiates contact with several state bodies, seeking remediation.</p> <p>The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM) is contacted, but they advise that the villagers notify the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation.</p> <p>The Corporation tells the villagers that a team will be dispatched to evaluate the situation. The Corporation also says that this is an issue for the Drainage Division. The Corporation later advises that its team was sent and the situation evaluated.</p> <p>In the meantime, villagers use shovels to try re-route the river. The river's passage is now threatening to topple Mt. Plaisir Hotel onto the beach.</p>

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## JULY 1 – MEDIA COVERAGE

6 SUNDAY JULY 1, 2012

### Grande Riviere on shifting ground

Stories by PETER BALROOP

ITALIAN-BORN Grande Riviere hotel proprietor Piero Guerinelli continues to grapple with an unfolding environmental disaster that is threatening to destroy the Mt. Plaisir Hotel resort, one of the premier turtle-nesting beaches on Trinidad's northeast coast.

Guerinelli, who has run the 15-room hotel for the past 20 years, is daily refashioning the beach on which the resort is built being eroded.

The erosion, at the height of the 2012 turtle-nesting season, has reached right to the foundation of the hotel and has prevented the rental of five rooms.

On Thursday the unshaven and clearly very worried Guerinelli was at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation's Ramdath Street chamber prior to the statutory meeting being held.

There, accompanied by the Tobo-Patting Ford electoral district representative, Council-

man Robert Brown, who has been in the hotel for the past 20 years, he had already contacted the Works and Infrastructure Minister Emmanuel George and arranged for an excavator to be sent to Grande Riviere to respond urgently to the emergency.

Guerinelli explained to *TNT Mirror* that his hotel is built visually on the mouth of the Grande Riviere River, which last December, following a series of landslides

in the area, shifted its course from running in a northerly direction to the sea, to swinging gradually west.

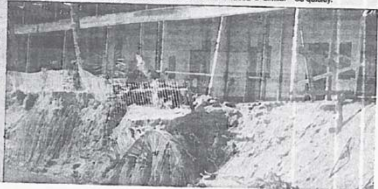
That course change, which was aggravated by the recent raging showers nationwide had accelerated the washing away of the sand on the beach in front of the hotel, exposing the foundation and threatening to collapse the building.

He said he would be also taking a lot of business at the weekend because he could not cater properly to the visitors to



PIERO GUERINELLI waits at the Sangre

Grande Regional Corporation chambers. Grande Riviere for the situation 10 years ago annual fishermen's fête, but on that occasion the hotel proprietor authorities had responded quickly.



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## DANGER TO MT. PLAISIR HOTEL



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## FIRST VISITS, INCLUDING MEDIA

Date	Incident/Activity
<b>Week of July 1, 2012</b>	<p>GRNTGA contacts the Drainage Division, and is told that the Division's head will be notified.</p> <p>Mr. Joth Singh, CEO of the Environmental Agency (EMA) is also contacted, by both GRNTGA and Pierro , proprietor of Mt. Plaisir Hotel.</p> <p>Mr. Pantin, superintendent of Regional Corporation, and Terry Rondon, Councillor for Toco, visit Grande Riviere to survey the situation.</p> <p>A reporter from CNC3 TV visits and does interviews for a story. A team from the Guardian newspaper also visits and covers the situation.</p> <p>All visits highlight that the solution is to dredge the river.</p>

## EMA & FORESTRY VISIT

Date	Incident/Activity
Week of July 1, 2012	On July 5, Mr. Joth Singh, CEO of the EMA, visits the site.
	On July 6, a team from the Forestry Department visits.
	Marc De Verteuil petitions the Ministry of Environment to send an excavator to Mt. Plaisir Hotel, as the situation facing the hotel worsens daily.
	Villagers contact the Ministry of Tourism, who advises that the situation does not fall under the Ministry's purview.
	Dr. Bachan, TVT Executive Director and TDC Director, is contacted. He advises that he will try to seek assistance.

