



Strategic Plan 2008 – 2013

The Bahamas National Trust



North Atlantic Ocean

National Parks of The Bahamas

Scale 1:3,500,000



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Introduction

The Bahamas National Trust was established in 1959 to implement the following statutory mandate:

“promoting the permanent preservation, for the benefit and enjoyment of The Bahamas, of lands and tenements (including buildings) and submarine areas of beauty or natural or historic interest and as regards lands and submarine areas for the preservation (so far as practicable) of their natural aspect, features, and animal, plant and marine life.”

The BNT is governed by a 21-member council, which convenes at least annually and sets policy for the organisation.

The council appoints an executive committee, which implements policy in collaboration with the organisation’s professional managers and staff.

Volunteers are involved in advisory bodies, standing committees and site support groups.

Our accomplishments are impressive. The West Indian Flamingo and other endangered species have been rescued from the brink of extinction. Large areas of valuable wetlands, forests and other ecosystems have been set aside for future generations. And award-winning contributions have been made to environmental education and curriculum development, with thousands of schoolchildren taking part in BNT programmes every year.

The Trust is a strong supporter of ecotourism, and has made important contributions to fisheries and wildlife management, historic preservation, and sustainable development in general.

Our work is financed by income from an endowment fund, as well as by membership dues, private donations, product sales and user fees. Although we now receive substantial funding from government, we must continue to raise a significant portion of the money needed to support our diverse programmes.

This five-year strategic plan is a working document that will be adjusted to meet changing needs and circumstances. As we build on our successes, we welcome the opportunity to promote long-term conservation and sustainable use of our natural resources.



Vision, Mission & Values

Vision:

A comprehensive system of national parks and protected areas, with every Bahamian embracing environmental stewardship

Mission:

To conserve and protect the natural resources of The Bahamas, through stewardship and education for present and future generations

Values:

- Passion for the environment and the conservation of our natural resources
- Education as a key to long-term conservation success
- Commitment to best practices in protected area management
- Respect for others as demonstrated through teamwork and partnerships
- Integrity, transparency and accountability
- Quality, consistent and reliable service to our constituents



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Executive Summary

This document presents the programmes and activities of The Bahamas National Trust for the next five years. It outlines the rationale for these programmes and activities, and indicates the expected outcomes, as well as how they will be monitored.

The strategic plan is founded on the BNT's role as a non-profit, membership organization established by an Act of Parliament. The BNT is a unique collaboration of the private, scientific, and government sectors, and is the only non-governmental organization to manage a country's entire national park system.

In 2009, the BNT will celebrate 50 years of conservation success. This strategic plan seeks to respond to the social, economic and ecological changes that are occurring within The Bahamas, and will be reviewed periodically to address ongoing developments.

The Bahamas faces significant challenges to conservation and sustainability. Population levels on New Providence continue to grow, while tourism and development remain the primary economic drivers. Fisheries stocks are beginning to decline, and invasive species are increasingly evident throughout the islands. These challenges must be addressed urgently, holistically and strategically.

To do so, the BNT will co-operate with other environmental groups to promote sustainable development and conservation of our natural resources. To evolve this collaboration, potential conflicts must be managed and a clear vision must be crafted and accepted by all.

The future of The Bahamas depends on the development of a society that understands limits; conserves energy, water and other essential resources; and protects biodiversity.

Our activities will be designed to support long-term conservation and sustainable use of our natural resources while taking account of economic imperatives.

We will strengthen the organisation through fundraising campaigns, membership recruitment, public education, and effective leadership. A culture of customer service and excellence will be instilled throughout the Trust.

We will build on our reputation as an environmental leader by effectively managing our national parks and protected areas. We will implement multi-media public education programmes to raise the level of environmental stewardship throughout The Bahamas. We will advocate policies and forge alliances to achieve sustainable development.

We will pursue our strategic objectives through the implementation of six inter-related programmes. The core programme will be **national park and protected area management**. It will be accompanied by **public education** and will benefit from environmental advocacy.

Three support programmes – **membership growth and fundraising**, **financial development**, and **institutional development** - will ensure effective implementation of the core programmes. These work programmes are derived from an analysis of our strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, as well as the threats identified during the strategic planning process.



¹ The Bahamas National Trust Act, Chapter 18, Statute Law of The Bahamas, 1958

Critical Issues

The 25 national parks and protected areas currently managed by the Trust are extraordinary natural resources that encompass a broad range of ecosystems throughout the country.

