



Anniversa

Calendar

MARCH

- 21st - **The G Sanri**
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tioned. Entertainment will be provided by *Santino's Messengers, Belize Dance Club and Boom & Chime.* All proceeds from the evening will go to *BAS for continuing conservation work.*
- 25th - 29th - **Trek to the Top Challenge Victoria Peak**
The Hon. Mark Espat, Minister of Tourism, other members of Cabinet, heads of government departments, statutory bodies, NGO's, Trekforce and local guides will be climbing Belize's highest peak. Pledges are being sought to fund public awareness raising and conservation work.
- 3rd - 5th - **Family Easter Camp**
Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and Blue Hole National Park
An opportunity for families and BAS members to have an exciting and educational weekend together. Activities include walking, caving, swimming, bird watching and educational presentations.
- 19th - 23rd - **Eco-Festival (Celebrate Earth Day)**
To be confirmed
As part of the Earth Day celebrations, BAS has organized an educational exhibition which will include exhibits by organizations working in the environmental field, government departments and local communities.
- 22nd - **Earth Day**
BAS Protected Areas
An international fundraising event co-hosted with the Massachusetts Audubon Society. Birdwatchers must obtain sponsorship for the number of species of birds counted.
- MAY
- 9th - **Birds and Breakfast - 6:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.**
Crooked Tree Village
Come and celebrate Mother's Day and the last of the spring migrants by sharing breakfast and observing the beautiful Jabiru Storks as well as many other birds at the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. Learn bird identification techniques with an expert guide before returning for a delicious breakfast of Journey Cakes or fried jacks with refried beans and banana and eggs. After breakfast visitors may tour the Crooked Tree Cashew Festival held at the Crooked Tree Show Grounds.
Early registration is essential.
Transport will be leaving Belize City at 5 a.m.
- 30 - **Annual General Meeting**
Radisson Fort George
The election of new BAS Board members will take place and awards will be presented in recognition of services to the Belize Audubon Society. The holder

as the grave site? But it was worse than that. Why did the acting Prime Minister

The Macal River Chalillo Project

Dear Editor,
I hope that you will consider publishing the following which addresses the article entitled, "The Macal River Chalillo Project" in the 14 March Belize Times.
Having read the article about the proposed Chalillo Dam on the Macal River, I would like to put forth the following comments for public consideration.

While the project site has been (Cont'd on page 4)

The Macal River Chalillo Project

(Cont'd from page 2)
removed from "Rubber Camp" to "Chalillo" due to environmental considerations, it should be noted that both sites are within 5 kilometres of each other and in the Canadian International Power Report 1992 (CI Power Report) it states, "Both the Chalillo and Rubber Camp schemes have similar reservoir and surface area characteristics and both have several environmental impacts or concerns (loss of riparian habitat, reservoir drawdown and changes in flow regime) associated with them as discussed in this report" (Executive Summary pg. 1)

The justification stated in this article that the dam is "necessary to ensure maximum output from the Mollejon hydroelectric dam so as to make the original investment viable. This was a part of the original blueprint for this hydro project". First, in the CI Power report, Introduction, "The Mollejon and Vaca schemes were found to be technically and economically feasible and also environmentally acceptable as "run-of-river" stand-alone single developments".

The Belize public should also be aware that the Mollejon project is a large part of our external debt. Borrowing more money for a large dam project increases this situation, creating an even MORE negative foreign exchange situation. (Information regarding the Mollejon Project/external debt available from Caribbean Development Bank).

It should also be known that 25% of the debt of developing countries is due to dams (Probe International and Int'l Rivers Network), and that 75% of dams go overbudget (Michael Cernea, Sociologist, World Bank). Cheaper electricity rates? This issue needs to be addressed in much greater detail for the Belizean consumer.

This article states that the cost will be "U.S.\$20.4 million dollars". However, when I quoted the possible cost of the proposed dam as U.S.\$30 million dollars to a senior scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), I was told that this was greatly underestimated for the costs of a large dam (EDF pers. comm.).

The proposed Chalillo Dam is a large dam, as any dam 15 meters or higher is considered to be a large dam. The proposed height of the dam is 30 meters.

The portion of the Belize Times article which states that, "Our aim is for sustainable development without prejudice to the purity of our environment. We must eliminate rural and urban poverty and give Belizeans an effective voice in the management of our resources". Pg. 3-54 of the CI Power Re-

port, ..." reservoir flooding will eliminate these alluvial terraces. Over a very long time, new terraces may be developed that could support riparian vegetation, but this is unlikely during the expected 50 year life time of the dam". Eradicating a unique area of the Belizean environment in exchange for a 50 year power project should be questioned as to its "sustainability". The people in rural communities living downstream from this proposed dam should indeed have a strong voice in this particular issue. If the dam project goes forward, their living conditions would be affected, and by all indications from the CI Power Report, in a negative manner.

There are statements in this Belize Times article referring to the Chalillo scheme and the CI Power 1992 report, "concerns arising out of that report are no longer relevant for realistic environmental and economic reasons". Yet, in that same report, the Full Supply Level (FSL) of the Chalillo Reservoir is stated as being between 393-410 meters. Now it is being stated as 395 meter level (in this article), 395-400 meters was the level quoted to ecologist Martin Meadows, and to myself, from BEL officials. However, why do not the same concerns apply? Why are the concerns no longer "relevant", if the FSL remains within the same parameters?

While the reservoir and associated flood level is stated to be BELOW the maximum natural flood level recorded over the past 15 years, it should be noted that the imminent rise of water level on 19 kilometers of the Macal River and 10.5 km of the Raspauculo river would accomplish what the CI Power Report stated.

- The dam will have the potential to increase downstream riverbed erosion due to release of silt-free water from the reservoir (pg. 3-29).

- Change in water temperature will be felt downstream and this release of warmer water could also have adverse effects on aquatic life downstream (i.e. fish) (pg. 3-30-31).

- The altered flow regime will affect downstream riparian vegetation and riparian dependent wildlife species, as well as physical and chemical water quality parameters (pg. 4-1).

Perhaps the people living in the communities downstream from the proposed Chalillo Dam scheme should be asked if they view this as "sustainable development" and a move towards the "well-being of the nation".

The proposed Chalillo Dam scheme needs further careful and continuous examination before plans develop to move this project forward.

Signed: Sharon Matola

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