

# ANNEX I

40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Bahamas  
*proposal for*

The Expansion of  
The  
Protected Area System  
Of  
The Commonwealth of The Bahamas



## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
A Unique Opportunity for MPA Declaration .....	6
ABACO.....	10
The Abaco Marls National Reserve .....	10
East Abaco Creeks National Park.....	11
Cross Harbour Conservation Area .....	12
South Abaco Blue Holes Conservation Area.....	13
ACKLINS/ CROOKED ISLAND .....	14
Acklin's Bight .....	14
ANDROS .....	15
Andros Green Cay National Park.....	15
Joulters Protected Area .....	16
BIMINI .....	17
North Bimini Marine Protected Area.....	17
CAY SAL .....	18
Cay Sal Land & Sea Park .....	18
ELEUTHERA.....	19
South Eleuthera Marine Protected Area .....	19
GRAND BAHAMA .....	21
North Shore -The Gap National Park .....	21
East Grand Bahama National Park.....	22
INAGUA.....	24
Hogsty Reef Protected Area .....	14
LONG ISLAND .....	25
North Long Island Marine Reserve .....	25
MAYAGUANA.....	26
Booby Cay National Park .....	26
NEW PROVIDENCE .....	27
South West Marine Managed Area.....	27
Perpall Tract National Park.....	28
SAN SALVADOR.....	29
San Salvador National Park.....	29
SOUTHEASTERN BAHAMAS MARINE PROTECTED AREA.....	30
PROPOSED PARK EXTENSIONS .....	31
EXUMA.....	31
Moriah Harbor Cay National Park Extension.....	31
GRAND BAHAMA .....	32
Lucayan National Park Expansion .....	32
Peterson Cay National Park Expansion .....	33
CONCLUSION.....	34

## Introduction

Over the past two decades, various commitments by governments have been made to conserve the marine and coastal environment, such as: the Biodiversity Convention (CBD); the Cartagena Convention and its protocols; and agreements under multilateral processes, such as CARICOM and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). Significant funding to protect the Caribbean's marine / coastal environment has been provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other public funding agencies. Governments, civil society, and the private sector have carried out many on-the-ground actions. While some progress has been made, trend lines point clearly toward the need for heightened action and leadership.

In 2008, the *Caribbean Challenge Initiative (CCI)* was launched by a set of governments, as an effort to provide greater leadership, and to chart a new course for protecting and sustainably managing the marine and coastal environment across the Caribbean. The Bahamas was one of two governments that initially agreed to participate in the CCI in 2008. Since that time 7 other Caribbean governments have also committed to the CCI.

### 1. Objectives of CCI

CCI is intended to galvanize leadership around the marine / coastal environment, and has had three broad, informal objectives to date:

- To catalyze high-level political will to protect and better manage marine and coastal resources
- To mobilize funding—not only significant additional funding for marine / coastal conservation, but also to put in place *sustainable* funding mechanisms
- To accelerate and support on-the-ground action to implement the various marine and coastal conservation commitments made by governments.

### 2. Commitments under CCI

To achieve these objectives, governments have made two types of commitments:

- "20 by 20" target - To effectively conserve at least 20% of their near-shore marine / coastal environment by 2020. (If this were achieved across the Caribbean, it would triple the area under protection, to 8.4 million ha.).
- Sustainable finance architecture target - To support and put in place new sustainable finance architecture that will generate long-term funding for the marine and coastal environment (taking the form of a set of trust funds and sustainable finance mechanisms, such as tourism fees).

### 3. Commitment under GEF Project

- The GEF Full Size Project "Building a Sustainable Marine Protected Area" requires a 10% commitment by February 2014. As of November 2013 the project has achieved only 758,684.4 hectares of the 2.5 Million required in for the project. This paper proposes 1,140,831.9 hectares which would bring the total hectares of protected area to 1,899,516.3 hectares or 4,693,807 acres. At present the project has only completed less than 1% of the project goal.

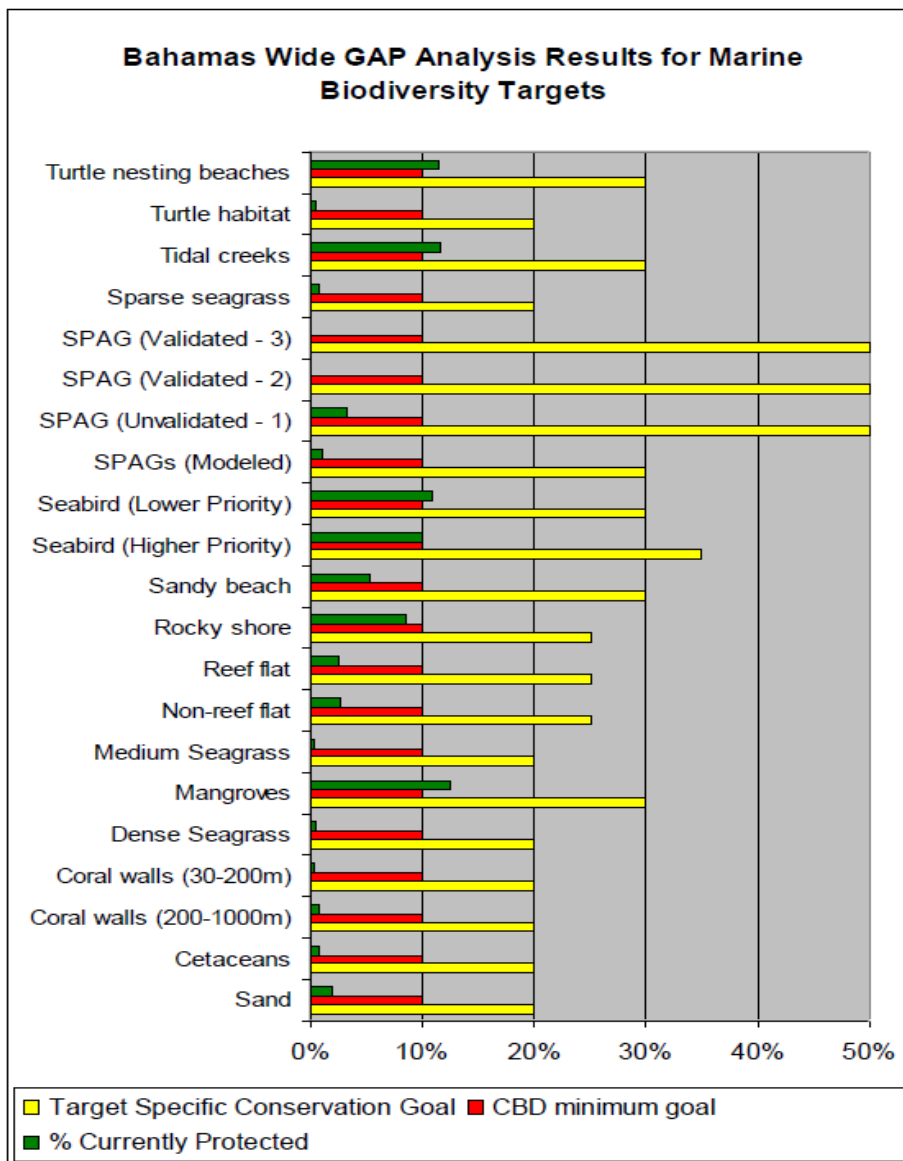
#### 4. Progress to date

##### **Sustainable finance architecture**

- Caribbean Biodiversity Fund This regional level trust fund was legally established in September 2012. Steps are now being taken to operationalize this regional fund, which will be based in The Bahamas. In Phase I, the CBF will be capitalized with a US \$40 million endowment to support the fund's eight founding CCI countries.
- Bahamas Protected Area Fund (BPAF) CBF investment returns will be channeled annually—according to an agreed formula—to independent national level trust funds that are being set up in CCI countries. In The Bahamas, through a wide consultation process the BPAF legislation was drafted in 2011. Following further review by the Government the draft BPAF legislation was amended in early 2013 and sent to Cabinet. The Cabinet has given the approval for the draft legislation to be sent to Attorney General's Office. It is anticipated that the BPAF legislation will be officially passed in Parliament sometime in 2013.

##### **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**

- Master Plans for protected area systems. In 2012 *The Master Plan for The Bahamas Protected Area System* was completed. This document is a comprehensive blueprint for action to achieve an effective national system of protected areas in The Bahamas, developed collaboratively by major stakeholders. For example, the Master Plan identifies new protected areas that need to be declared, and defines the additional funding, training, capacity building, and policy actions needed to effectively manage the protected area system.



