

**Welcome Remarks
Ambassador Hardt
U.S. Fishing Group in Guyana/Launch of Sport Fishing
Documentary
Wednesday, March 28, 2012, 6:00 -8:00p.m.
Ambassador's Residence**

Honorable Ministers of **G**overnment,
Members of the visiting sports fishing group,
Colleagues
Good evening and welcome.

I am truly pleased to host this gathering this evening to bring together this impressive delegation of sports fishing enthusiasts, U.S. investors, private businessmen, U.S. outdoors media, representatives of the Government of Guyana, directors of eco-tourism related agencies, hoteliers, representatives from the Guyana hospitality industry and colleagues from the diplomatic community to highlight the innovative work of the U.S. Agency for International Development in promoting new sources of economic growth within Guyana's dynamic and diversifying economy.

Through our Guyana Trade and Investment Support program, under the leadership of Bill Gelman and Patrick Henry, USAID has been working in recent years to promote economic development in so-called “non-traditional” sectors: fisheries, non-traditional agriculture, forestry products and eco-tourism. Great strides have been made in all of these areas, and I have been pleased to see firsthand the concrete fruits (and vegetables) of these efforts in visits to farms and hatcheries and eco-resorts. It is our hope that what we have launched, and what the British will continue to nurture, will develop strong roots that will lead to self-sustaining and continually growing generators of economic activity that create jobs and income for the people of Guyana.

In this regard, USAID Guyana has been highly successful in fostering the development of Guyana as a major birding destination. Through the GTIS Project, USAID funded familiarization tours to Guyana by birding bloggers and leading travel journalists, as well as visits to marketing fairs by Guyanese wilderness and birding tourism operators. These efforts resulted in the equivalent of over US\$13

million in advertising to promote the industry. Today, eco-lodges in the interior are operating at 70 percent capacity in the high season and several eco-lodges have expanded capacity to meet the growing demand. This compares to 20 percent occupancy rates when this project began in 2004. So this has been a big success story.

Tonight's event gives us a chance to mark what I believe is another major step forward in the development of a second, exciting ecotourism product for Guyana: sport fishing. Sport fishing is big business -- a rapidly growing multi-billion dollar industry that that American Sport fishing Association estimates generates more than \$125 billion in economic output and more than one million jobs in the United States. They claim that if sport fishing were a corporation, it would rank above the Bank of America or IBM on the Fortune 500 list of largest American companies.

Given the growth and global expansion of sport fishing, it is also an industry where Guyana can offer a unique tourism product to anglers in search of exotic catches and remote, pristine fresh water locales that

are teeming with fish. Visits to Rewa and other ecotourism resorts can bring anglers face to face with giant black piranhas, the big-toothed piara, peacock bass, himara, and of course, the legendary arapaima, which an ongoing study being conducted by scientist from Auburn University suggests is endemic to Guyana.

Thanks to the efforts of USAID to develop this product and create critical linkages to the private sector and special interest publications, sport fishing is on the cusp of becoming the second major eco-tourism product to make significant contributions to the Guyana economy and specifically to Amerindian regions and populations in the interior. And where our USAID birding efforts focused on building broader awareness of Guyana's birding potential, this effort has been led by a very productive public-private partnership between USAID and U.S. investors, who were initially attracted to Guyana as a result of the media interest generated by USAID's birding activities.

In fact, it was Costa Sunglasses, represented this evening by its VP for marketing Al Perkinson, that first became interested in Guyana

through links to participants of a USAID-sponsored birding familiarization tour. This led to the first phase of the program, namely to test if catch and release sport fishing was a viable market niche for tourism in Guyana. In May 2010, Costa and USAID GTIS made their first fishing trip at Rewa Village. In November 2010, Costa returned to Guyana to meet with key players in government, the private sector and civil society to fine tune their plans. In January 2011, a catch and release fishing trip was organized on the Rupununi River that teamed Costa, Nervous Waters and USAID GTIS. At that time, a decision was made to focus specifically on the Rewa area and specifically on using fly rods. Then in March 2011, Costa and Nervous Waters sent 3 anglers to develop a pilot project focused on actually catching arapaima on a fly rod. With that accomplished, the project moved into Phase Two, which was to build the economic model for the industry. In November 2011, 4 paying anglers plus the Costa and Nervous waters tested the logistics and fishing at Rewa. At this time, Costa brought down a writer from *Garden and Gun* magazine to write a feature on fishing at Rewa for publication in the May/June 2012 edition. And finally, this month,

Costa and Nervous Waters made another trip that further tested the readiness of Rewa, trained staff and guides, and brought down a writer from *Field and Stream*. In total, Costa has invested over US\$250,000 in cash and in kind to develop a sport fishing model for Guyana.

Over the next two months, Costa and Nervous Waters will explore tarpon fishing off the coast of Guyana, which will offer the prospect that sport fishing will expand beyond the interior. The March and April 2012 trips will be highlighted in the December/January issue of *Field and Stream* Magazine. Additional trips to Rewa are planned in November 2012. We are pleased that the U.S. sports fishing investors are committed to ensuring the full involvement and participation of Amerindian communities in Rewa and throughout Region 9 in the further development of sports fishing in Guyana.

USAID's involvement in this project has not only been focused on connecting the people and entities in this room. It has also been working hand-in-hand with the Ministry of Agriculture's Fisheries Department to

develop an Inland Fisheries Management Plan to establish catch and release regulations, to tag and monitor fish populations, designate fishing sites, and otherwise ensure environmentally responsible management of the rivers and fish stocks. We have also sought to facilitate contacts between eco-lodge owners and the U.S. private investors who are laying the foundation to bring to Guyana the rapidly growing niche sport fishing industry. I am pleased to note that members of the U.S. team will be working with the Ministry of Agriculture and other government authorities to develop an Inland Fisheries Management Plan. The project also is training fishing guides so critical to the sport fishing experience.

I know that both USAID and the U.S. investors driving this new sport fishing endeavor are committed to employing international best practices in shaping the industry in Guyana. If successful, this tourism product can help preserve Guyana's biodiversity, provide livelihoods to the communities in the interior, offer expanded opportunities for eco-lodges, and promote a sustainable economic activity that can contribute

to the diversification of Guyana's economy and the advancement of Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy.

The video documentary that will be shown shortly, and future articles in U.S. outdoor and sport fishing publications, will provide valuable promotional materials to large and diverse audiences about the unique potential for sports fishing in Guyana. This documentary will be shown at sport fishing and ecotourism film festivals and gatherings across the U.S. I am confident that the initiative is in good hands with the participation of such prestigious partners as Costa Sunglasses Inc., Nervous Waters, Guyana Government ministries, and the local private sector.

Thank you again for joining us this evening. Enjoy the show!