

Bahamas Protected



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Executive Summary Marine Protection Plan

for expanding
The Bahamas Marine Protected Areas Network
to meet The Bahamas 2020 declaration

SEATHE FUTURE

September 2018

20 x 20 White Paper Prepared by The Bahamas National Trust



Executive Summary
20 by 20 White Paper: Marine Protection Plan
for
Expanding The Bahamas Marine Protected Areas Network
To meet The Bahamas 2020 declaration

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The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a Marine Protected Area as “an area of intertidal or subtidal terrain, together with its overlying water and associated flora, fauna, historical and cultural features, which has been reserved by law or other effective means to protect part or all of its enclosed environment.”

BACKGROUND

Recognizing the importance of a thriving marine environment to the culture and economy of our islands, The Bahamas has long invested in marine area protection. Important milestones included the creation of the Sea Gardens in 1892 northeast of Nassau, the establishment of the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park in 1958, and the passage of the Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction & Conservation) Act in 1977. At the turn of the millennium, the Government of The Bahamas, supported by local conservation partners and other key stakeholders, renewed its commitment to sustaining a healthy marine environment by creating a network of marine protected areas (MPAs).

At the Seventh Conference of The Parties (COP-7) of the United Nations Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2004, The Government of The Bahamas endorsed and agreed to the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA). In May 2008, The Bahamas formally committed to the [Caribbean Challenge Initiative](#) (CCI) to effectively conserve at least 20% of the near-shore marine resources across The Bahamas by 2020.

This CCI Declaration served as a catalyst to The Bahamas’ pledge to:

- (i) Exceed the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) goals by effectively conserving at least 20% of the near-shore marine resources across The Bahamas by 2020;

- (ii) Achieve the “20 by 20” Goal, to have in place fully functioning sustainable finance mechanisms that will provide long-term and reliable funding to conserve and sustainably manage the marine and coastal resources of The Bahamas;
- (iii) Preserve the country’s marine and terrestrial environments to meet the targets established by the CBD PoWPA for 2010 and 2012; and
- (iv) Mobilize efforts to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, as signatory to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) – Life Below Water, which came into force in January 2016.

With the addition of 11 million acres in 2015, The Bahamas National Protected Area System (BNPAS) now protects 10% of the country’s coastal and marine environment.

In 2004, the National Implementation Support Programme (NISP) was formed under the Ministry of the Environment to implement the PoWPA. NISP members include the Bahamas Environment, Science and Technology (BEST) Commission, the Bahamas National Trust, the Department of Marine Resources and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). In 2016, TNC and the Bahamas National Trust collaborated with the Bahamas Reef Environment Educational Foundation to implement the *Bahamas Protected* project. *Bahamas Protected* is a three-year initiative to support the Government of The Bahamas in meeting its commitment to the CCI, the United Nations CBD and SDG 14.

This document, *20 by 20 White Paper: Marine Protection Plan*, was created after consultation with the NISP and other key stakeholders. It proposes a set of areas that would protect important marine resources across The Bahamas and achieve the country’s 20 by 20 goal.

PROCESS TO IDENTIFY PROPOSED MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

To identify areas that merit protection, the *Bahamas Protected* science team conducted a national marine gap analysis using the best available science to identify marine resources that fell short of national targets set by the NISP for protection of important ecosystems and marine organisms. The gap analysis also identified priority areas of interest (AOIs) for further vetting with key stakeholders.

A critical step in designing and selecting new protected areas is engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process. *Bahamas Protected* conducted public consultation in communities throughout the Bahamas to gather more information about areas for protection that were identified through the scientific process and to identify areas that local stakeholders wished to propose as MPAs. *Bahamas Protected* also implemented a public relations campaign to raise awareness about MPAs and the process to identify new MPAs. Stakeholder engagement via the marine gap analysis, public consultation and the public relations campaign is summarized as follows:

Engagement through Marine Gap Analysis: Approximately 40 leading local and international scientists and field practitioners from more than 26 organizations were consulted through three national workshops that built on two previous gap analyses. Strategic advice was also sought from the NISP.