**Figure 1. Bahamas Wide Marine Gap Results 2008**

The Bahamas Gap Analysis, which is a part of the Protected Areas Master Plan, recommended that establishment of protected areas in the following localities would contribute significantly, both in biodiversity coverage and in maintaining connectivity:

- Grand Bahama (eastern cays and offshore marine area extending towards Abaco)
- Abaco (eastern reef and nearshore environment (seagrass, mangroves) extending from Pelican Cays to Cherokee Sound)
- Northern Bimini (eastern half of sound, including near and offshore marine environment)
- South Andros (pine forest, coppice ridge and string of blue holes)
- Northwest Andros (tidal creeks, nursery areas for priority marine species)
- San Salvador (northern reefs and offshore cays)
- Long Island (northern coastline to offshore SPAGs)

- Cay Sal Bank (coral reef, beaches for sea turtle nesting)
  - Additional protected areas should be placed throughout the central and southern Bahamas to ensure greater representation and redundancy.
- New marine / coastal protected areas declared and improved management - since 2008, six new marine protected areas have been declared in The Bahamas. The original 2008 marine protected areas (MPAs) for The Bahamas comprised approximately 154,011 hectares (596 sq. miles). As of June 2012, The Bahamas now has 758,684 hectares (2929 sq. miles) of marine protected areas, which are legally defined. This accounts for 3-5% protection of The Bahamas' near shore marine environment.

### A Unique Opportunity for MPA Declaration

Two significant events are taking place in 2013, namely The Bahamas will be celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence and the first Summit of Caribbean Political and Business Leaders will be held to officially launch the second phase of the Caribbean Challenge Initiative.

To help fulfill The Bahamas' 20 by 20 commitment under the Caribbean Challenge Initiative, the National Implementation Support Programme (NISP) Partnership has developed this proposal for the Ministry of Environment and Housing consideration for inclusion in the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary activities undertaken by government. This proposal is designed to add an environmental component to the celebratory activities being held in honor of our country's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence. Currently the Bahamas Protected Area System consists of 27 national parks and four marine reserves. In total there are 31 areas in the Bahamas National Protected Areas System. **The 40 for 40 Campaign seeks to have at least 9 new Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) declared in honor of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our country's independence.** In keeping with national celebrations, it is envisioned that these new protected areas will be established throughout the entire The Bahamas.

The second phase of CCI was launched in May 2013, at a Summit of Caribbean Political and Business Leaders. The Summit was co-hosted by Prime Minister Keith Mitchell of Grenada, Premier Orlando Smith of the British Virgin Islands, and Sir Richard Branson (CEO, Virgin). The Summit brought together—for the first time—Heads of Government, CEOs of major corporations with Caribbean business operations, and key partners, to set a new course for the region's marine and coastal environment. The event created opportunities for Leaders to:

- (i) Endorse, at the highest level, new commitments to marine conservation by government and private sector leaders (covering such issues as marine protected areas, fisheries, tourism, and ecosystem-based adaptation);
- (ii) Announce new, concrete conservation actions being taken;
- (iii) Announce new funding programs; and
- (iv) Announce new innovative public-private partnerships.

The Bahamas participated in the Summit during which, the Government restated its commitments to the CCI and committed to further extend the national protected area system of The Bahamas by including in the existing network additional marine and coastal areas. Since March 2010, NISP partners comprised of the Bahamas National Trust, The Department of Marine Resources, The Nature Conservancy and the BEST Commission have been working on the project “*Building a Sustainable National Marine Protected Area Network for The Bahamas*”. Additionally, since January 2012, The Nature Conservancy in conjunction with partners has been implementing the project “*Expanding Marine Protection across The Bahamas*” with the support of the Waitt Foundation. Both projects seek to advance The Bahamas’ goals under the Caribbean Challenge Initiative particularly as it relates to the 20% by 2020 target and improving effective management of our national protected areas system by 2014.

Bearing in mind the recommendations of the Gap Analysis, as well as taking into consideration stakeholder consultation, existing MPA proposals and the “40 for 40” campaign, project partners have identified the following sites for MPA declaration in 2013:

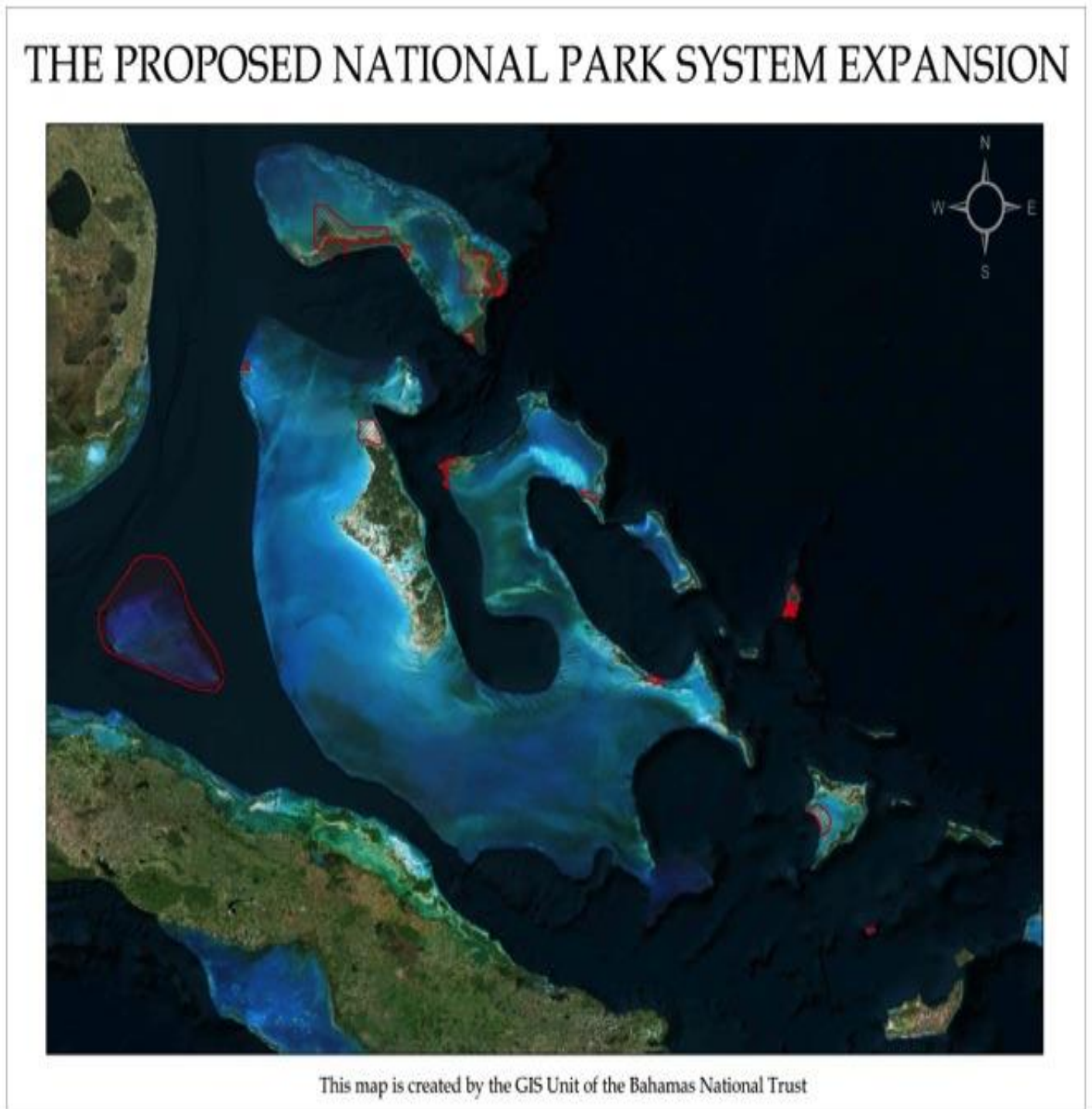
<b>Proposed Areas</b>	<b>Island</b>	<b>Size (acres)</b>
1. The Abaco Marls National Reserve	Abaco	192,500
2. East Abaco Creeks Park		95,000
3. Cross Harbour Conservation Area		14,000
4. South Abaco Blue Holes Park		34,000
5. Bight of Acklins Protected Area	Acklins	61,500
6. Andros Green Cay National Park	Andros	580
7. The Joulters, North Andros		92,000
8. North Bimini Marine Protected Area	Bimini	6000
9. Cay Sal Land and Sea Park	Cay Sal	1,750,000
10. South Eleuthera Marine Reserve	Eleuthera	2,750
11. North Shore – The Gap National Park	Grand Bahama	280,000
12. East Grand Bahama National Park		12,500
13. Hogsty Reef Protected Area	Inagua	7,300
14. North Long Island Marine Reserve	Long Island	42,000
15. Bobby Cay National Park	Mayaguana	120
16. Southwest New Providence Marine Managed Area	New Providence	18,000
17. Perpall Track		177
18. San Salvador National Park	San Salvador	17,000
19. Southeastern Bahamas Marine Park	South Eastern Bahamas (Acklins, Crooked Island Samana Cays etc.)	1,920,000