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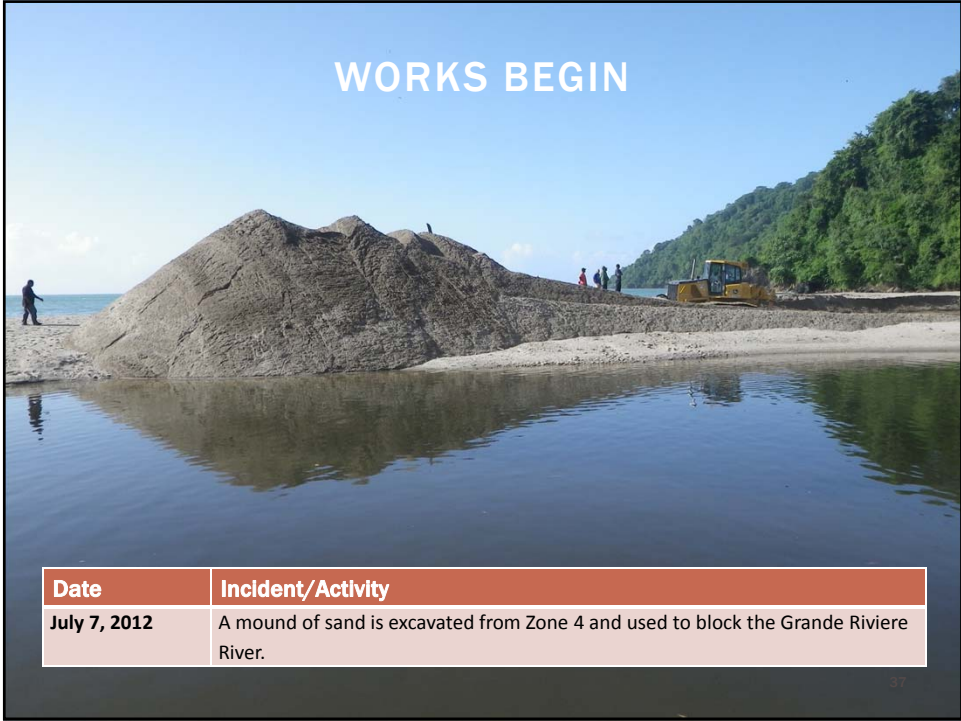
## EXCAVATOR ARRIVES

Date	Incident/Activity
July 6, 2012	An excavator from the Ministry of Works arrives in Grande Riviere, brought in by the military.
	The Grande Riviere villagers were not advised that an excavator was being sent.



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# WORKS BEGIN

A photograph showing a large, conical mound of sand on a sandy beach. The mound is situated next to a body of water, which reflects the scene. In the background, a yellow excavator is visible on the beach, and a few people are standing near it. The sky is clear and blue, and a green hillside is visible in the distance.

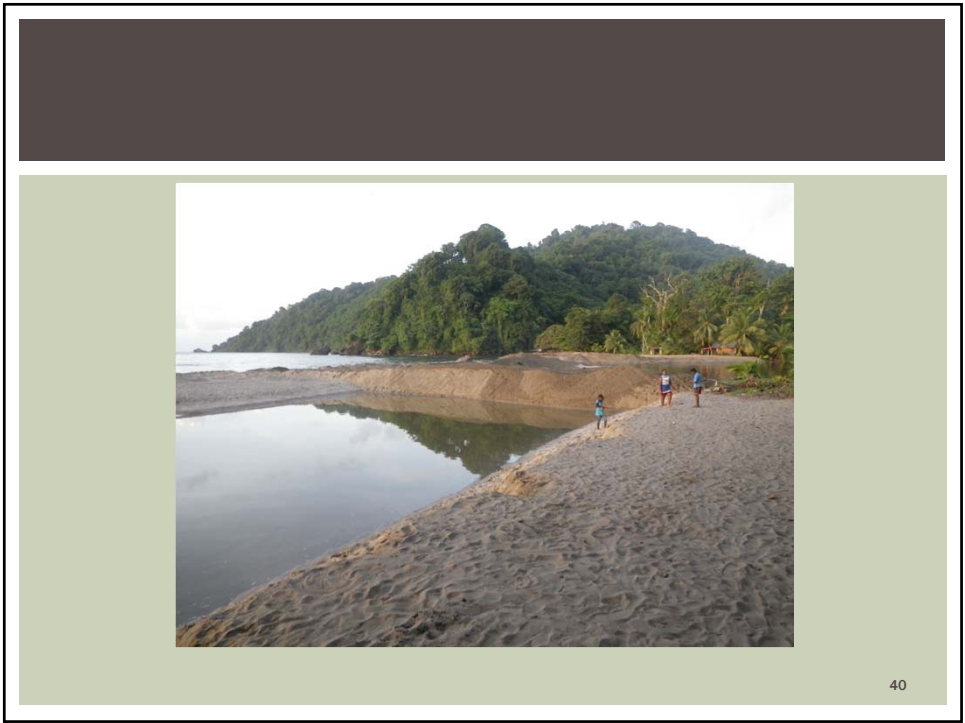
Date	Incident/Activity
July 7, 2012	A mound of sand is excavated from Zone 4 and used to block the Grande Riviere River.

