

Bahamas Protected Areas Fund Awards First Competitive Grants Under Historic Marine Debt Conversion Project

Nassau, The Bahamas — February 12, 2026

On the 12th of February 2026, The Bahamas Protected Areas Fund (BPAF) announced the award of the first competitive grants under the Marine Conservation Program established through The Bahamas Debt Conversion Project for Marine Conservation, a landmark initiative that is transforming sustainable financing for ocean protection in The Bahamas.



At a grant award ceremony held in Nassau, BPAF awarded **\$405, 420.00 to nine Bahamian organizations**, marking the first set of competitively allocated grants under the debt conversion agreement. These awards represent a major milestone in the implementation of the country's first-ever debt conversion transaction and demonstrate BPAF's central role in directing long-term, sustainable funding to priority marine conservation efforts.



Bahamas Debt
Conversion Project
For Marine Conservation

The Bahamas Debt Conversion Project, launched in November 2024, was developed in partnership with **The Government of The Bahamas, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and other international partners.** The transaction unlocked approximately **\$124 million in new funding for marine conservation over 15 years**, with a minimum of **\$1.2 million allocated annually** to support marine protection, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods — primarily through grants to non-governmental and community-based organizations.

As the conservation trust fund selected to support the Project, BPAF is responsible for stewarding these resources and implementing a transparent, competitive grant-making process to ensure funds are directed where they will have the greatest impact.



“Today marks a historic moment for The Bahamas and for marine conservation in our country,” said **Mr. Glenn Bannister, Chair of the Board of the Bahamas Protected Areas Fund.** “Through BPAF’s competitive allocation process, we are proud to award the very first projects under the Marine Conservation Program of the Debt Conversion Project. These grants bring innovative finance to life — supporting Bahamian organizations, strengthening protected area management, and delivering real benefits for our reefs, coasts, and communities.”

Established in 2014, BPAF was created to ensure a sustainable financial base for the effective management of the Bahamas National Protected Areas System and to support conservation activities critical to the country’s

natural resources and economic future. Over the years, BPAF has played a leading role

in advancing conservation finance, strengthening institutional capacity, and supporting climate resilience across the archipelago. BPAF was one of the more prominent local bodies providing funding for assessment and recovery in the wake of Hurricane Dorian.

The nine inaugural grantees represent a diverse cross-section of Bahamian environmental leadership and community-based conservation. The first awardees under the Marine Conservation Program are:

Organization	Project Title	Grant Award Totals
Bahamas Marine Mammal Research Organization (BMMRO)	Evaluating Marine Mammal Presence and Resource Conditions in Southern Bahamas Marine Protected Areas and Surrounding Waters	\$ 50,000.00
Bahamas National Trust (BNT)	Baseline Marine Assessments and Community-Driven Park Management Enhancement for the San Salvador Marine Protected Areas	\$ 50,000.00
Bahamas Reef Environmental Educational Foundation (BREEF)	Marking Our Reefs: Signage, Buoys, and Awareness for the BREEF Coral Reef Sculpture Garden & Coral Nursery within the Southwest Marine Managed Area	\$ 50,000.00
Bahamas Undersea Research Foundation (BURF)	MPA management planning For Abaco - Identifying and addressing climate and other threats through Rapid Ecological Assessments and stakeholder surveys	\$ 50,000.00
Blue Action Lab	Coral Restoration to Enhance Peterson's Cay National Park	\$ 36,995.00
Friends of the Environment	Abaco Coastal Stewardship: Education and Engagement	\$ 47,025.00
ImagiNation Ink in association with Black Tide Media	Marking Our Reefs: The Last Barrier: Paradise in Peril	\$ 35,000.00
ORG Bahamas Foundation	Strengthening Environmental NPO Capacity for Marine Conservation and Coastal Resilience in The Bahamas	\$ 50,000.00
Waterkeepers Bahamas	Youth Environmental Ambassadors/Cadets	\$ 36,400.00
Total		\$ 405,420.00

- **Bahamas National Trust**
- **Waterkeeper Bahamas**

- **Bahamas Reef Environment Educational Foundation (BREEF)**
- **Friends of the Environment (Abaco)**
- **Bahamas Undersea Research Foundation**
- **Blue Action Lab**
- **Bahamas Marine Mammal Organization**
- **ORG Bahamas**
- **ImagiNation Ink**

Funded projects will support a wide range of priorities, including youth education and engagement, coral restoration, baseline marine assessments, marine protected area (MPA) management planning, capacity strengthening of environmental NGOs, community-driven parks management, climate-smart planning, and sustainable livelihoods.



Karen Panton, Executive Director stated that the “award ceremony was deliberately embedded in this grants writing workshop so that potential grantees can see the end from the beginning. BPAF is deliberately making investments in expanding the grantee pool and capacity so that Bahamian organizations can better pursue and secure funding from beyond our borders, from both regional and international funders”.

“These first awards reflect BPAF’s commitment to transparency, strong governance, and competitive processes,” Mr. Bannister added. “They also demonstrate our confidence in Bahamian expertise and our belief that conservation is strongest when it is led locally and rooted in communities.”

BPAF extended its sincere thanks to all partners who made the Debt Conversion Project possible, including **The Government of The Bahamas, The Nature Conservancy, the Inter-American Development Bank, Standard Chartered Bank**, as well as to the Grants Review Committee, and other teams who supported the review and selection process.

“This is only the beginning,” Mr. Bannister said. “Over the next 15 years, the Debt Conversion Project will provide unprecedented resources for marine protection and blue economy development. BPAF stands ready as steward, partner, and catalyst to ensure these funds deliver lasting impact for the people, communities, and marine ecosystems of The Bahamas.”

Grant Writing and Monitoring and Evaluation Workshops in Grand Bahama and New Providence

The Bahamas Protected Areas Fund (BPAF) recently hosted a series of impactful Grant Writing and Monitoring & Evaluation workshops in Grand Bahama and New Providence, continuing its mission to elevate the capacity of nonprofits, communitybased organizations, and government agencies across the country.

The first workshop took place on February 3rd at the Rand Nature Centre in Grand Bahama, a followup twoday session was held in New Providence on February 12th and 13th at the British Colonial Hotel, offering participants deeper, hands on guidance in developing strong proposals and effectively monitoring funded projects. These





workshop brought together organizations from across the nation which included
Photo 5: Nassau workshop attendees.

These workshops brought together more than 48 organizations with 40 plus individuals from across the Bahamian archipelago, in person and virtually.

These sessions were facilitated by **BPAF's Grants Manager, Shacara Lightbourne**, who brings extensive experience in grant writing as well as monitoring and evaluation providing participants with practical insights, best practices, and proven tools for success.

Additionally, **Deon Stewart**, the National Programme Coordinator at the **UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme**, delivered a special presentation on the financing opportunities available through the GEF SGP, giving attendees direct visibility into new pathways for environmental project funding.

Together, these workshops reflect BPAF's commitment to strengthening national conservation capacity and empowering Bahamian organizations to access and manage funding more effectively.