Last remaining mangrove wetland in Barbados disappearing

Title BRIDGETOWN, Barbados.- A new environmental study sharply critical of the Government of Barbados shows the key Graeme Hall mangrove wetland is disappearing due to outside pollution and poor water quality. The Graeme Hall wetland is the last remaining mangrove in Barbados - a red mangrove forest that has existed for no less than 1,300 years. It is the only wetland in Barbados recognized internationally under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar). It acts as a Caribbean flyway stop for migratory birds between North and South America. The extensive 800-page study (www.graemehall.com/press/papers/Graeme Hall 043010 MEA.pdf) prepared for the Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary by Environmental Engineering Consultants of Tampa, Florida shows the Sanctuary has suffered a 77 per cent reduction in salinity in the past ten years due to an inoperative government-run sluice gate. The huge reduction signals "an inevitable failure of the mangrove ecosystem" as freshwater flora and fauna take over. The study also cites damaging factors including: dumping of raw sewage into the wetland instead of the sea by the South Coast Sewage Treatment Plant; contaminated storm water runoff originating from 1,150 acres of government-managed drainage systems; and, commercial and residential pollutants from adjoining properties. "The government owned and operated sluice gate failure confirms our worst fears," said Stuart Heaslet, an official with Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary. "It means that as the mangrove forest dies, it will not grow back because freshwater plants are taking over." The original environmental investment was based on the area being protected as a brackish mangrove ecosystem. "The study confirms that Government-controlled pollution is being dumped into the wetland. Despite our formal offers of technical and financial assistance to government, there has been no response. We can't defend ourselves against pollution and environmental mismanagement outside our boundaries. Bird counts are down, crabs are disappearing, and we are seeing environmental degradation everywhere." Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary occupies 42 per cent of the Ramsar wetland at Graeme Hall, and is owned by Peter Allard, a Canadian investor and philanthropist who has put more than US $35 million into the 35-acre eco-tourism site to preserve the last significant mangrove woodland and wetland on the island. "The investment in the Sanctuary was supposed to be part of a sustainable environmental initiative, dependent on government leadership," said Allard. "As the largest private environmental stakeholder in Barbados, we continue to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to maintain the Sanctuary, but we all have to face the fact that it's Government who is killing the wetland. The study shows that our environmental commitment and investment cannot withstand this assault." The Sanctuary in fact closed its doors to the general public in late 2008 when problems of pollution and water quality became

overwhelming. "This isn't just a problem for the Ramsar environmental wetland and our investment, it's also a health and human welfare problem for the people of Barbados," said Allard. Despite a 6,000 signature petition by citizens of Barbados to create a 240-acre national park at Graeme Hall, a new government zoning policy calls for commercial and residential development for the majority of the area. As the Canadian owner of the Sanctuary, Allard has filed several complaints alleging that the Government of Barbados has violated its international obligations by refusing to enforce its environmental laws, thereby allowing increased pollution and land development to damage the Sanctuary. See study: www.graemehall.com/press/papers/Graeme Hall 043010 MEA.pdf Related articles: http://graemehall.com/press/releases/bilateral-investments-treaty-complaint/20091028-BIT-Complaint.pdf http://graemehall.com/press/releases/barbados-endangers-wetlands/20091203-Barbados-Endangers-Wetlands.pdf SOURCE Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary, Inc. See original story: http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/last-remaining-mangrove-wetland-in-barbados-disappearing-due-to-unchecked-pollution-and-government-inaction-93020534.html