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# WORKS CONTINUE

Date	Incident/Activity
July 8, 2012	The excavator and tractor on site begin work, east of the mound that was deposited to block the river. Residents gather to watch the activities. The excavator opens a channel north of the original blockage to the river mouth, allowing the Grande Riviere river to now flow out to sea. The heavy equipment pushes sand from Zone 4 in an easterly direction and in full view of the Grande Riviere community, unearths eggs and hatchlings.

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## THE MEDIA RETURNS

Date	Incident/Activity
July 8, 2012	<p>The Trinidad Express is contacted and reporter Kim Boodram visits the site and interviews Len Peters from GRTNGA; Pierro Guerrini from Mt. Plaisir Hotel; Marc de Verteuil and Sherwin Ruiz.</p> <p>In his interview with the Express, Mr. Peters says that he regrets the loss of turtle eggs and hatchlings caused by the remedial dredging work. He notes however that the work was necessary, and was part of the ongoing attempt to find the balance between turtle conservation and the economic livelihood of the Grande Riviere community. He further notes and regrets that the relevant regulatory agencies were not present to coordinate the work.</p> <p>Mr. Guerrini tells the Express that while he agrees with the work undertaken, he believes it should have been done further west of the selected site. Mr. Ruiz tells the reporter that a different, more specific method should have been used and greater judgment exercised.</p>

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Date	Incident/Activity
July 9, 2012	<p>Mr. Joth Singh, CEO of the EMA visits the site.</p> <p>Articles appear in the Trinidad Express and Trinidad Guardian.</p>

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## JULY 9 – MEDIA COVERAGE

### Turtle tragedy

...thousands of hatchlings crushed to death!

Kim Goodrum

THOUSANDS of leatherback hatchlings were crushed to death at the weekend as the Ministry of Works used excavators to retreat the Grande Riviere River, at the north coast coast.

The Ministry had been called in when the river, running west, eroded most of the beach front, threatening the stability of several houses and hotels.

The community was horrified, though, when excavation work began Saturday without their knowledge on what is the most sensitive part of the beach.

Among these buildings under threat was the Mt Plaisir Bateau Restaurant and Hotel, the most popular tourist accommodation during turtle nesting season.

The Ministry was called in two weeks ago by hotel owner Piero Guarrini.

The measures that took place over the past two days was not the help that was expected.

"It is an unfortunate and there are so many mixed feelings," Guarrini said.

"This is a shock. On the one hand the erosion needed to be stopped but what has happened here is not right," he said.

Marc deVerteuil, of Paga Bois Conservation said the debate could have been avoided with proper land zoning and co-ordination between relevant agencies.

Shervin Remy, a member of the Grande Riviere Environmental Organisation, spent yesterday evening visiting those hatchlings that were still alive - and clearing the beach of hundreds of dead ones.

Brought to tears several times, Remy commented that the river mouth could have been opened without that part of the beach being torn up.

"We think they had to do this," Remy said.

July 9th, 2012

"This is the worst act of destruction I have ever seen by humans on turtles."

Remy was among those in the community who began a rescue mission early yesterday and by evening had saved about 500 hatchlings.

The babies were kept in a caged area behind Mt Plaisir but to be released last night.

Among them could be seen the who had been too badly injured a would clearly not make it.

On the beach, hundreds of us could be seen, some crushed a some rolling in the surf. Here a there, hatchlings could be seen the ing for life, some still partially the shell.

Excavation work went on all in what is classed by conservation as one of four of Grande Riviere which is just over a kilometre is and is the third most prolific sea turtle nesting site in the world.

Len Peters, head of Turtle VIII Trust, said while yesterday's toll is unfortunate, much of the nest area had already been lost to river.

