



SAINT LUCIA NATIONAL TRUST

PRESS RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

A DESTRUCTIVE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT WITHIN THE PITONS MANAGEMENT AREA

Destructive construction project in the Pitons Management Area

The Saint Lucia National Trust and the Saint Lucia Archaeological and Historical Society are deeply concerned about an ongoing, construction project at a property at Beau Estate located within the Pitons Management Area (PMA) in Soufriere. The Trust has been concerned about developments within the PMA for some time now, and we are extremely disturbed that this project appears to have significantly damaged an important, environmentally sensitive area. We believe this project is one example of the negative aspects of what is happening within the PMA, and is compelled to bring this matter to the attention of the public.

Currently, construction of ultra-exclusive villas is taking place at Beau Estate, primarily for non-nationals. The Trust and the Society are convinced that this potentially destructive development project within Beau Estate requires immediate and decisive intervention by the planning and development authorities for the following reasons.

The property has been stripped of nearly all vegetation. The property is relatively steep sloping and denudation of the vegetation compromises slope stability and soil conservation. The property is also north of a small watercourse near to which important Amerindian petroglyphs have been discovered. No soil conservation measures such as silt traps or drains appear to have been utilised. Further, it appears that land adjoining the property, but not owned by the developer has also been cleared of vegetation.

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This development negatively impacts our World Heritage Site in the following ways:

1. The exposed soil can now be more readily washed away, particularly during the rainy season, causing further erosion and land degradation;
2. The potential loss of large quantities of soil will damage the fringing coral reefs which are found in the nearby Gros Piton Marine Reserve;
3. There is a potential variation to the existing watercourse, which may jeopardize the Amerindian archaeological remains; and
4. The removal of extensive tree cover from such a large tract of land affects the visual quality, aesthetics and natural beauty of the area.

The actions of the developer are a clear indication to the Trust and the Society, of the developer's deliberate and outrageous disrespect for the integrity of the PMA in particular, and its importance to Saint Lucia in general. We urge the authorities to take strong action to ensure the developer obeys the laws of Saint Lucia, and respects our island's priceless archaeological and natural heritage.

Loopholes and Inconsistencies in Our Development Control System

Upon contacting the Development Control Authority, the Trust was informed that the development had not been approved by that body, and a stop notice had been served. We congratulate the DCA for taking this action and look forward to the early and decisive enforcement of the stop order.

Further, the Saint Lucia National Trust and many other relevant agencies who serve as referral agencies for the DCA were never given the opportunity to review and comment on any application made to the state for this project. This contravenes the management regime for the World Heritage Site. Last year the World Heritage Committee expressed concerns about the nature of developments at the PMA in

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Soufriere. This development will further jeopardise the World Heritage status of the PMA, particularly since it was allowed to proceed without approval.

Threats to the PMA

The Saint Lucia National Trust and the Society are concerned about threats to the integrity of the World Heritage Site due to continued pressure from property developers to change the landscape of the area. The approach that seems to be used by some developers, is to coerce the political directorate to go against the tenets of conservation agreed to for the PMA, and even to go contrary to the law

The Importance of the Pitons Management Area World Heritage Site

The Pitons Management Area was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee at its 28th session held in Suzhou, China, in July 2004.

Long before that, the Pitons have been a national icon for Saint Lucia: a landmark for sailors, a symbol of strength to colonisers, a place of spirituality for the island's early inhabitants, and the island's most renowned natural scenery.

The Pitons Management Area, established in 2002 under the Planning and Development Act of 2001, is a 2,909-hectare site near the town of Soufriere including the Pitons, two volcanic spires rising side by side from the sea (770 metres and 743 metres high respectively), linked by the Piton Mitan ridge. The volcanic complex includes a geothermal field with sulphurous fumeroles and hot springs. Coral reefs cover almost 60% of the site's marine area.

After many years of research, and a submission by the Government of Saint Lucia, the PMA was listed by UNESCO as a site of *Outstanding Universal Value* because of its unique geological history and outstanding natural beauty, under criteria (vii) and (viii) respectively.

Effectively, this listing implies that the visual impact and natural assets of the site must be managed to safeguard against loss of its auspicious status. To be eligible

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for designation as a World Heritage Site, Saint Lucia agreed to establish a management regime that involved the conservation of the marine and terrestrial areas within the site, particularly those areas of greatest importance: the Sulphur Springs, the Pitons and the ridge that connects them.

A Way Forward

If the destructive construction project highlighted, and other like actions continue, we have good reason to believe that the quality of our World Heritage Site will be threatened, even degraded, and we may lose our World Heritage status. This will damage Saint Lucia's reputation and international standing, and strain our relations with UNESCO and other important international bodies.

The Trust and the Society feel obligated to publicly raise our objections to such developments and encourages all Saint Lucian residents will embrace our collective responsibility to protect the nation's natural, archaeological, historical and cultural assets.

We promote balanced national development which is sustainable and which considers the needs of future generations. As such, we implore the intervention of Government, working in partnership with the relevant agencies, to develop a focused, comprehensive strategy for national development.

The Trust urges immediate action by Government regarding the property under development at Beau Estate, Soufriere. The Trust believes that a strong message must be sent to developers to ensure they respect the natural and cultural environment within which they seek to invest. We reiterate that they must also respect the laws of the land.

Further, we urge Government to renew its commitment to maintaining the Pitons Management Area as a World Heritage Site by insisting upon balanced sustainable development and conservation and by ensuring that systems and structures to achieve this are operationalized. To this end, the Trust urges Government to:

1. dialogue more directly and in a timely manner with agencies concerned with the conservation and development of national resources,

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2. ensure the execution of proper environmental assessments with respect to sensitive areas, and
3. involve the public in the decision making process.

Finally, the Trust reaffirms its commitment to fostering national discourse aimed at influencing the balanced development of special places in Saint Lucia through dialogue and accountability.

The Trust will soon be launching its RESCUE Saint Lucia Advocacy Programme. This advocacy programme will ensure the public is regularly informed about the state of national historic, archaeological, cultural and natural assets such as those within the Pitons Management Area. We urge Saint Lucian residents to support the work of the Trust in ensuring special places in Saint Lucia remain beautiful forever.

Saint Lucia National Trust

Saint Lucia Archaeological and Historical Society

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