Engagement through Public Consultation: Three rounds of public stakeholder consultations were conducted from 2016 to 2018, engaging approximately 400 persons in 21 meetings on over 10 islands throughout the Bahamas. Additionally, maps of proposed areas were posted to the *Bahamas Protected* Facebook page and shared for public comments over a six-week consultation period.

Engagement through Public Relations: Key stakeholders were engaged to share information about the benefits to communities of MPAs and to engage members of the public in the consultation process. This was done through face-to-face meetings, TV, radio, social and print media, and through the wide distribution of public service announcements (see Table 3). MPA posters were displayed in airports around the country. To date, over 7,000 people signed a petition supporting Bahamian MPAs.

ECONOMIC VALUATION OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES PROVIDED BY MPAS

The *Bahamas Protected* project also considered the benefits that nature provides to people, known as ecosystem services. Diverse, functioning ecosystems provide myriad benefits that can be sustained through protected area management. Nearshore habitats bolster the stocks of fisheries, beaches and reefs draw tourists, and reefs, and coastal mangroves and seagrasses buffer storm waves, mitigate climate change impacts, and promote water quality. *Bahamas Protected* quantified the economic value of four key ecosystem services within the existing MPA network (Fig. 1).

Nursery habitats to support lobster fisheries



- \$23.5 million in export value annually
- 6 million lbs. catch annually

Vibrant tourism



- \$67.6 million in expenditures annually
- 383,000 visitor-days annually

Communities protected from coastal hazards



- Reduced exposure to risk for nearly 40,000 people and \$806 million in annual income saved

Carbon storage for climate mitigation



- \$5 billion in avoided carbon emissions
- 400 million tons CO₂ sequestered in mangroves and seagrass annually

Figure 1. Economic value of four ecosystem services provided by the MPA network of The Bahamas

PROPOSED MPAS

Using the recommendations from the marine gap analysis and taking into consideration stakeholder consultation and already established MPAs, *Bahamas Protected* proposes that the sites in Table 1 be legally declared MPAs. **These 43 areas cover 8,111,661 acres (3,282,674 hectares). If all areas are declared and legally established, the Government of The Bahamas will be able to fully meet its commitment of conserving 20% of its nearshore marine environment by 2020.**

CONCLUSION

This document, *20 by 20 White Paper: Marine Protection Plan*, proposes a set of areas to protect to achieve The Bahamas 20 by 20 goal of conserving important marine resources, which lie at the core of the country's social and economic well-being, now and for future generations.

We invite the Government of The Bahamas to note the following:

- i) The Bahamas has committed to fulfilling the CCI 20 by 20 goal: to protect at least 20% of the marine and coastal environment by 2020.
- ii) The *Bahamas Protected* project is a three-year initiative that was undertaken to support the Government of The Bahamas in meeting the 20 by 20 commitment.
- iii) The project used a marine gap analysis and public consultation process to identify areas listed in Table 1 that should become MPAs.
- iv) Stakeholders were engaged via the marine gap analysis, public consultations and a public relations campaign.

Therefore, we urge the Government of The Bahamas to:

- v) Endorse the declaration of the areas in Table 1 as protected areas within The Bahamas; and
- vi) Instruct the relevant agencies to complete the legal process for establishing the areas in Table 1 as protected areas within The Bahamas.