### Park Expansion Areas

<b>Park Expansions</b>	<b>Islands</b>	<b>Size (acres)</b>
Moriah Harbour Cay National Park Expansion	Exuma	18,000
Lucayan National Park Expansion	Grand Bahama	2,880
Peterson Cay National Park Expansion		1000



A map of the proposed MPA sites and park expansions listed above can be found in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2. Map of proposed MPAs and national parks for expansion.**

# ABACO

## The Abaco Marls National Reserve

Size: 192,500 Acres

The Marls is an extensive mangrove flats located on the Western side of Abaco. Local bonefishing guides heavily use the Marls. The Marls serves as an important nursery habitat for commercially and ecologically important species. The purpose of the proposed park is to protect a portion of this vital wetland habitat, while still allowing cultural and recreational activities. The proposal suggests that fishing be allowed, and that existing fishing regulations be enforced within the boundaries. Protecting this creek system will ensure that nursery habitats for Queen conch, groupers and turtles, will be safeguarded against development.

## THE ABACO MARLS NATIONAL RESERVE



This map is created by the GIS Unit  
of the Bahamas National Trust

## East Abaco Creeks National Park

Size: 13,000 Acres

This is an extensive wetland habitat connected hydrologically through blue holes that include the Snake Cay creeks, the Bight of Old Robinson and Cherokee Sound. The purpose of the proposed park is to protect vital wetland habitat, while still allowing cultural and recreational activities. The proposal suggests that fishing be allowed, and that existing fishing regulations be enforced within the boundaries. Protecting this creek system will ensure that nursery habitats for Queen conch, groupers and turtles, will be safeguarded against development. The endangered white crowned pigeon and a few other offshore birds have been seen roosting and nesting in the mangroves in the area as well. Like Cross Harbour Bahamians have historically used these creeks for subsistence fishing and enjoyment. The Bight of Old Robinson has the second highest density of blue holes in The Bahamas. Research has shown that Bahamian blue holes have the highest biodiversity of any underwater caves in the world. The hydrologic connectivity of these blue holes highlights the importance of the protecting these systems from anthropogenic impacts due to development.

### EAST ABACO CREEKS NATIONAL PARK



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## Cross Harbour Conservation Area

Size: 14,000 acres

Located on crown land from Blackwood Point to Cross Harbour Point, this proposed conservation area should be officially declared a Conservation Forest (no-build zone) as it falls under the new Forestry Legislation. Additionally, this site has a high marine biodiversity and abundant fish stocks. It is an important breeding ground for nurse sharks and the Queen conch and some believe it is perhaps the most important bonefish breeding ground on the entire Little Bahama Bank. Economically this area is significant as it yields B\$ 141 million for the Bahamian economy. Culturally, Cross Harbour is one of the primary bonefishing areas on all of Abaco, used by local lodges and independent bonefish guides and residents of south and central Abaco use the pine forests, beaches and water for recreation. The ramp is an important facility for local fishermen.

### CROSS HARBOUR PROTECTED AREA



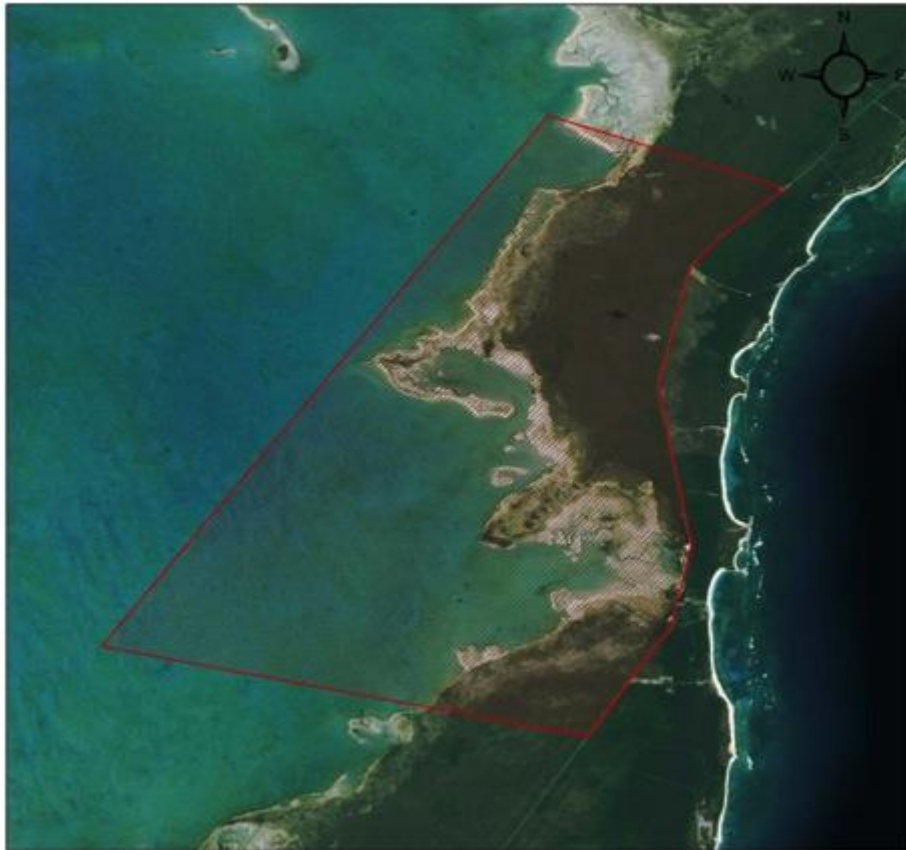
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## South Abaco Blue Holes Conservation Area

Size: 34,000 Acres

The South Abaco Blue Holes Conservation Area is located on crown and treasury pinelands between the South Bahama Palms Shores residential area and the Crossing Rocks Settlement on South Abaco, which is on the eastern side of Ernest Dean Highway. The proposed conservation area protects four (4) inland blue holes/ sinkholes as well as thirteen (13) offshore blue holes. The inland sites have become world renowned for their amazing scientific value including new species of cave adapted animals, but even more fascinating, the location of pre-historical remains of animals never before known to exist in The Bahamas. Historically, the area has been used for recreation, cave diving and tours, and non-commercial fishing. The South Abaco Blue Holes show great potential for continuing eco-tourism and environmental education opportunities, continuing its international fame following an extensive National Geographic article. The proposal takes into consideration the environment as well as stakeholder opinion; having been developed with considerable community involvement.