Peters said there was also so times a compromise to be in when animals and people share same space. In this case, the will of the community had to be con ceded.

Peters said the weekend's trag should not have happened in the place, since the river had started eroding west since December last y.

Repeated attempts to have courses redirected since then a futile, he said, and the Ministry's ed no later to act.

"This intervention was ne cessary," he said.

"We would have lost more ne cessary eventually. We didn't lose i of eggs, although this is an enor ing disaster. At the very least, RMA (Environmental Manager Authority) should have been pre to direct this operation."

### GRAND RIVIERE IN JEOPARDY



As river erodes coastline, threaten turtle nestlings

Thousands of leatherback hatchlings were crushed to death at the weekend as the Ministry of Works used excavators to retreat the Grande Riviere River, at the north coast coast.

The Ministry had been called in when the river, running west, eroded most of the beach front, threatening the stability of several houses and hotels.

The community was horrified, though, when excavation work began Saturday without their knowledge on what is the most sensitive part of the beach.

Among these buildings under threat was the Mt Plaisir Bateau Restaurant and Hotel, the most popular tourist accommodation during turtle nesting season.

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## PRESS CONFERENCE

Date	Incident/Activity
July 10, 2012	<p>A Press Conference is held in Grande Riviere. Present are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minister of the Environment and Water Resources, Ganga Singh</li> <li>Minister of Tourism, Stephen Cadiz;</li> <li>Minister of State in the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, Ramona Ramdial</li> <li>Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Environment, Anthony Ramnarine</li> <li>Chairman, Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, Keshwar Maharaj,</li> <li>Director of Drainage, Ministry of Works, Ram;</li> <li>Councillor Terry Rondon</li> <li>President of Grande Riviere Village Council</li> </ul> <p>Members of the community are invited.</p>

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## JULY 10 - MEDIA COVERAGE

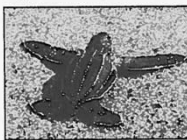
### Letter of the day Tears for baby leatherback turtles

IT is with disappointment, despair and dumbfounded shock that I write this regarding incident involving the tragic, heart-rending death of the turtles at Grande Riviere.

We are truly blessed to have these ancient creatures (*Dermochelys coriacea*—leatherback turtles) visit our shores with the hope of the species carrying on. However, with idiots like the girl riding on the back of one, total disregard for signs placed all over the beach, and yesterday's blood-bath, how can the species thrive?

Agreed it was necessary for the work to be done; however had the proper co-ordination taken place, that tragedy could have been avoided. As I read the article in yesterday's Express, only tears of pain and hurt, and emotions of rage and anger could be expressed at the total disregard for these majestic creatures. Could we really put a value on the existence of a species? Is there a cost attached to avoid the extinction of creatures?

Within the last 100 years, which might I add is not a very long time, over 10 animals have gone totally extinct: The Tasmanian Tiger, the largest known carnivorous marsupial of modern times, last seen in



1936; the Quagga was a southern subspecies of the Plains Zebra in 1883; the Golden Toad native to the tropical cloud forests which surround Monteverde, Costa Rica in 1989; The Caribbean Monk Seal was the only known seal which was native to the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico which was declared extinct in 2008. Javan tigers were a subspecies of tigers which were limited to the Indonesian island of Java last sighted in 1972 and the list goes on. What do you think is the cause of most of these extinctions? Yes! You guessed right... humans! How would we look and feel if the following was to be quoted about the leatherback turtles: "...These ancient majestic creatures, nested mainly in the Caribbean were totally wiped out

because of poor conservation and humans. In Trinidad 2012, over 1000 of these creatures were brutally savaged by an excavator which plummeted the species to the brink of extinction and they never recovered...."

Is this where we are going Trinidad? Making the creature another statistic? Another one of those creatures that we just talk and hear about? Something that we hear in stories and folklore? Something that our grandchildren and their children's children will never experience? Turtlematching is a pastime that has been shared and passed on throughout the generations, and I would love for it to continue.

These creatures are at our mercy for their very existence; and we are treating it trivially and without any importance. Government bodies, officials or whomever, this is a plea to do something about this. This is not political! These creatures are part of our ecosystems just like any other creature. Please Trinidad and Tobago, let us do something about this. We have to, we need to.

