

Grand Cayman mangrove buffer ripped up

Title As the National Trust launches its campaign to push for the long awaited conservation law, Grand Cayman has lost another significant stretch of natural habitat from the North Sound coastline. The developer of Dragon Bay, Michael Ryan, was granted planning permission by the CPA in February to clear over 378,000 square feet of mangrove buffer zone, despite the fact that the Development and Planning Regulations state that such natural protective barriers should only be removed in exceptional circumstances. Ken Crews from Orion Development told CNS that the goal was to replant a new 50 foot buffer of red mangroves out into the ocean, recreating what he said was the pre-Ivan mangrove fringe. Following concerns from local sea captains that the mangroves had suddenly disappeared sometime over the weekend, revealing a cleared area of marl along the shore of the North Sound by the Dragon Bay site, Ryan confirmed to CNS that the clearance work had been done. He said it was part of a project to remove the old dead mangroves and rejuvenate the area. Acknowledging it was a sensitive issue, the Ritz Carlton developer said the removal was strictly within the limits granted by the Central Planning Authority. At the invitation of Ryan, CNS visited the site on Wednesday afternoon with Ken Crews, a land development expert from Orion Development, who pointed out what had been cleared and where the mangroves would be replanted to create this new 50 foot fringe. He stated that the original mangrove buffer of some 250 to 300 feet stretching along the coast for 1500 feet had been removed because some of it was dead and because of the potentially hazardous debris in the areas where the mangrove was still alive -- all a legacy, he said, of Hurricane Ivan. He also noted that the plans included constructing a seawall to protect the wider property as it had been affected by storm surge during that hurricane. Crews explained that a major replanting project would now take place over the next few months to stretch the new fringe out into the ocean to rejuvenate the area where the mangroves grew before the 2004 hurricane. Although some of the mangrove buffer which has been removed was still recovering from the infamous Ivan surge, according to aerial photographs taken before the clearance some two thirds of the buffer zone which has now been torn up was full, healthy, mature mangrove. Experts from the Department of Environment, who had advised the CPA against allowing the removal of the mangrove buffer, said they had not seen evidence of hazardous waste in the existing healthy zone and the area being described as dead by the developer was in fact making a significant recovery. There were also concerns that there had been previous encroachment by the Ritz development on the mangrove buffer in that area. Director of the Environment Gina Ebanks-Petrie said that it was disappointing to see another mangrove buffer zone lost, given how much has already been removed from Grand Cayman's coastlines. She said once mangrove was ripped out there were significant problems associated with trying to replant it. **Follow the rest of this news story at:** <http://www.caymannewsservice.com/headline-news/2010/05/12/mangrove-buffer-ripped> (Photo Credit to this News Post: Neepster / Flickr

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