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## Baker's Bay accused of 'blatant bribe'

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Members of the Save Guana Cay Reef Association (SGCRA) cried shame on the developers of the Baker's Bay project yesterday, calling their donation to the Bahamas National Trust (BNT) a "blatant bribe" which is being used to sway public opinion.

SGCRA began their fight against the development on Guana Cay, Abaco in early 2005 and are still fighting to save the tiny island from what they see as over development destruction. The non-governmental organization is now pushing for environmental protection laws for the entire Bahamas.

Baker's Bay Golf & Ocean Club is being developed by Discovery Land Company, a Scottsdale-based real estate development firm specializing in the creation of world-class residential golf communities.

According to a statement issued by the SGCRA, a recent press release by Baker's Bay reveals that BNT received \$200,000 and will continue to receive this amount every year for the next three years. It indicates that a second grant may be issued for a further three years contingent on the successful achievement of the outlined general milestones and overall performance of the organization in carrying out the organization's mission.

"It is with extreme disgust that we, the Save Guana Cay Reef Association, read in the papers that such a 'blatant bribe' was being used to sway the public opinion in reference to the Baker's Bay development, in Guana Cay," the SGCRA statement said.

"The Bahamas National Trust graciously received the donation. We realize they are a cash strapped organization and we respect their work, but that is no reason 'to sell your soul to the devil.'

"Accepting the donation is one thing, we cannot fault them for that, but the gushing words of praise that followed in the press release from the BNT, was nothing short of appalling."

The SGCRA noted some early literature produced by the

developers in which they mention the BNT as being a part of the project. They were even mentioned as being a part of the environmental monitoring team in the Heads of Agreement between the developers and the government.

"In researching this, we felt some comfort in knowing that the BNT were going to be looking out for our interests," they said.

When SGCRA contacted BNT Executive Director Chris Hamilton via an e-mail on April 14, 2005, he responded back stating that he had not seen the development plans and had not been in any discussions about the preservation or monitoring activities with Baker's Bay. Furthermore, Hamilton said the first he had heard of the BNT involvement when he saw the article in the newspaper.

However, SGCRA members contend that in the recent press release about the donation, a BNT official clearly states that they have visited the site and they are sure that the aspects of the project will be carried out in the most environmentally sensitive way possible.

SGCRA has secured the professional services of some of the best known scientists in the region and all of them, they say, are certain that a golf course with its associated fertilizers and chemicals this close to a living coral reef is a recipe for disaster.

"All of these scientists have no personal interest in the project and none of them were paid for their work. They have all stated categorically that this golf course will kill the reef at Baker's bay and beyond," they said.

"You only have to look at the pictures or visit the island to see how this mega development is going to destroy this beautiful Bahamian treasure."

SGCRA state they are very disappointed when they see comments made about the donation in which Livingston Marshall, an employee of Baker's Bay, claims that "Baker's Bay will help set the standard for sensitive and sustainable development in The Bahamas and maybe even the region."

Disgusted with the actions of the developers, SGCRA question how sustainable development and Baker's Bay could be used in the same sentence.

"They have clear-cut every tree in a 100-acre area. They have already removed over 70 acres of mangroves. They want to build a golf course within 50 yards of one of the most beautiful reefs in The Bahamas," they said. "They drive a beach raking machine over the beach four times a day during the height of turtle nesting season. They have already destroyed the crabbing grounds that have been used for generations by Abaconians."

The Save Guana Cay Association reminds all Bahamians that they have the responsibility to save something for future generations. While they understand the BNT's acceptance of the donation, they want them to rethink their endorsement of the project and check out the facts.

"Please do not be blinded by the money Bahamas," they said. "Baker's Bay has lots of money to throw around and they can buy lots of friends but with all the money they have, they cannot replace a living coral reef. They cannot replace mangroves and

the associated fisheries."

*DESTROYING MANGROVES — It is understood that the Baker's Bay developers will clear roads in and remove all mangroves, then they will fill the mangroves in with the material they dredge. The entire area is low, and thus they will have removed and buried hundreds of acres of mangroves. Pictured are some the mangroves that have been uprooted.*

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