

Remarks by Hon Robert Pickersgill M.P.
Minister of Water, Land, Environment and Climate Change
at the
Opening Ceremony for the
Integrated Management of the Yallahs and Hope Watershed Management
Areas
at the
Terra Nova All Suites Hotel
on
13 April 2015.

Salutations

I am very pleased to be here for this very critical opening ceremony and launch of the Integrated Management of the Yallahs and Hope Watershed Management Areas.

Before I begin my address, I should tell you that I was told to be accurate, be brief, and be seated. I promise I will be as brief as possible..no matter how

long it takes.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the goals of Jamaica's Vision 2030 National Development Plan is that **'Jamaica has a healthy natural environment'**. The articulation of this goal recognizes that the quality of life is inextricably linked to that of the natural environment. The achievement of this goal is no easy feat but requires conservation, strong management of environmental and natural resources, with water resources being one of the most critical.

The country's watersheds supply drinking water, provide the means of recreation and respite and most importantly, sustain life.

It is imperative, therefore for the government, stakeholder agencies and departments and communities, to give careful consideration to activities which will impact our watersheds. This is especially so for stakeholders living in the watershed area.

Access to potable water is one of the greatest challenges facing the country today- a challenge which could become more severe unless well-thought out strategic measures are taken to address the question of water security particularly in the face of climate change. The aim of this administration is to increase access to potable water for our citizens to 85 -percent by the year 2020, with the achievement of universal access by the year 2030.

In recent years, the effects of Climate Change are becoming more and more evident in Jamaica. As I have articulated on many occasions, the country has experienced unusually long dry spells, followed by short, intense rainfall periods. Water security is tied to both water availability and quality. For both factors, watershed health is critical.

Jamaica is one huge watershed but for administrative purposes is divided into 26 watershed management units. The country's watersheds are classified as: least degraded, less degraded, degraded and severely degraded.

The Hope River and Yallahs River watersheds which we are targeting at this launch, are among the four classified as severely degraded. However, they produce 42% of the water for over 660,000 persons in the Kingston Metropolitan Area.

These two adjoining watershed management units cover some 44,486 hectares on the southern slopes of the Blue Mountain range. The upper slopes of the two watersheds contain nearly 10% of the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park, which protects the largest block of closed broadleaf forest in the country.

Additionally, the basic water resources to sustain the agricultural livelihoods in the area and the irrigated areas in the lower part of the Yallahs basin, are provided by these watershed management units.

The Hope River flows into the Palisadoes-Port Royal Protected Area, which is a Ramsar site, that is, a wetland site of international significance. These watersheds are valued for their high level of endemic species and for being an overwintering habitat for migratory species. In general, watersheds also contribute to climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration.

These two watershed management units represent 7% of the island's farmland which provides livelihoods for approximately 15,000 farmers.

Ladies and gentlemen, environmentalist David Suzuki of the Suzuki Foundation has noted, and I quote... “Our choices at all levels—individual, community, corporate and government—affect nature. ...And they affect us.”..end of quote

I am sure that I do not have to tell you that the causes of degradation in the two these two watersheds are well known. Indeed, they were reconfirmed by the studies conducted during Inter-American Development Bank/Global Environment Facility project preparation phases.

The more significant problems include (i) biodiversity habitats being threatened by deforestation and forest degradation; (ii) soil quality being reduced as a result of a combination of inadequate agricultural practices and natural conditions, affecting income generation opportunities, particularly for small farmers.

In addition, the hydrological regimes, namely. river flow volumes during the rainy and dry seasons as well as water quality are affected by deforestation, land use changes, soil erosion, waste water disposal and the use of agrochemicals, linked to hillside coffee farming practices..

The watersheds are exposed to heavy rains in short periods as a result of hurricanes and extreme weather events. Also, part of the watersheds have significant slopes, a feature which is compounded by less than adequate soil management techniques by small farmers.

As a result, the Forestry Department estimates that approximately 49% of the combined area of the watersheds is prone to landslides and 65% is subject to soil erosion . The conclusion is that these environmental problems are induced by a combination of economic, social and institutional factors.