### SOUTH ABACO BLUE HOLES CONSERVATION AREA



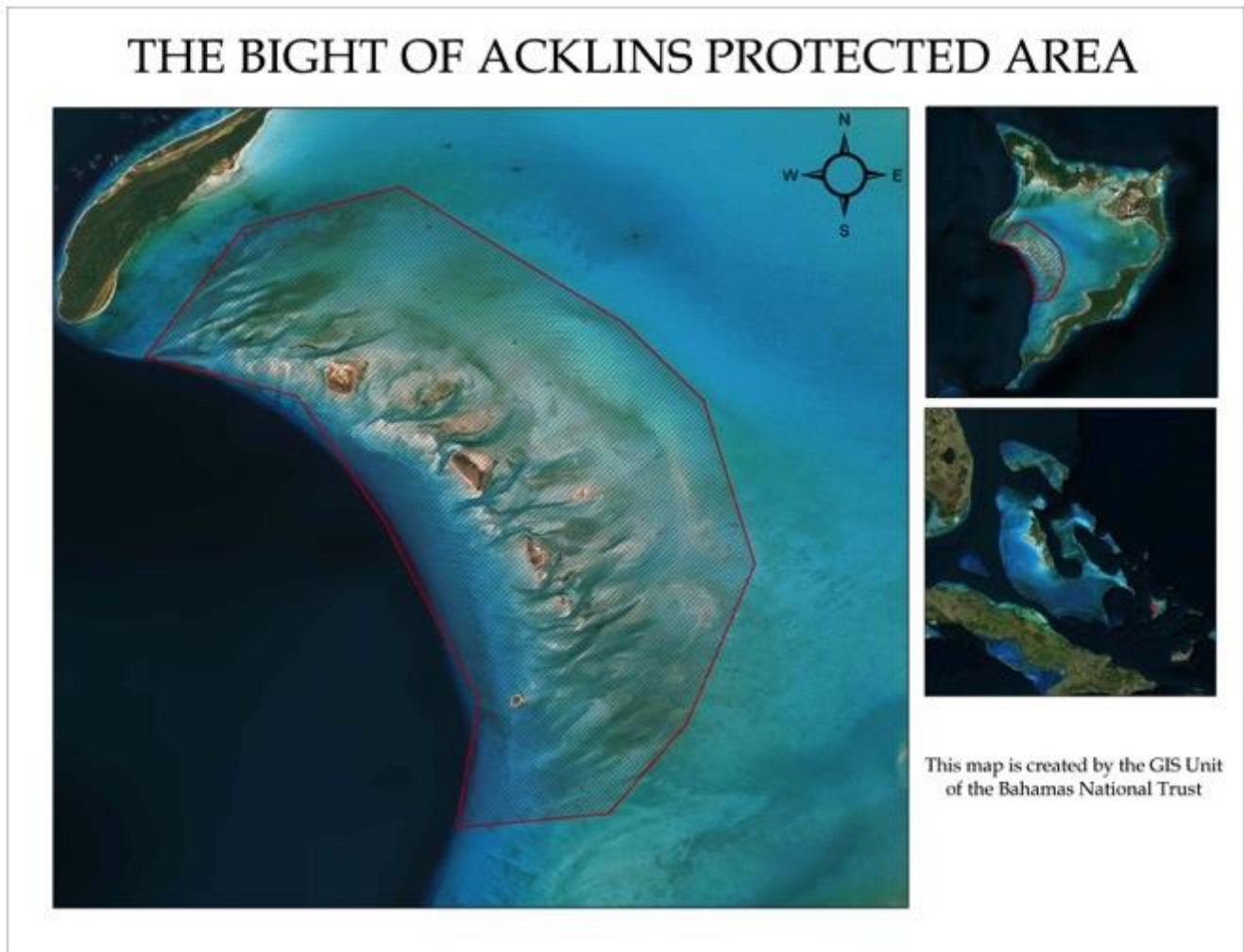
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## ACKLINS/ CROOKED ISLAND

### Acklin's Bight

Size: 61,500 Acres

The cays known as North Cay, Fish Cay, Guana Cay, Wood Cay and South Cay constitute the known range of the Bahamian Rock Iguana (*Cyclura rileyi nuchalis*). The area is also important for both seabirds and White-Crowned Pigeon breeding. The immediate surroundings and a portion of the Acklin's Bight mangrove flat, serve as important nursery habitats for the reefs located adjacent to the islands of Acklin's and Crooked Island. Salina Point is a major bone fishing attraction for the island and adding a protected area will increase ecotourism for the site.

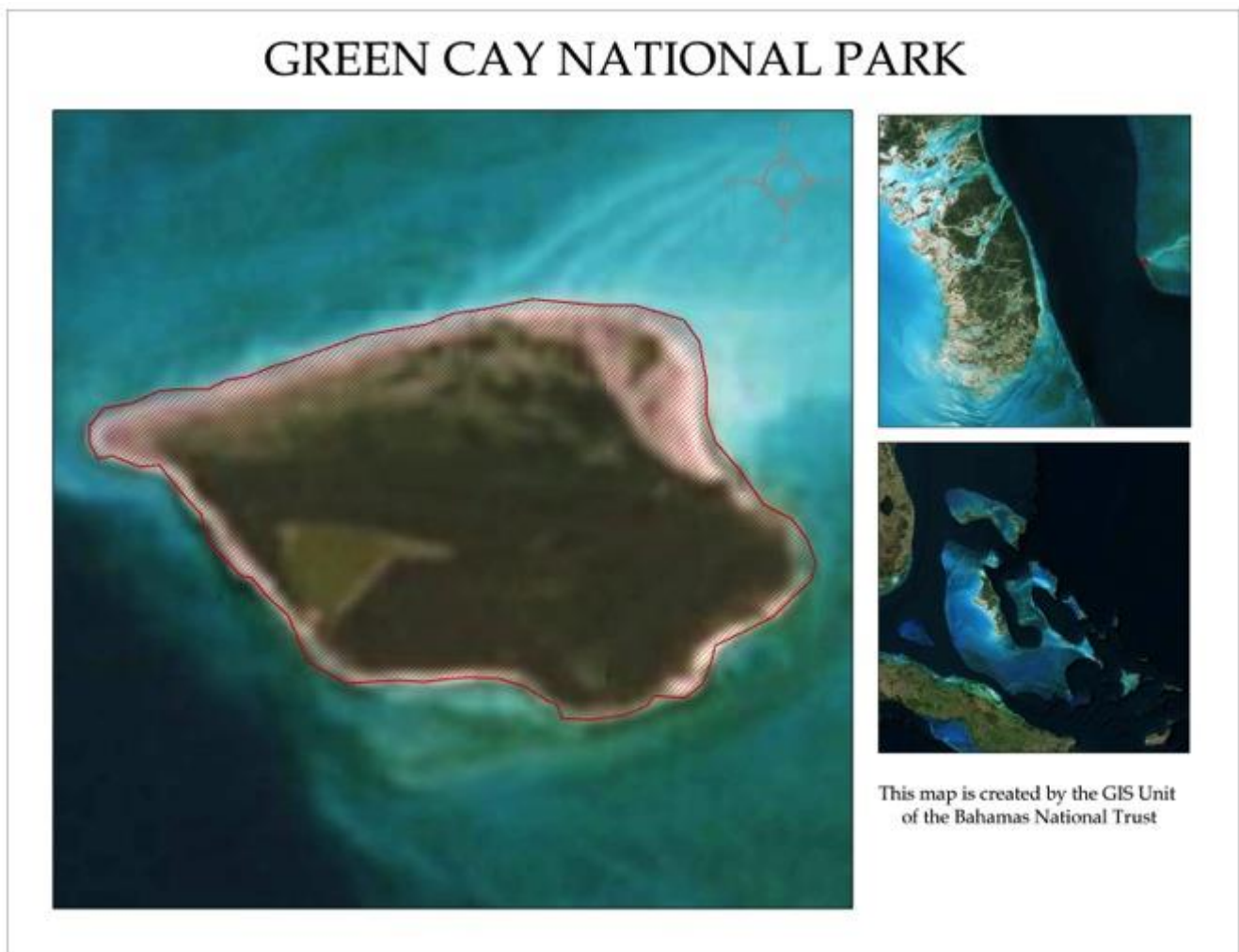


## ANDROS

### Andros Green Cay National Park

Size: 580 Acres\*

Green Cay is an isolated island on the eastern side of the Tongue of the Ocean with no permanent dwellings; however, it provides an anchorage and a fishing ground. Coral reefs are found along the southern and eastern shoreline and around the rocks and ledges extending eastwards from the cay over the Great Bahama Bank. There are areas of mangrove and seagrass beds although the seagrass beds are relatively sparse. It is recommended that the boundaries of this park be expanded into open and nearby deep waters\*.