Table 1. Listing of Sites Proposed for Meeting the 20 by 20 Goal

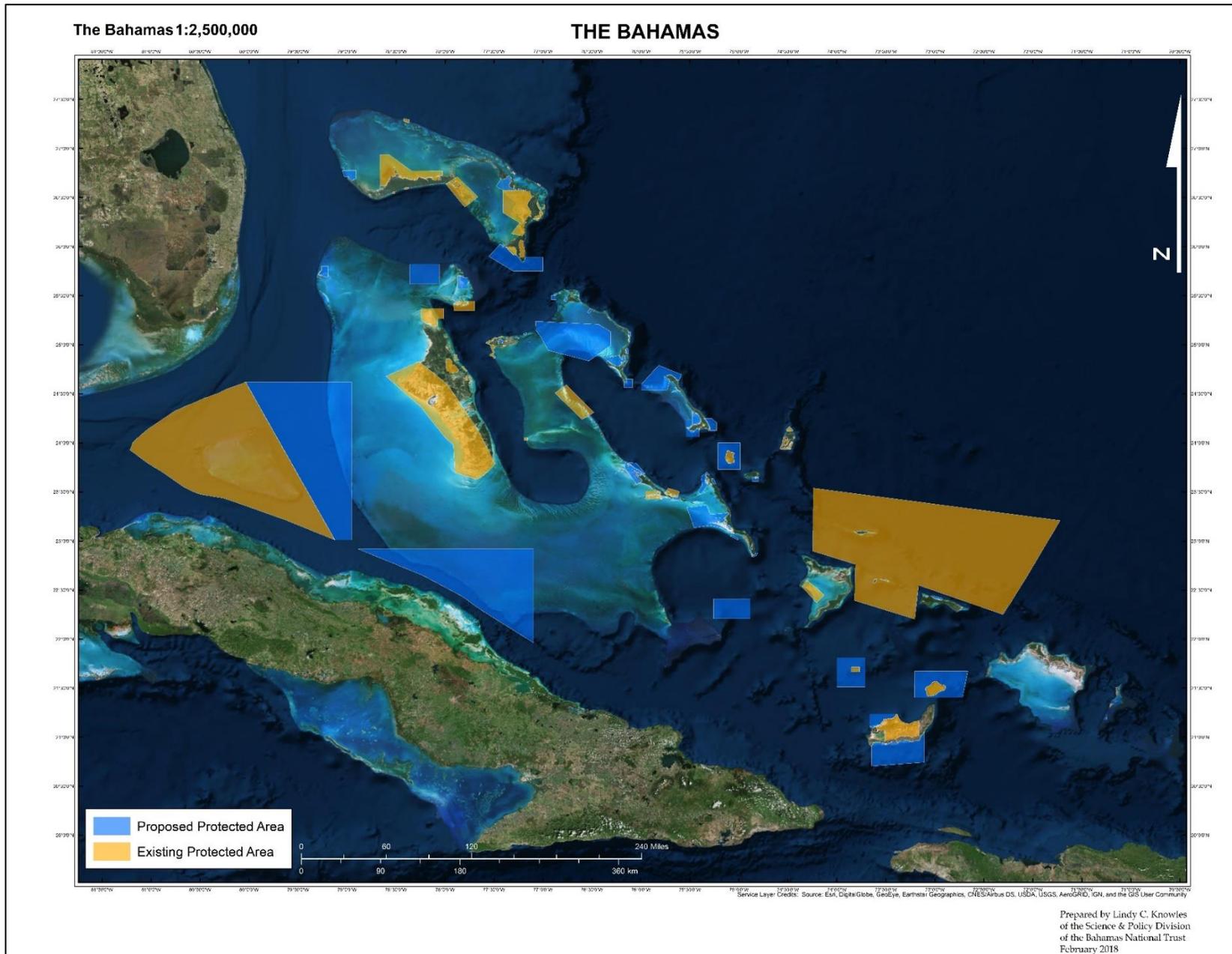
	ISLAND	SITE NAME	SIZE (ACRES)	PROPOSED MANAGEMENT TYPE	PROPOSED PA MANAGEMENT AGENCY
1	Abaco	Sandy Point Marine Managed Area	1,492	*Zoned for multiple uses	***DMR/BNT
2	Berry Islands	West Berry Islands Marine Managed Area	169,250	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
3		Kemps Cay and Pigeon Cay	33,347	**Highly protected area	BNT
4	Bimini	North Bimini Marine Reserve	21,733	Highly protected area	DMR/Forestry
5	Cat Island	North Cat Island (Orange Creek/Port Royal)	159,724	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
6		Alligator Creek	3,635	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
7		Fernandez Bay/Joe Sound/Armbrister Creeks	24,132	Highly protected area	DMR
8		Hawk's Nest and Cutlass Creeks	42,420	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
9		Columbus Point	28,015	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
10	Eleuthera	West Schooner Cays Marine Managed Area	614,953	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
11		Egg Island	5,570	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
12		Seahorse National Park	3,210	Highly protected area	BNT
13		Savannah Sound and Plantation Reef	3,468	Highly protected area	BNT
14		Half Sound, North and South	3,573	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
15		South Eleuthera Marine Managed Area	38,274	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR/Forestry
16		Deep Creek	2,059	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR/Forestry
17		Lighthouse Point Marine Area	18,876	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
18		Corrie Sound	2,510	Highly protected area	DMR/Forestry
19	Exuma	Southern Exuma Cays	66,476	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
20	Grand Bahama	West End	26,945	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT/DMR
21	Inagua	South Inagua	359,422	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
22	Long Island	North Long Island	26,166	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
23		Northeast Long Island	3,642	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
24		Long Island Marine Managed Area	183,226	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT/DMR
25		Steven's Rock	3,797	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
26		Great Lakes	1,605	Highly protected area	BNT
27	South Long Island	3,454	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR	
28	Mayaguana	Curtis Creek	6,528	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT/DMR
29	New Providence	Lost Blue Holes	174	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
30		Athol Island PA	971	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
31		Eastern New Providence Cays (Green Cay)	4,159	Highly protected area	DMR/Forestry
32		Lake Killarney	5,013	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
33	Ragged Island	Cay Verde	212,711	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR/BNT
34	Rum Cay	Southeast Rum Cay	7,694	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR/Forestry

