

BOYHOOD MEMORIES FROM THE GREAT RIVER WATERSHED!
AN INTERVIEW WITH THE RIDGE TO REEF WATERSHED PROJECT (R2RW)

Many of the older people in our rural areas have a great deal of knowledge about environmental resources. They can also recount the many changes that have taken place over the years and can help us to know if things are getting better or worse for the environment over time. Older folks can also teach us a lot about our cultural history and it is interesting that many of their cultural stories often have something to do with the environment as well.

One of the people who knows a lot about the environmental changes that have taken place in the Great River Watershed is Mr. Whyte of Hermitage in Bethel Town, Westmoreland. Partners working with the Ridge to Reef Watershed Project (R2RW) had the privilege of hearing some of Mr. Whyte's "watershed wisdom" earlier in the year. Here's what he had to tell us about the many changes to the forests and water supply in the area and about how people used to use certain environmental resources:

Citrus is a big crop in the watershed and Mr. Whyte has some fond memories of using oranges in ways that are no longer practiced...

...when mi was a boy, we used to rind the orange to get the oil from it – to get the oil and what we used to do, them have it into pint bottle and it smell pure essence – sweet perfume. My sister! If you every smell how sweet that was, nuttin did sweeter! No perfume you coulda buy today would be as sweet! That is what I know about.

He also remembers the a great deal about the forests that used to be much more plentiful:

The forest... The fact is my young days it was very excellent. Lots of different wood, lumber and etc. we have first justic – a die wood.(timber tree) We have logwood. Also a diewood. We have cedar – a proper lumber. We have bully tree (fruit tree), we call it.

That's hard wood now. We have three kinds of bully trees – we have naseberry bully trees, busta bully tree and black bully tree.... More were plenty on the property. It was so plenty & different from now that I can't name everything ... when I was a child living on the property and going to school.– we have guava, soursop, oranges, to feed school children. We have oranges on this property to feed plenty. The children never had to eat the nutribun dem give dem nowadays, but we never go hungry because dere was always plenty of food on di trees fi eat.

Nowadays di time get dry because dem cut down all di forestry, all di trees. But di forestry will bring the water fall. Di trees bring the waterhead and the water.

Nowadays di trees dem planting caan reach to certain heights – if it don't have forest guard here – it will be worse than what we have here now because the wood louse (illegal loggers) dem love the power saw, they love all type of saw – they won't allow the plants to grow and mature. That is what is increasing the dry right now. Lack of water, lack of the forestry and it cause low rainfall and through that you never find food bear as usual when you used to find rain falling in the forest.

Mr. Whyte on water harvesting and drinking water...

--- the water that I used to drink when mi was a boy, we wasn't so sickly. As much as they say as they purify it now in that time the water was more stronger. The rain water was more stronger than the water we get now. People used to drink the rain water and it was sweet. But not again. People don't collect their own water fi drink.

...on water scarcity and cultural history:

... If you walk this property you won't find 15 ponds alive. They all burst out of the holes and dry up from the ponds we had at slavery, only one pond we have now from slavery. The only pond left has a story you know. Dem say that it was made by a slave, a big belly pregnant slave girl. She was big, big pregnant. And dem say that she was so pregnant

that she couldn't do all her slave work, but in those days if yuh didn't do yuh work one day it carry over to di next day and so she get more and more tired. Till finally, one day di slave master did come to whip her and give her a beating, but she just lay down with her belly pon di earth and she did die. But her big belly leave a big impression that became a pond and that is the only pond that still has water till this day!

The Ridge to Reef Watershed Project is a five year project of the Government of Jamaica and the Government of the United States through its Agency for International Development. The project is working with community groups and many more people like Mr. Whyte in both the Great River Watershed and the Rio Grande Watershed areas.