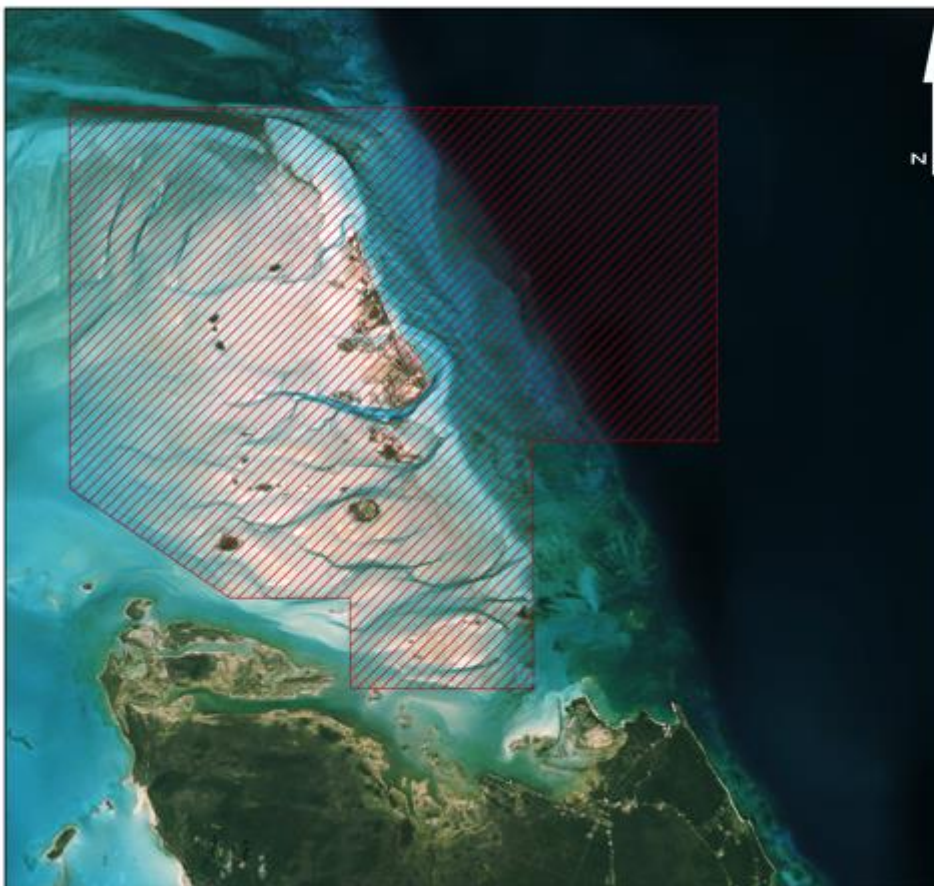


## Joulters Protected Area

Size: 79,500 Acres

The Joulters are located north of North Andros and are comprised of several islands. The area is an extensive mangrove flat system and is presently utilized for bonefishing. The critically endangered Piping Plovers reside on the island chain. Traditional activities and ecotourism activities will continue to be allowed as well as enforcement of current laws and regulations.

# ANDROS JOULTER CAYS PROTECTED AREA



Size: 92,000 Acres

Distance from the islands to the East: 7 miles  
Distance from the islands to the West: 7 miles  
Distance from Lowe Sound: 2 miles



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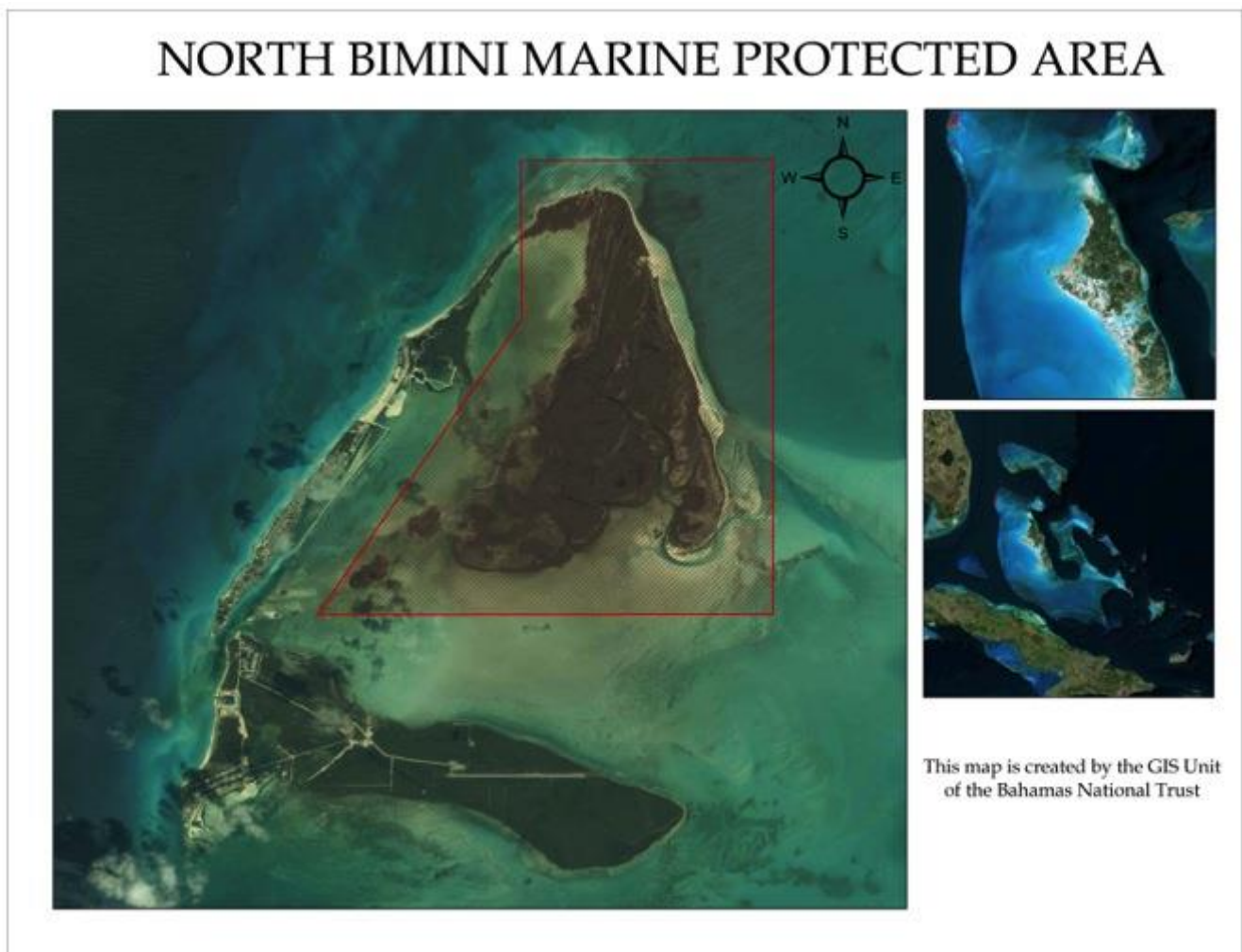


## BIMINI

### North Bimini Marine Protected Area

Size: 6,000 Acres

The eastern half of Bimini Sound and adjacent waters contain mangrove and seagrass habitats. The mangrove system is an important nursery habitat for lemon sharks (researched by the Bimini Biological Field Station) as well as commercially important species. Because it is one of the few mangrove systems on the western edge of the Great Bahama Banks, it may be an important nursery area for many species on a regional scale. Catch-and-release bonefishing is important within the proposed reserve area.



## CAY SAL

### CAY SAL LAND & SEA PARK

Size: 1,750,000 Acres

The Cay Sal Bank is located midway between Cuba, the Bahamas and the USA. The isolated cays that exist on the bank are home to many seabirds and provide resting stops for migratory birds. Given its remote location, the area remains relatively undisturbed. Cay Sal contains important turtle nesting habitats, healthy reef systems and diverse commercially important species. The Cay Sal Bank was earmarked in the 2008 Bahamas wide Marine Gap Results as being a critical area for protection. The Bank has been subject to a number of recent research projects, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill Bahamas Preassessment exercises in 2009, the Khaled bin Sultan Living Ocean's Foundation Global Reef Expedition in 2010 and ongoing bird assessments. The Cay Sal Land & Sea Park was first proposed in 1982 as part of the Bahamas National Trust's 'Development of a National park system'. The Cay Sal Land & Sea Park would encompass the entirety of the Cay Sal Bank: the islands, the corals and a bit of deeper water surrounding the bank.