Nicholas Dase  
via email

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## JULY 10 - MEDIA COVERAGE

### Turtle tragedy...thousands of hatchlings crushed to death

What a crying shame on this Govt.

It's a crying shame of poor planning and communication on the ministry's side!

Where is the pre-construction report? Are there no signs posted in the area warning the public of a turtle nesting area? Where are the Govt environmentalists? Where are the local Govt monitors? There are ways of doing work and it seems that none of the above was ever implemented.

So none of the workers saw the eggs and turtles and think to stop?

'Think' is the key word there. Man, they have a job to do because they have to eat a food, they just following orders.

The quicker you stop being political and wake up to the reality that we as a people are incompetent and make a mess of most things we put our hands on, the better!

What does the government have to do with this incident? Was the excavator being driven by a government minister? Was a government minister present at the site overseeing operations? Put the blame where it belongs so that in the future those actually doing the job will be more cognizant and observant and invest time where they go bulldozing the

the place where God knows what is being bulldozed is along the construction path for the Debe to Mon Desir

highway. That destruction and killing of flora and fauna is unequivocally the fault of the government.

There is a diversity of life to be found in swamps. Does the Government want to hear that? No! So they insist on proceeding with building the highway right through the swamp, atop rivers, through farmland, through flat-lands that act as sponges absorbing surface water. When they are through the totality of the environmental damage that they would have inflicted, it will be enormous and very irreversible.

Trinidadians are some of the most incompetent people in the world. I am horrified that so many things which are easy and common sense, are made so difficult by Trinidadians.

Just look around at all of the corruption and plain stupidity that happen daily in our lives. There are so many brilliant people in this land that things should be much better, but everyone looks at the other person.

I will always maintain that almost everything wrong in T&T, is the fault of Trinis who do not do their work effectively.

This is disgusting. And they say it is in the name of progress.

For a country with a literacy rate as high as worldly acclaimed, I wonder, where do they live? They should consult with Forestry and wait for the hatching season to finish. Call before you dig.

If Ministry of Works decided to wait until the season was complete, then there was a good chance that there would not be a hatching season next year. The beachfront was being eroded badly because the river had strangely diverted (it was a strange sight to behold as the river mouth which was roughly hundreds of feet away from the main beach area just started to go west towards the beach itself).

Somebody lapsed badly to allow this to reach this far and to have the destruction of so many hatchlings of the endangered turtles by this botched operation with little or no coordination (more lapses) was truly sorrowful to watch.

I have to commend the villagers who tried to save them. I do not know who will be held accountable for this unmitigated travesty though.

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## SIGNS OF BEACH RECOVERY - JULY 10



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## JULY 11 – MEDIA FRENZY CONTINUES

ENVIRONMENT

NEWSDAY SECTION B Wednesday July 11, 2012 Page 13

# Emotions run high

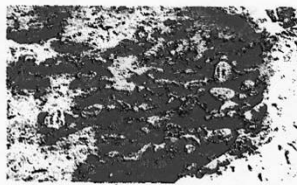
\*TEARS from Page 1B

unearing, irresponsible and avoidable action by those in authority, entrusted to protect these hapless animals.

Richard Joseph, secretary of the MCT cannot believe that such a tragedy can be justified and lamented, "To lose the head of a state agency come out and openly say that nothing was wrong with the remedial works as only 'hundreds' of hatchlings were destroyed is nothing short of scandalous and a slap in the face for turtle conservationists who have laboured long and hard in the vineyards."

Overcome by his emotions, Joseph continued, "It is high time that citizens stand up and demand that persons occupying well-paid jobs funded by our tax dollars carry out their duties with due diligence. In a first-world country, heads would be rolling today as persons would be held to account for this travesty."

The Zoological Society group noted that TT is now the laughing-stock of the world, as with today's technology, this incident has gone viral on the social network as well as featured by the conventional media including BBC, CNN and Fox News. John Seyajag, curator at the National Aquarium in



Baltimore in a wake-up call to TT cautioned, "Trinidad and Tobago has long been a country that was envied for its protection of turtles and known to have among the largest nesting population in the world at a single site, but overnight this site has turned into the largest graveyard for leatherback turtles. What a sad day for this country and a blot to its sterling reputation as a defender of turtles!"

Latchmedal could not help but question, "In this time of crisis, where are the protesters who take up lesser causes? Where are our 'welfarists' and animal behaviorists in this time of real need?"