These data, and descriptions, I am sure, have convinced you of the critical importance of this morning's project launch.

In welcoming this watershed management project, I wish also to note that the government has taken bold steps to secure the country's water resources and biodiversity.

Among them:-:

- The Watershed policy for the country was upgraded and is undergoing further revision to ensure that climate change issues are integrated.
- The application of a Watershed Area Management Mechanism (WAMM). The WAMM is gradually being implemented in several watersheds and has several components that integrate community and government agencies planning and action and for which the community takes ownership. The Tourism Enhancement Fund has provided a grant of J\$11M to the NEPA to implement the WAMM in Black River.
- A funding facility, the National Protected Areas Conservation Trust of Jamaica, has been established and is in the process of becoming operational. Through a regional fund, the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund and other capitalization ventures (including the Global Environment Facility and the UNDP), the national trust fund will be able to fund Protected Areas management. All protected areas are of course, within watersheds.
- The government – led by the Mines and Geology Division, developed a Hillside Manual in 2013 ,that provides guidelines for development on slopes. The aim is to mitigate against the incidence of slope failure, debris floods, excessive erosion and disturbance.

- The Forestry Department has been involved in fire management training. This activity will be one of the central features of the new project..
- The Government through the IDB has supported various infrastructure projects for the NWC to address the physical infrastructural issues within these watersheds. However, overall effectiveness of this intervention is still compromised by issues such as high sediment loads in catchment basins, resulting from improper land management techniques. As such, soft approaches are required to complete the slate of watershed management tools and applications.

I am sure that you will agree that the Hope and Yallahs Watershed Management Area is in need of urgent intervention towards restoration.

I am pleased, then to announce that the Global Environment Facility (GEF), through the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), has provided the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) with just over USD\$ 3.9M to implement the Integrated Management of the Yallahs and Hope Watershed Management Areas Project.

This Yallahs-Hope Watershed Project is geared towards achieving a greater level of water security - improving the efficiency with which water is collected and stored for present and future use throughout the Kingston Metropolitan Area.

The overall goal of this five (5) year project is to improve the conservation and management of biodiversity and the provision of ecosystem services in the Yallahs and Hope River Watersheds.

This will be achieved through:

- Institutional strengthening and capacity building for integrating biodiversity into watershed management.
- This will be supported by the watersheds policy for the country and a GIS based Decision Support System which will provide real time information to support water resource related decision making.
- Creating economic and financial incentives to support biodiversity and integrated water resource management.
- Implementing sustainable livelihoods, agriculture, and forestry in watershed communities. Through these activities, more than 200 community persons will be trained in various thematic areas such as land husbandry, best practices, fire management, ecotourism and other small business ventures. Other beneficial activities will include the reforestation of 400 hectares of degraded land; development of 6 on-farm demonstration plots and commissioning of market studies for development of alternative livelihoods in 4 communities within the Yallahs and Hope Watershed Management Areas.

As we move towards mitigating and adapting to climate change, my ministry welcomes this project which will safeguard access to potable water which is a key driver of the government's overall economic agenda and is a critical element in the fight against poverty, hunger and disease.

I acknowledge the financial and technical support of the Global Environment Facility and the IDB as we work towards higher water yield, increased biodiversity and sustainable land management in the Hope River and Yallahs River watersheds.

I endorse the approach to the project of partnerships among government agencies and of community involvement in enhancing knowledge through training and best practice as this can only redound to greater efficiencies and effectiveness of results.

Four agencies within my ministry...NEPA, the Forestry Department, the WRA, and the NWC... will play strategic roles along with RADA in the execution of the project.

It is therefore my distinct pleasure today, to declare the GEF/IDB Integrated Management of the Hope- Yallahs River Watershed Management Area project officially launched!

I close with the anticipation that this project will benefit the Yallahs and Hope River Watersheds and Jamaica as a whole for many years to come, and will contribute to our overarching goal of making Jamaica, “**the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business**”.

I thank you!