## **ELEUTHERA**

### **South Eleuthera Marine Protected Area**

Size: 2,750 Acres

The area proposed initially included an area around Powell Point and the Schooner Cays off Cape Eleuthera. This area was ranked among the highest during the scientific review of proposed fishery reserve sites by Stoner et al. (1999), because of the areas importance for conch, lobster, grouper, and coral reef habitats. The proposed Fishery Reserve area and surrounding areas for South Eleuthera was extensively studied in the late 1980's and early 1990's as one of the focal sites for the Perry Institute for Marine Science/Caribbean Marine Research Center's Fisheries Oceanography and Recruitment in the Caribbean and sub-tropics (FORECAST) research program. As a result, there are numerous published accounts on habitats within the area, as well as the status of its conch and lobster stocks. These studies have shown the importance of the reef area near Cape Eleuthera as lobster habitat, and the area around the Schooner Cays as containing some of the highest conch densities in the Bahamas. Due to social concerns the initial areas proposed have been modified. Nevertheless, the proposed area contains important inshore areas for conch, juvenile lobsters, and juvenile reef fish, including snappers and groupers. While the area currently being considered does not contain the diversity of key habitats that the initially proposed area possessed, it does include some areas of ecological significance. Habitats within the currently proposed area include extensive sand, seagrass and low-relief hardbottom habitats. The proposed area also includes several mangrove lined tidal creek systems, conch habitat, and nurseries for lobster, Nassau grouper and several snapper species.

# SOUTH ELEUTHERA MARINE PROTECTED AREA



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## **GRAND BAHAMA**

### **North Shore -The Gap National Park**

Size: 280,000 Acres

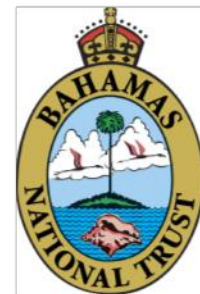
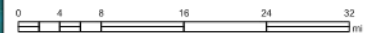
Located on the north eastern shore of Grand Bahama, the proposed park covers an area 40miles from Dover Sound to Cormorant Bush (between Pelican Point and McClean's Town). The coastal area on the north shore consists of mangrove wetlands, tidal creeks, sand and mud flats, beach strand and rocky shores. An extensive area of blue holes and an as yet unexplored karst cave system also exists in the coastal area northeast of Dover Sound, while further inland where land rises slightly from the shore, pine woodlands with palm understory occurs. Numerous bird species rely on the area's coastal and inland habitat. The pine forests in the area were extensively logged in the 1950's and the last reported logging activity occurred in 1960. A pulpwood loading terminal was constructed at North Riding Point in the late 1950's and a logging camp community of 200 homes known as "The Gap" community existed for several years up until the end of the logging. Remnants from this historic era are found in the grid of logging roads that is still in existence and the terminal structure at North Riding Point. Approximately 50% of the land within this proposed park is owned by the Grand Bahama Development Company and The Grand Bahama Port Authority, while beyond the boundaries of Freeport are Government owned land. The only inhabited area in the proposed site is Water Cay, in which the surrounding waters are being proposed for protection.

# NORTHSHORE-THE GAP NATIONAL PARK



Size: 280,000 Acres

Maximum Distance in East-West Direction: 44 miles  
Maximum Distance in a North-South Direction: 25 miles



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## EAST GRAND BAHAMA NATIONAL PARK

Size: 12,500 Acres

Located in the area south of Sweetings Cay, a series of tidal creeks provide prime flats fishing habitats that support the local communities in east Grand Bahama. The extensive mangrove forests are corridors to the offshore reef system that are included in the proposed national park for East Grand Bahama. Explored blue hole systems on Sweetings Cay are connected to undisturbed underground karst systems that are supported as National Parks to benefit the local economy of Sweetings Cay. Rapid Ecological Assessments (REAs) are planned for mid-summer, which will provide substantial biological data on the health of marine and terrestrial ecosystems, including areas important for bonefish.

# EAST GRAND BAHAMA PROTECTED AREA



Size: 95,000 Acres

Distance East of the Settlements: 2 miles  
Distance West of the Settlements: 3 miles



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## INAGUA (area)

### HOGSTY REEF PROTECTED AREA

Size: 7,300 Acres

The Hogsty Reef Protected area would encompass the Hogsty Reef atoll, located North-East of Inagua. This atoll is a popular site for diving and has diverse coral and fish populations. Hogsty Reef was visited in 2010 as part of the Khaled bin Sultan Living Oceans Foundation's Global Reef Expedition. This area was earmarked in the 2008 Bahamas Gap Assessment document as being of critical importance. The two islands are valuable nesting sites for seabirds and provide a resting site for migratory birds. This protected area would cover the entirety of the atoll: the lagoon, the reefs and the two islands.



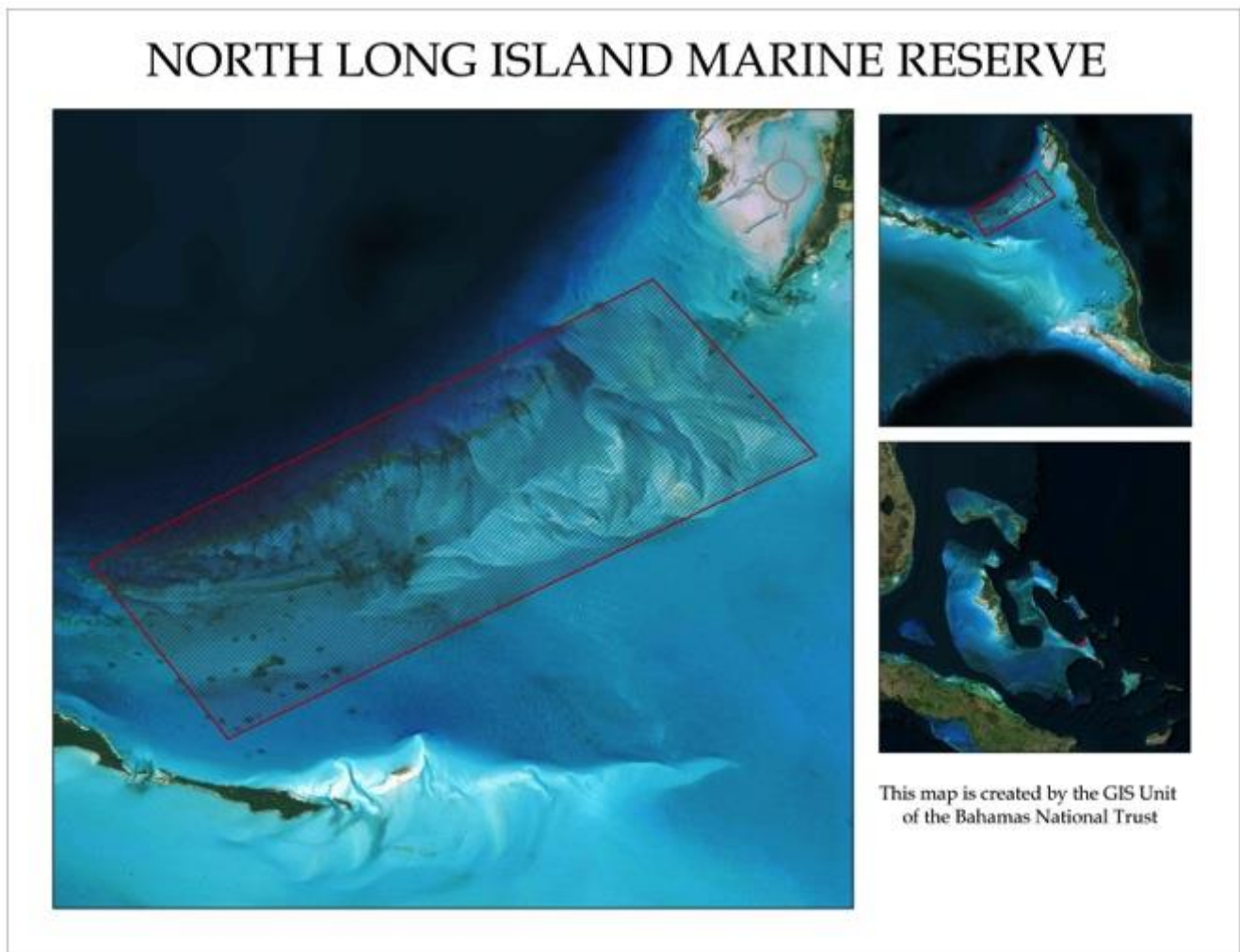


## LONG ISLAND

### North Long Island Marine Reserve

Size: 42,000 Acres

This site includes an excellent mixture of windward and leeward coral reefs, and onshore seagrass and mangroves around Calabash Bay and Glenton Sound. Tidal channels flowing into the bay and sounds may provide important juvenile habitat for a variety of fish species and lobster. A grouper spawning aggregation site near Cape Santa Maria also makes this a very high priority site for protection. A dive operation at Stella Maris uses the reef in this area and may be supportive of a reserve.

