

IRONWOOD FOREST

UPDATE - 25th APRIL 2008

Dear Friends

WELCOME to your first Ironwood Forest Update.

I hope you will forgive me for the length of this update, I have tried to keep it to the point.

First and foremost, THANK YOU everyone for taking the time and effort to come to www.Ironwood-forest.com. By current estimations we have over 1804 unique visitors, of which a hefty 594 have added their names to the petition and / or a comment. In our eleven days of operation we have had a staggering 113,821 HITS – with very many of you returning to read new posts. Indeed, traffic was so great at the start of this week, the site crashed. We have since increased our bandwidth x 10, and I hope things run more smoothly from now on!

I have read every COMMENT you have made, and where possible I have tried to develop the site in accordance your suggestions. **This is YOUR SITE – YOUR VOICE.**

Many of you have said that you would like to do more than just leave your name and a comment. The site now carries a FEEDBACK BOX, allowing you to leave a specific message and contact details.

An ACTION COMMITTEE has been formed, and is organizing a MAJOR EVENT to give you all an opportunity to come together – MORE DETAILS COMING SOON. The committee is looking for a couple more keen hands so please keep your offers of HELP coming in.

A BULLDOZER LIST is being assembled (in case of emergency). If you are prepared to stand, shoulder-to-shoulder, in front of the bulldozer, please send your contact details through the FEEDBACK BOX to find out how the list will operate.

When I read through your comments, a couple of things immediately occur to me. This interest is borne by a true diversity of people. I see upstanding and respected members of our community; I see old and young, home and abroad, and most significantly, the landowners most affected by the road. If I might be allowed to make an observation, I see a general thirst for information and for positive action, along with a willingness to consider diverse options and work together to achieve the best solution. I see a raw appreciation and love of Cayman.

So WHY, outside of this website, is the subject of the FOREST so CONTENTIOUS? There have been accusations on all sides. What is the source of the misinformation, distrust and anger? Who is telling the truth? Who is telling the lies?

LET'S FIND OUT – RIGHT NOW.

THE BACKGROUND

In recent weeks, some might say that the *Department of the Environment* has been noticeable by its absence on the subject of the Ironwood Forest road.

We have been given a commentary on the value of endemic flora by the National Roads Authority in a GIS press release.

http://www.gov.ky/portal/page?_pageid=1142,2713814&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

We have been told what the Department of Environment thinks by the Minister for Roads, Mr Arden McLean.

(Radio Cayman *Talk Today* Wednesday 23rd April).

And, in a Cabinet Press Briefing, Thursday, 17 April 2008, we have been told the official government position by Leader of Government Business Mr Kurt Tibbets:

*“we have explored and exhausted almost every available alternative and **all the parties involved** - after much discussion - **are in agreement** that this is the most practical way forward.”*

http://www.gov.ky/portal/page?_pageid=1142,2712218&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

However, the Department of Environment, is not mentioned once in this briefing note, and the wife of the landowner most affected by the construction of the road has apparently written in to www.Ironwood-Forest.com to say that her husband prefers the alternative, lower impact route NOT the one through the middle of the forest. This lady states that *“The fact of the matter about this whole thing is that he was treated as if he did not exist in any of this.”*

Perhaps the Department of Environment and this man have something in common?

COVER-UP?

As most of you will know, the Department of Environment is the government agency charged with the protection of our natural environmental.

Many people tuned in to the Radio Cayman's *Talk Today* Program on Wednesday 23rd April, myself included, to listen to what people had to say about the Ironwood forest and the proposed road plans.

In his introductory remarks, the Minister for Roads, Mr Arden McLean made several comments regarding the position of the Department of Environment, and provided a number of reasons why the alternative route was not favorable, including the suggestion that several more homes would be destroyed by the alternative route, incurring massive additional cost.

I am quite familiar with the alternative route proposed by the Department of Environment – it certainly does not run through a single additional house. I quickly contacted the Department, to enquire whether they were listening to the radio program. I was told not to worry - several staff members were indeed listening to the program, and **the Department had already sent an email to the show following the Minister's remarks, clarifying the position of the Department for**

the benefit of the public. I was still concerned – what if the email was lost or overlooked? Don't worry, I was told, "we will call the show to check it was received".

Satisfied, I listened to the rest of the program, however, as the show drew to an end, and the host completed his round-up of email enquiries, there was no mention of any email received from the Department of Environment.

After the show had ended, I contacted the Department of Environment once more, and they confirmed that their email had definitely been sent. They had even called to make sure it was received.

So, why wasn't this email read out?

The Department of Environment said not to worry, and they would resubmit their clarification the following day (Thursday 24th), to be read out on the next show. I was pleased to hear this news, because I think word from the Department is long overdue.

So, on Thursday I tuned-in once more, and once again, no clarification from the Department of Environment. I called the Department once more, but this time I could not get a straight answer from them as to how this could have happened.

There are ONLY TWO possible explanations for this:

1 - The Department of Environment has lied repeatedly about sending a simple email.

2 - Someone at the other end intercepted the Department's email, and stopped it from being read out to the public.

So, let's clear up this mess with two simple questions:

Ms. Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Director of the Department of Environment, I ask that, in the public interest, you furnish www.Ironwood-Forest.com with a written response to the following questions:

Did you or did you not repeatedly submit an email clarification to the *Talk Today* program, to address inaccurate commentary by Minister Arden McLean regarding the position of the Department of Environment with respect to the Ironwood Forest road project?

AND

What exactly is the FULL and DETAILED position of the Department of Environment regarding this proposed project?

THE PEOPLE OF CAYMAN DESERVE TO KNOW

Wishing you all a wonderful Earth Week weekend

Mark