Why the silence from the many guardians of the turtles? Now is the time for the Turtle Village Trust and the other community-based organisations which not only receive support from the Government and corporate sector for turtle protection, but also make a living from this resource to show their mettle and take a stand against this act of animal cruelty. Where are those who promote this country as an eco-tourism paradise?"

On the visit, the team met with Sherwin Ruiz and his group from the community, trying to salvage what little they could after the wanton destruction. President of the

MCT, Ramkissoon-Maharaj, impressed by their efforts, urged, "Support is needed for this group, who like a David among Goliath is condemning this action and leading an on-site effort to save as many of the dug-up hatchlings as possible." As for Ruiz himself, he said, "I had to stand by helplessly and look at this infamous and uncaring act take place because a few buildings were threatened."

There are other measures which could have been taken to safeguard the buildings without jeopardising the future of this endangered animal."

The few hatchlings that were collected by this group have since been released into the sea.

Latchmedal, further questioned "Whose lives were threatened to such an extent that we had to destroy the future of this species repository in the thousands of destroyed eggs and hundreds of dead hatchlings? He continued, "The turtles have adapted to dealing with nature by laying thousands of eggs to ensure that at least one survives to adulthood, but faced with man's intervention they are powerless."

When we reap the seeds of what we have sown here at Grande

Riviere, I hope that it will not be too late."

To make matters even worse, Biplak, curator at the Zoo pointed out the deleterious effects of the heavy equipment used in the operations for future emergence of hatchlings. Giving his viewpoint, he commented, "This excavator would have passed over many other nests and compacted the sand. It is therefore more than likely that these remaining hatchlings when they are ready would be unable to burrow their way out of those nests."

Various persons have weighed in on alternatives to what took place and there is consensus that the situation could have been alleviated by the use of sand bags to stabilise the banks, even if this was temporary until the nesting season is over. Also, better coordination of the activity by relevant state agencies would have saved the eggs and hatchlings.

Community persons such as Ruiz and his group could have been called upon to remove eggs for relocation and hatchlings before the new course was cut.

Our "welfarists" and turtle protectors should have been on hand to assist in the delicate operations and avoid the disaster that transpired.

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## JULY 11 – MEDIA FRENZY CONTINUES

### TEARS OF THE TURTLES

RESPONDING to the horrific event played out earlier this week at the most prolific nesting habitat for the critically endangered leatherback turtles where thousands of eggs and hatchlings were destroyed at what should have been a safe haven, a team comprising Gopie Latchmoedial, Nirmal Biplah, Lisa Ramkisson-Mahary and Richard Joseph from the Zoological Society of Trinidad and the Macanor Conservation Trust (MCT), involved in turtle protection at Mucuna, visited the site to see first-hand what took place.

Latchmoedial, president of the Zoological Society of Trinidad and Tobago in an immediate reaction, exclaimed, "My organisation is in strong condemnation of what took place and it is unbelievable to see the extent of the losses to the leatherback turtle population at Grande Riviere."

This is something that we will be hard-pressed to explain to our international partners in conservation, including our friends from the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the National Aquarist in Baltimore who have been bombarding me with their concerns."

Latchmoedial said that cooking at the situation objectively, one cannot help but see the irony that the so-called "golden-goose" for the community and tourism in this area quickly became expendable, when their properties were threatened by what seems to be a natural process. But most unbelievable of all is the justification being given for this.

\*TEARS continue on Page 138



MEMORIAL for Leatherback Turtles Lost: (left to right) Community activist, Sherwin Ruiz, Nirmal Biplah (curator at the Zoo) and Lisa Ramkisson-Mahary (president of Macanor Conservation Trust) in an expression of their sadness over the destruction of eggs and hatchlings at Grande Riviere Beach, yesterday morning.

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## JULY 11 – MEDIA FRENZY CONTINUES

### Turtle hatchlings tragedy

## Cadiz: The problem was communication

Kim Beodram  
kim.beodram@trinidadexpress.com

"THIS can never happen again."

These were the words of Tourism Minister Stephen Cadiz yesterday, as he stood on a portion of Grande Riviere beach that was excavated at the weekend, crushing a sea turtle nest, and killing hundreds of hatchlings in the process.