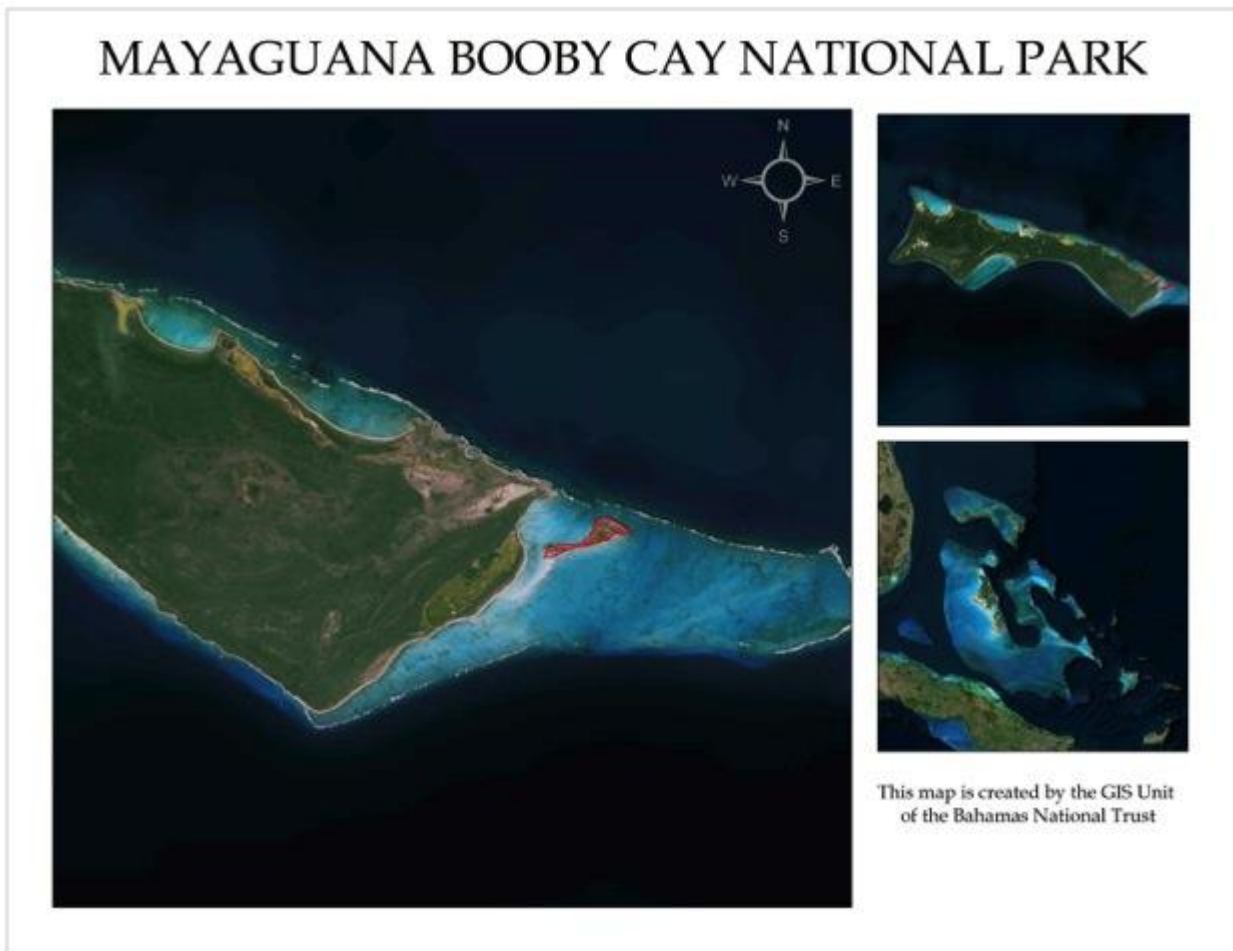


## MAYAGUANA

### BOOBY CAY NATIONAL PARK

Size: 120 Acres

Booby Cay is located on the eastern side of the island of Mayaguana. Booby Cay is of significant value for the resting seabirds of the area. It is also the sole location of Bartsch's Rock Iguana, *Cyclura carinata bartschi*, found only in the Bahamas on this island. This park would protect the entirety of the island. Booby Cay is one of three areas in The Bahamas internationally recognized as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).

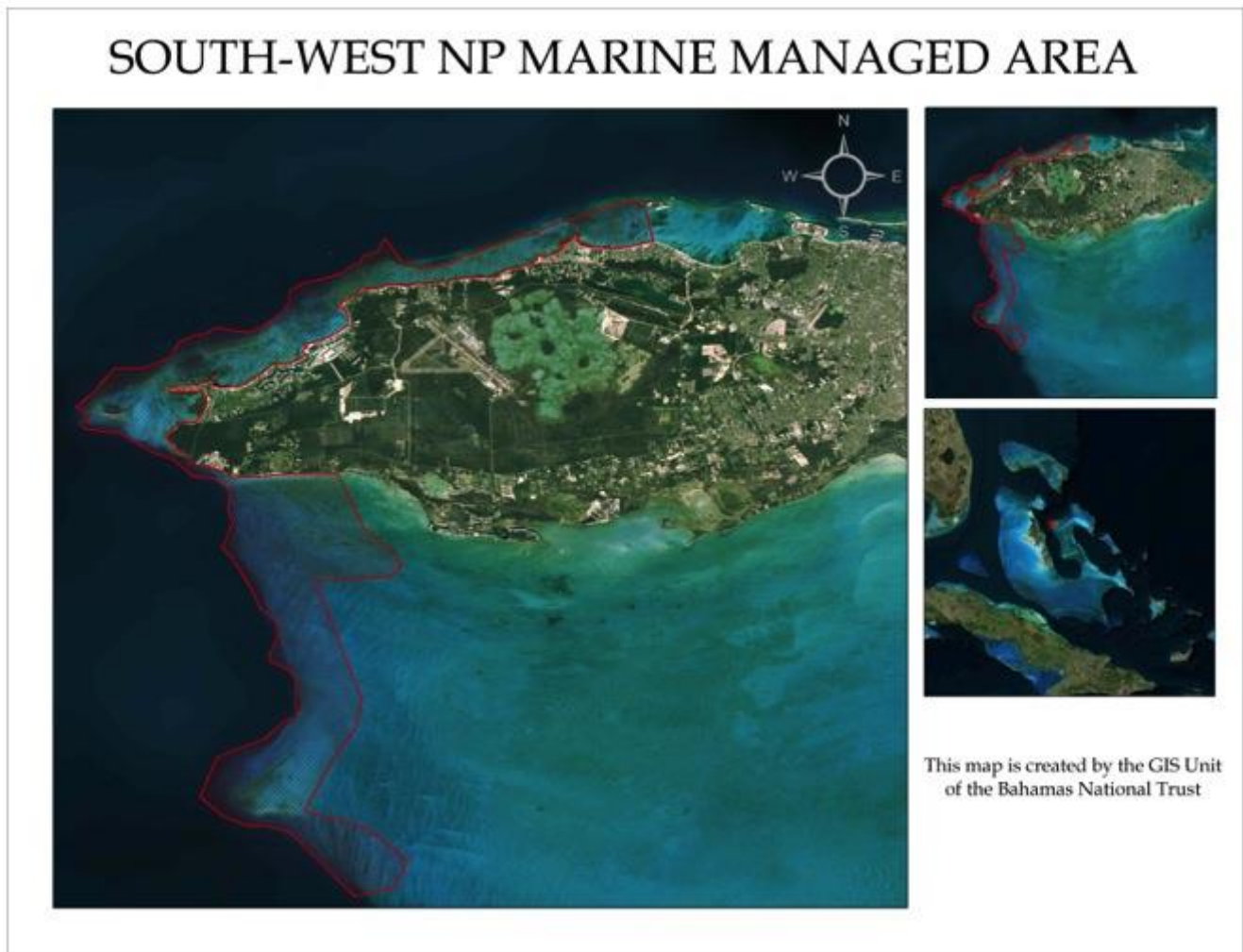


## NEW PROVIDENCE

### SOUTH WEST MARINE MANAGED AREA

Size: 18,000 Acres

This area is just off of western New Providence Island would protect an important heritage fishing area and lucrative dive sites. This protected marine area would provide an opportunity for both education and economic benefits through sustainable non-extractive use of resources. Films alone have brought in \$375 million dollars over the last five years, which is a direct economic benefit to the southwestern side of New Providence Island. In addition, a study conducted by The Bahamas Diving Association in 2008 estimated that the shark diving industry in The Bahamas alone generates roughly \$78 million a year. As such, zoning within the described boundaries will vary to provide higher levels of protection for key reef and seagrass sites.



