

Bahamas Protected

CARIBBEAN DIVISION | THE WORLD WE DEPEND ON DEPENDS ON US

Together We Can Sea the Future By Protecting The Bahamas Today

A Collaboration to Achieve Remarkable Marine Protection Goals

As a country made up of over 700 islands and cays surrounded by turquoise waters, The Bahamas is rich with marine and coastal resources, from stunning coral reefs and marine life to expansive white beaches that bring millions of visitors from around the world. However, these treasures need protection — today more than ever. The people of The Bahamas depend on its nearshore marine environment every day, whether directly or indirectly, for food, livelihoods and to provide the foundation for a robust tourism industry and healthy economies. **It is imperative that the marine and coastal resources woven through these breathtaking islands be conserved and effectively managed in ways that allow Bahamians to thrive today, while ensuring that nature can continue to provide for future generations.**

Bahamas Protected was born out of this need and is the result of many years of collaboration toward a common goal of protecting the waters on which all Bahamians rely. **For more than a decade, conservation organizations have joined forces on the ground in The Bahamas to protect the ocean — pooling their science and expertise to identify priority marine areas for protection and work closely with the Bahamian government to establish these as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).** In 2008, with the launch of the Caribbean Challenge Initiative, the government of The Bahamas committed to protect and effectively manage at least 20% of its nearshore marine environment by 2020. Today, over 13 million acres are protected, or 10% of the country's nearshore environment, bringing The Bahamas halfway to its committed goal.

The Bahamas National Trust, Bahamas Reef Environment Educational Foundation and The Nature Conservancy, with funding from Oceans 5, launched Bahamas Protected in 2016. **This three-year project aims to support the government of The Bahamas in reaching its 20% protection goal and to help ensure effective marine management to secure the long-term sustainability of one of the most unique and iconic archipelagos in the world.**

Bahamas Protected Partners



The Bahamas Protected Approach: A Multifaceted Initiative with Four Main Objectives

Identify priority areas for protection and design a new set of MPAs that will bring The Bahamas to its 20% goal

By completing a rigorous analysis of marine areas, Bahamas Protected is able to help guide the expansion of the country's protected areas network and recommend to the government areas that should be added, based on priorities that include biodiversity data and projected climate change impacts. Key stakeholders, including fishers and others whose livelihoods depend on the sea, provide equally important criteria that shapes the expansion process, through interviews and engagement during the decision-making steps. MPAs that are designed and managed well provide economic benefits to fishers and communities. They also significantly improve quality of life by preserving the myriad of practical and cultural functions the ocean offers — providing food in addition to recreation opportunities and ways for communities to connect through festivals, regatta or other events that celebrate Bahamians' connection to the sea. By engaging those that benefit from MPAs, there is more opportunity for The Bahamas to grow its protected areas network successfully and with lasting results.



Increase the effective management of the entire network of MPAs in The Bahamas

Effective management requires planning. Bahamas Protected aims to grow a network of fully functioning MPAs that have science-based zoning plans defining the best uses for each area to optimize benefit to nature and people. This allows biodiversity to flourish while communities still get the resources they need from their marine environments. In addition, Bahamas Protected will develop management plans for several existing MPAs and will develop and enact bylaws for all existing marine parks so that protected areas become and remain fully functional. To help ensure the longevity of these management plans and bylaws, Bahamas Protected will build collaborative stakeholder relationships and involve local community groups in the planning and regulation-making processes.



Support effective management of MPAs into the future through dedicated, reliable funding

Effective management of MPAs also requires secure, long-term funding. Bahamas Protected is evaluating the financial gap between the level of management that is possible with current funding and what is needed annually to make ongoing, effective management a reality. To help close this gap, Bahamas Protected is designing and implementing sustainable finance mechanisms, like natural resource extraction fees or marine park entry fees, that qualify the Bahamas Protected Areas Fund to receive endowment funds from the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund (CBF). Launched in 2012, the CBF provides a long-term financial support structure for countries as they work to achieve and sustain their marine protection goals. The revenue raised by The Bahamas through these newly developed sustainable finance mechanisms will be matched by funds flowing to the Bahamas Protected Areas Fund from the CBF — to be dedicated to effectively operating and overseeing the entire system of MPAs in The Bahamas today and into the future.

Strengthen public awareness and support for MPAs

Successful MPAs have the backing of surrounding communities, policymakers and the fishing and tourism industries. With the support of the people who earn their livelihood from and make regulations about the marine environment, informed protected area declarations are made, effective management plans are put into action and policies are respected and observed. Bahamas Protected is implementing targeted outreach and educational campaigns to make people aware of the benefits of fully functioning MPAs and how collective efforts from many segments of the population can sustain them successfully for the long-term. In addition to community-based outreach like town meetings and stakeholder interviews, Bahamas Protected is using media outreach as well, including public service announcements, press releases, op-eds and social media campaigns, to bring about an understanding of and enthusiasm for the ways in which MPAs benefit nature and people.

With ambitious shared goals and a collaborative approach, Bahamas Protected provides a unified call to action across the islands of The Bahamas to champion the protection of the country's marine environment — a strong force supporting real progress toward the 20% protection goal and helping to build a legacy of conservation for the next generations.

SEA THE FUTURE

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CONTACT The Nature Conservancy in the Caribbean

Lisa Lord Price
Director of Development
lprice@tnc.org • 307-690-0920

Shenique Albury-Smith
Bahamas Program Director
salbury@tnc.org • 242-326-0024

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