The operation was carried out by the drainage division of the Ministry of Works to redirect the Grande Riviere river, which had changed course, severely eroding the beachfront. The erosion is threatening the stability of a number of homes and hotels, including the Mt Plaisir Estate restaurant and hotel, the top tourist accommodation for turtle-watching tourists during the annual

March to August nesting season.

Cadiz said he understood the urgency of the situation but felt the lines of communication had not run clearly between the relevant agencies.

"Of course there could have been better coordination," Cadiz said, "we have to make sure this never happens again." Cadiz said the negative attention being given to Trinidad and Tobago over the killing of the baby turtles was unfortunate.

"Obviously a huge error was made here in trying to fix a problem that was a natural occurrence," he added.

Environment Minister Ganga Singh also visited the site yesterday but he stood by the Works Ministry's actions, saying their intervention was absolutely necessary.

While Singh apologised for the death of the turtle hatchlings, most of which were critically endangered leatherbacks, he said the works were not carried out arbitrarily but after proper consultation.

The best interest of the community had to be considered, he said.

Grande Riviere is one of the world's top nesting sites but local conservationists have argued that the area in question had not seen the high numbers of turtles usually recorded. They supported statements by chief executive officer of the Environmental Management Authority, Dr Joth Singh, that zone four of the beach, as that area has been classified, was not filled with viable nests.

This is contrary to what some community activists have said,



APOLOGISED: Minister of the Environment and Water Resources, Ganga Singh, left, speaks with residents of Grande Riviere during a tour of the beach and river area where excavation work was done at the weekend. During the process hundreds of baby leatherback turtles were killed. —Photo: AYANNAH KINSALE

placing the numbers much higher in terms of viable eggs and live hatchlings.

"The operation was not carried out in isolation of the proper information," Allan Bachan, CEO of

Turtle Village Trust, said.

Dr Joth Singh said the act would ultimately save many more eggs and hatchlings, as the river would have washed away parts of it beach that were more nest intensive

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TOUR: Kyle Charles (right) president of the Grande Riviere Tour Guides speaks to Environment and Water Resources Minister George Singh (second from right), Tourism Minister Stephen Cadell (left) and others during a tour of the beach yesterday. PHOTO BY MICHAEL BARNES

Minister, EMA on beach dredging

## It had to be done

By DALY BARNHART

It was necessary. The Prime Minister of the Government and Water Resources Minister George Singh in his speech of yesterday work by officials from the World and Infrastructure Ministry at Grande Riviere beach which are hundreds of leatherback turtles eggs and hatchlings perishing in the process.

Grande Riviere is recognized by local and international conservation as being a major nesting site for the endangered leatherback turtle and the related conservation project among local conservationists who have placed and occurred on Facebook and other social media sites. The area was quickly picked up by international conservationists.

Singh, Tourism Minister Stephen Cadell and Environmental Management Authority (EMA) head Dr. Josh Singh, led a delegation to the beach yesterday and they were met by residents and conservationists.

Recent heavy rainfall caused the Grande

Riviere river to burst its banks and the shore line of the water started to move a new path along the beach creating more erosion which threatened a hotel and some of the beach which currently have eggs buried in hundreds of turtles mostly come online to lay their eggs.

In the end, the conservationists themselves convinced the excavation work was necessary to save the beach and the existing hotel egg from the destructive force of the river. And while some have indicated by the conservationists about this, Singh nevertheless pointed out that such a situation must not be allowed to happen again.

He promised to get experts to find ways to ensure that the river's course cannot be altered by heavy rain and pose a threat to the turtle's nesting site on the beach.

Singh said that the roughly one hundred eggs damaged during the excavation work, "while unfortunate", place in comparison to the tens of thousands of unhatched eggs which could have been washed away had the raging river been allowed to continue its destructive

## Why was hotel on the beach?

THE EDITOR: Dr. Josh Singh, TT's head of the Environmental Management Authority has tried to minimise the quantity of the loss of leatherback turtles killed by excavation works.

Dr Singh's opinion is that only hundreds of the turtles were killed. But put into perspective, every turtle killed has with it the potential to produce thousands of offspring and they in turn thousands more. So in fact, the excavation works has killed not hundreds, not thousands but an infinite number of turtles. As excavation works press on the potential death of infinitely more turtles is clear.