## Perpall Tract National Park

Size: 177 Acres

Perpall Tract is one such area, containing its rich variety of native, endemic and medicinal flora. The majority of this area is relatively undisturbed by human activity and is an ideal opportunity to preserve Bahamian native trees and shrubs for the benefit of current and future generations. In addition to this flora, there is a network of historic wells, each supporting its own unique mini-ecosystem of lilies, ferns and other wildlife. The area therefore offers examples of important natural biodiversity and history. The well fields within Perpall Tract provide essential flood drainage for nearby residential neighbourhoods.

### PERPALL TRACT NATIONAL PARK



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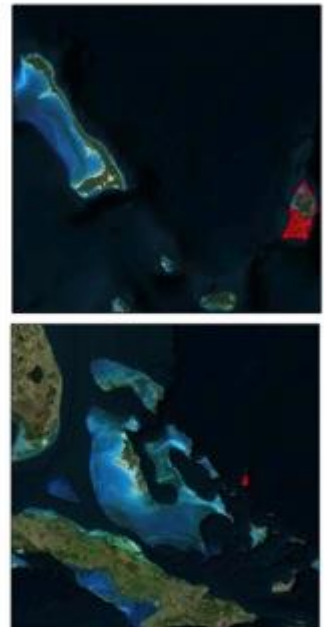
## SAN SALVADOR

### San Salvador National Park

Size: 17,000 Acres

San Salvador is home to a critically endangered iguana, and the most impressive assemblage of nesting seabirds to be found anywhere in the Bahamas. For many years the economy of the island has benefited from recreational scuba divers who visit repeatedly to explore the magnificent marine environment of the island. The proposed San Salvador National Park system comprises of a total of five (5) areas, two (2) of which are internationally recognized as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), important for sustaining populations for the endangered San Salvador rock iguana and seabird species, and the island's only tidal creek. The only tidal creek on the island of San Salvador is critical to the Park proposals for The San Salvador National Park System were first proposed in 2006, and presently ready for resubmission, highly supported by the people of San Salvador. The areas proposed are: 1) Graham's Harbour (north), 2) Southern Great Lake (inland lake), 3) Dive sites (south west), 4) Pigeon Creek and 5) Snow Bay.

## SAN SALVADOR NATIONAL PARK

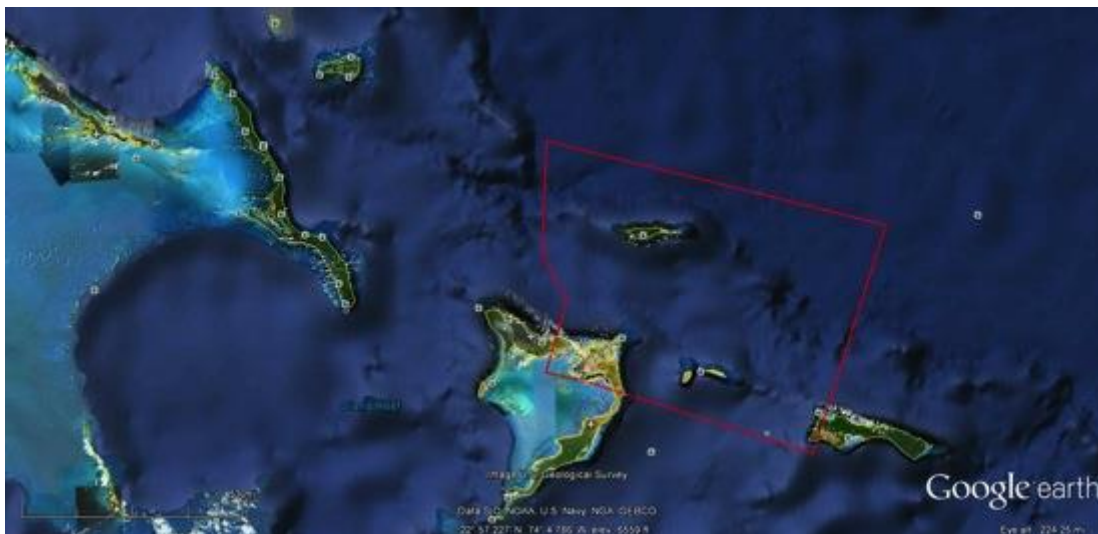


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## Southeastern Bahamas Marine Protected Areas

Size: Approximately 1,920,000 Acres

The Southeastern Bahamas Marine Protected Area is a recommendation of the 2013 REA for the Southeastern Bahamas (Samana Cay, Plana Cays, Mayaguana, Acklins and Crooked Island). The REA recommended that a terrestrial and marine protected area be established around the Plana Cays, which would also include suspected spawning aggregation sites. The protected area would contain areas of all types of benthic habitats (tidal creeks, wetlands, sea grasses, sandy bottoms, muddy bottoms, patch reef areas, spur and groove reef areas, hard bottoms, shallow fore reefs, wall areas, deep oceanic areas, sea mounts) in order to provide appropriate niche spaces and nursery areas for all life stages of all resources in the protected area. The MPA would also provide possible enhanced connectivity for larval transport and genetic material transmission between the Caribbean and southern Bahamas to the northern Bahamas. In addition, a more secure corridor for the safe transit of highly migratory species such as turtles, whales, sharks, and other pelagic species would be made available for movement from the eastern Caribbean up through The Bahamas. The protected area would also have positive impacts locally and Bahamas-wide if established because of the linkage to the MPA system to the south, -Inagua, as well as to the north, - the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park. This area would include the island of East Plana Cay as well, home of the only endemic land mammal to the Bahamas (the Bahamian Hutia).



## Proposed Park Expansions

### EXUMA

#### Moriah Harbor Cay National Park Expansion

Size: 14,000 Acres

Moriah Harbour Cay National Park was established in 2002. The approved area currently protects less than half of the mangrove flats and areas of key biodiversity importance (e.g. Pigeon Cay). This new proposal seeks to expand the boundaries to protect more of the mangrove flats and other biodiverse habitats.



## Lucayan National Park Expansion

Size: 2,750 Acres

Established in 1992, the 40-acre, Lucayan National Park (LNP) protects the longest known karst cave system that connects the pine forest in the north to the creeks in the south, and a minimal portion of Gold Rock creek. Much of the cave system lies outside the current park boundary, includes a minimal portion of Gold Rock Creek, and presently ends at the beach. The proposal seeks to expand park boundaries to include the extent of the Gold Rock creek system to the east, known mapped karst caverns to the north, and the coral reef system to the south. Results from a Rapid Ecological Assessment (REA) conducted in April 2013, indicates that the adjacent coral reef system are quite healthy.





## Peterson Cay National Park Expansion

Size: 1,000 Acres

Peterson Cay, originally granted in 1971, is located 7 miles east of Lucaya off of the southern shore of Grand Bahama. It is the only cay on the leeward shore of Grand Bahama and an important bird area (IBA) for a myriad of ground nesting seabirds because it is predator-free. The current park area encompasses the Cay to the quarter mile surrounding marine area. To have a more sizable impact on conservation as well as prolonged and sustainable resource benefits, we request that the Park's boundaries be extended from the Lucayan waterway to Sharp Rocks Point, which would include the coast of the mainland and extend an additional mile south of the cay to protect the coral reefs in that vicinity.



## Conclusion

As the NISP and other community and NGO stakeholders continue to work towards the identification of areas for consideration by government for protection and management, this proposal seeks to put forward areas for consideration as part of landmark efforts of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the country's independence. Should the Ministry and the government seek to move forward with the declaration of some or all of these areas this will increase The Bahamas' level of protection from the present 3-5% thus significantly advancing recent efforts to reach the 20% target by 2020. Such a bold declaration of new marine and protected areas will also reinforce The Bahamas' position as a regional leader in the Caribbean Challenge Initiative and definitively declare the environment as an important part of The Bahamas' milestone towards sustainable development.