35	Southwest Great Bahama Bank (Columbus Bank) Marine Managed Area		2,162,120	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
EXPANSION OF EXISTING MARINE PROTECTED AREAS					
36	Abaco	Expansion of Cross Harbour National Park	215,815	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
37		Expansion of the Marls of Abaco National Park	44,980	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
38	Cay Sal Bank and Great Bahama Bank	Expansion of Cay Sal Marine Managed Area	2,816,790	Zoned for multiple uses	DMR
39	Conception Island	Expansion of Conception Island National Park	145,302	Highly protected area	BNT
40	Exuma	Expansion of Moriah Harbour Cay National Park	5,349	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
41	Inagua	Expansion of Inagua National Park	62,373	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
42		Expansion of Little Inagua National Park	336,642	Zoned for multiple uses	BNT
43		Expansion of Hogsty Reef Protected Area	234,059	Highly protected area	DMR
Total Area of New Proposed and Expanded MPAs:			8,111,661		

* Multiple-use MPAs may be zoned for various uses, such as fishery replenishment areas, recreational zones, fishing areas, etc. Certain types of fishing gear are restricted and seasonal closures may be implemented based on resource conditions. Examples include San Salvador National Park (BNT) and Andros West Side National Park (BNT).

** Highly protected areas (or Marine Reserves) are fishery replenishment areas where extractive uses are restricted. A Marine Reserve is defined as “Any designated area with its surrounding waters a protected area; the removal of any fisheries resource is prohibited except with the written permission of the Minister for educational, scientific and research purposes.” Examples include Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park (BNT), Pelican Cays Land & Sea Park (BNT), and South Berry Islands Marine Reserve (DMR).

*** DMR = Department of Marine Resources; BNT = Bahamas National Trust



Map 1. The current Bahamas National Protected Area System and areas proposed for meeting the 20% protection goal. (courtesy of L. Knowles, BNT.)



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