We all know that once development type technology starts poking around with nature, nature loses. The intervention was not the first to control the river. It will not be the last, not with additional construction to accommodate tourists and workers near nesting sites to attract economic activity. In a year or two from now the excavations will return causing deeper into nesting grounds.

Why were hotels and other buildings erected so close to the Grande Riviere river and beach? Is the "excavation" of the hotels and buildings stationed obviously too close to the river and sea, or else there would be no motive to tamper with the river, of greater priority for saving than the endangered turtles? Which is the greater priority, badly eroded buildings or the leatherback turtles?

B JOSEPH  
via e-mail

## Editorial Turtle tragedy

I could be wrong. Last Sunday afternoon the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources announced that a beachside excavation had been carried out to save the beach and the eggs of leatherback turtles. The beach was in a state of emergency and the eggs were in danger. The Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources announced that a beachside excavation had been carried out to save the beach and the eggs of leatherback turtles. The beach was in a state of emergency and the eggs were in danger.

## Bhoe: Someone must account

THE DRAINAGE Division of the Ministry of Water and Infrastructure "should be held to account" for the destruction of eggs and hatchlings (newly hatched turtles) of the endangered leatherback turtle, Planning Minister Dr Bhoop Tewarie said yesterday.

"Ministers need to align their strategies and actions towards the sustainable policy framework which Government was operating."

Acknowledging that the excavation was "unfortunate and should not have happened", Tewarie told reporters yesterday at the Hyatt Regency, Port-of-Spain, "I do think it can be excused."

The Drainage Division was called in to shore up the diaphragm and erosion at the Mt. Pleasant Estate and Hotel — which promotes the turtle nesting site — and other dwellings threatened by the Grande Riviere river which changed its course during heavy showers.

Asked about the Planning Ministry's policy on coastal development given the damage of the buildings and turtle eggs, Tewarie said while the Drainage Division should be held to account, he does not think anyone should be blamed given the tension between development and the death of the turtles.

We should learn from it," he advised. The excavation general international press coverage with several websites carrying the story including BBC, Associated Press, Reuters, US cable news channels including MSNBC, News and CNN.

BBC reported that workers from a TT Government ministry were called in to redirect a river that was eating Grande Riviere beach, but TT Environment claimed the workers botched the job and destroyed 20,000 eggs.

The MSNBC story was titled, "Up to 20,000 sea eggs crushed by bulldozers on Caribbean island" dozens of comments below it. On Storyful, a web that monitors dozens of lists and thousands of posts the social networking site Twitter found that the sea turtles was the third highest tweet for the day.

## MINISTRY LAUNCHES PR CAMPAIGN

Date

July 12, 2012

Incident/Activity

Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources runs press ad.

The Day 1.2 Million Lives were saved.

The Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources has launched a public relations campaign to raise awareness of the importance of protecting the environment and the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The campaign is part of a larger effort to protect the environment and the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a campaign that is designed to raise awareness of the importance of protecting the environment and the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The campaign is part of a larger effort to protect the environment and the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a campaign that is designed to raise awareness of the importance of protecting the environment and the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.







## IN SUMMARY



From a Conservation perspective Zone 3 needed to be protected as it currently accounted for 45% of the nesting on the beach...

Mr. Peters of the Turtle Village Trust indicated that the threat is even bigger than that as the other end of the beach threatens zone 1 and this also needs to be solved.

The reality of the situation is that if this is not addressed there may be no nesting beach for sea turtles to nest on next year (2013). From a Social and Economic perspective jobs and infrastructure needed to be preserved so the risks needed to be mitigated.

I think that we all need to take away a major lesson from this.

Environmental issues are sensitive issues and we cannot afford the luxury of sensualisation as the fallout may have far reaching consequences. Travel agents in the United States had indicated that they cannot sell Trinidad and Tobago and so we had to face the fall out to our ecotourism industry and the possible consequences to the people of Grande Riviere who depend on this industry for their livelihoods.

What is required is that we deal with issues based on fact. We owe it to our country and our community conservationists who toil night after night to be more responsible.

I close with the hope that all of us will strengthen our collective resolve and commitment to this beautiful place and the species we seek to protect. There is need for greater dialog and respect among stakeholders and Government Agencies. Today, I see the future of accomplishment through cooperative effort.

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TODAY

Video





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