

# **Bahamas Protected Areas Fund (BPAF) and The Bahamas Customs Department signs MOU to Raise Funds for Conservation**

*Innovative Sustainable Financing for Protected Areas via Click2Clear*

Bahamas Protected Areas Fund (BPAF) and The Bahamas Customs Department signed an MOU on July 27, 2021 formalizing their partnership to raise funds for protected areas and climate resilience.



From Left: Lashelle Moxey – BPAF Ops Asst., Tyrone Sands – Bahamas Customs, PR and Training Officer, Ellison Thompson - BPAF Director and Karen Panton - BPAF, Ex. Director

This MOU comes at a time when countries around the world are experiencing unprecedented climatic challenges including excessive heat, fires and flooding. Raising funds to protect and strengthen our natural environment is essential. For SIDS like The Bahamas, rising sea levels, increasingly dangerous storm events, saltwater intrusion, biodiversity losses and the outbreak of diseases like Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, all make climate change an existential threat.

This new partnership presents a very innovative solution to ensure that revenues are directly available to mitigate to mitigate the threat. Protected areas are known to support biodiversity and respond to climate change. Funding secured for BPAF from the Click2Clear Opt-In Contributions Initiative, will provide protected area managers and other environmental actors the additional and necessary funds to continue urgent management and restoration activities. “This is a wonderful marriage, an exceptional

opportunity to support our country,” said Kelley Bostwick-Toote, BPAF’s Chair of the Board.

The Comptroller of Customs, Dr. Geannine Moss, noted that she is “pleased to partner with BPAF on such an important and vital venture where residents and tourists can lend their support for Bahamian natural resources. Giving for natural resources management and climate resilience is one way of ensuring a clean, safe and healthy Bahamas for generations to come”. Dr. Moss, while noting the difficult economic times now facing Bahamians, said a “sacrifice in making a donation towards this vital venture now will aid in the sustainability of our protected areas”. She implored all Bahamians to donate freely towards the protection of these islands we love.

The sustainable revenue initiative will be implemented on Customs’ **Click2Clear** platform implemented by The Government of The Bahamas to streamline and ease the import and export of cargo in The Bahamas. The wealth of stakeholders associated with the Click2Clear Initiative (including shipping companies, airlines, exporters, boaters and residents), presents an efficient opportunity to reach a mass of potential supporters for protected areas and environmental management. Giving for natural resources management and climate resilience will be integrated seamlessly into an established platform that allows the country to collect its revenues, while providing for financial donations to BPAF. Users of the Bahamas Customs Click2Clear platform will have the option to round-up or give any amount they desire, to BPAF for environmental groups who will access these funds via grants from BPAF.

Ellison Thompson, member of the Board of Directors for BPAF, expressed his delight noting that ‘BPAF is delighted and extremely grateful to Customs for agreeing to partner with us on its Click2Clear platform. This is a major step to provide financial sustainability for BPAF and enhances the green credentials of Bahamas Customs’. Karen Panton, Executive Director of BPAF stated that she hopes this is the start of many great partnerships. She noted that BPAF is looking to partner with other Government Departments and private businesses who want to improve their environmental and sustainable impact within the country. She invited interested persons to contact the Fund at [info@bahamasprotected.com](mailto:info@bahamasprotected.com) or at 698-1152, to find out how to support the protection of The Bahamas’ environmental resources and safeguard lives.

BPAF, an independent grants-making institution, was established in 2014 by an Act of Parliament. The Fund is governed by an independent Board of Directors chaired by Kelley Bostwick-Toote with Bruno Roberts serving as Vice Chair. The purpose of the Fund is to “ensure sustainable financing into perpetuity” for biodiversity conservation, in particular, protected areas and climate resilience. The Fund’s activities extend to scientific and policy research, education, conservation and management of protected areas. Since last year, BPAF has been awarding grants for Hurricane Dorian ecosystem-based assessments and recovery from a grant secured from the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development through the German Development Bank – KfW.