

June 17, 2010

Sea grape trees planted on Saunders Beach

Nassau, Bahamas – Some 20 seagrape trees now dot the coastline at Saunders Beach replacing the casuarina trees that were removed in August of last year.

The exercise is a part of The Government's plan to redevelop, revegetate and landscape the area.

"This is the first phase," said Shenique Albury, Environmental Specialist assigned to the New Providence Road Improvement Project in the Ministry of Public Works and Transport. "Another set of trees will be planted and will extend near to Perpall Tract,"

The casuarina trees were removed to assist the Government in its efforts to control and eradicate invasive species in The Bahamas.

"Casuarinas are considered one of the number one plant species that is of concern for The Bahamas and the recommendation is to try to eradicate them from the country.

"This is a very big task but the only way to accomplish that is to start somewhere. The casuarinas also have a negative impact on the beach and are not the best tree for maintaining beach stability. The beach loses sand because of the casuarinas and their inability to maintain or help to build the sand on the beach," Ms. Albury said.

The environmentalist explained that the full-grown trees were selected to compensate for the removal of the casuarinas.

"We want to mitigate the loss of shade by putting in trees that, although different, serve the function of providing shade," she said.

Ms. Albury pointed out that The Bahamas Environment, Science and Technology Commission was consulted on the best species to replace the casuarinas. The matter was referred to a sub-committee known as the Biodiversity Committee.

"The Biodiversity Committee recommended that we use seagrape trees because they are native, naturally found on the coastline and can withstand an environment of salt, high winds, waves and sea surges," Ms. Albury said.

"This tree can adapt and cope with all of these conditions fairly well. If they are impacted they recover very quickly or are not killed out because of an extreme situation such as a hurricane. People also have a connection to the sea grape because it is edible. It is a native fruit and not just a tree."

The seagrape trees were uprooted from the Gladstone Road Agriculture Centre where they had been planted for some 10 years.

"The trees were already established and were being saved for landscaping purposes and we thought why not take advantage of such a great opportunity and it also added up to a cost saving.

"The trees are quite tall, not very bushy. It's not practical to take full grown trees because they are too heavy and when transporting we don't want them to be damaged or diminish their chances of survival. We selected this time to increase their chances of survival and get as much rain as possible," Ms. Albury said.

"You have to prepare the trees to be moved. They go through a process of root pruning a few months in advance of moving them. The objective of that is so that the trees start to grow new roots before they are moved to a new location. The roots will not be large, but when you take the tree out of the ground the roots will not be damaged. By

the time it gets to a new location it already has generated some new roots that will not be damaged during the transportation process.”

The beautification plan for Saunders Beach also includes the planting of shrubs and smaller trees in the parking area, along the edges of the road and roundabout.

Sea grape trees have replaced the casuarinas trees that were removed from Saunders Beach. The redevelopment of Saunders Beach is a component of the New Providence Road Improvement Project.