Some of these parks have received international recognition and designation - the Inagua National park is home to one of the world's largest nesting colonies of the West Indian Flamingo; and the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park was the first of its kind in the world.

Unfortunately, our geography, and associated difficulties in travel and communication, have prevented many Bahamians from enjoying first-hand the natural beauty of our parks.

To maintain support, both financial and otherwise, our national parks must become more relevant and accessible to the Bahamian people - a part of their daily lives.

Tourism is an ecologically and culturally sensitive industry. As a major user of resources, it requires careful management and planning to ensure economic sustainability.

The Trust must continue to play a leadership role in public education and ecosystem management to address these critical issues.

However, our ability to do so is constrained by limited resources. The expansion of our responsibilities over the past 50 years has not been accompanied by a similar growth in financial resources.

The income currently available from our endowment fund is not enough to achieve our goals. Development of new sources of sustainable income is critical to the Trust's survival and success over the next five years and beyond.



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Core Strategies

The BNT has evolved from a volunteer-led organisation to a professionally staffed body that manages the country's entire national park system.

During its early years, the BNT was the nation's environmental conscience, and the only significant non-governmental organisation devoted to the environment.

From the mid-eighties through 2000, we focused on public education and the legal protection of natural resources and ecosystems, while new organisations formed to address other environmental issues.

From 2000 through 2006, the Trust's financial returns from its endowment fund declined, leading to staff reductions and other cutbacks.

In the future, we will be guided by the need to effectively manage our national parks and protected areas, while pursuing education and advocacy programmes to develop support for balanced growth and environmental stewardship.

This work requires alliances and partnerships with other non-governmental organisations, educational institutions and government agencies. It also requires professional staffing and improved infrastructure, which must be underpinned by increased funding.

Our strategic plan reflects these considerations and seeks to build on our strengths to address the nation's critical challenges.

Programmes and Goals

The BNT will adopt **three primary programmes** and **three support programmes** to implement its strategies. The core programmes are:

- National Park Management**
- Public Education**
- Environmental Advocacy**

The support programmes are:

- Membership Growth and Fundraising**
- Financial Development**
- Institutional Development**

The goals of these programmes are:

National Park Management - **To effectively manage the nation's system of parks and protected areas.**

Public Education - **To inspire greater environmental stewardship through diverse educational programmes.**

Environmental Advocacy - **To advise decision-makers on ways to balance economic development with natural resource protection.**

Membership Growth and Fundraising - **To expand membership and secure the BNTs financial future.**

Financial Development - **To provide timely and accurate financial information to all stakeholders.**

Institutional Development - **To ensure cost-effective administrative, human resource and management support for the primary programmes of the BNT.**



Work Activities

This section describes the activities that the BNT will undertake to achieve its mission and vision over the next five years. While committed to this plan, we are prepared to adapt our programmes to respond to internal and external changes.

National Park Management

Goal 1: To effectively manage the nation's system of parks and protected areas.

Park management is at the core of our mission and our prime reason for being. We will effectively manage the land and sea areas entrusted to our care and seek to expand public access to these areas. We will also explore opportunities for new areas to be set aside for future generations.



Objective 1.1: Implement general management planning for national parks.

We will build on our experience with the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park management planning process to:

- Develop general management plans for two additional parks per year during the next five years
- Develop a strategic plan for each national park within six months of completion of a general management plan
- Develop annual operating plans for each staffed park
- Complete Geographic Information System mapping of all parks and protected areas to indicate boundaries, facilities, cultural sites, and significant habitats

Objective 1.2: Expand public access to national parks.

We will work to make national parks more relevant to the public by:

- Providing staff and facilities to support appropriate visitor experiences at Harrold & Wilson Ponds National Park by 2012
- Introducing five new commercially viable park visitation experiences by 2012
- Finalising a general infrastructure plan for all national parks by 2009
- Reviewing plans periodically to address shortfalls in infrastructure needs
- Ensuring that all park facilities are energy efficient and models of sustainability

Objective 1.3: Explore new areas to be designated for protection.

We will work with our science advisory committee, executive committee and local communities to:

- Review gaps in biodiversity and identify ecosystems that need protection
- Document and recommend these areas for protection
- Support the further protection of existing Important Bird Areas

Objective 1.4: Implement programmes to reduce the impact of invasive species.

We will combat the negative effects of invasive species on native ecosystems by:

- Conducting surveys in all protected areas to establish baseline populations
- Developing invasive species management plans for all protected areas
- Implementing invasive species eradication efforts on a priority basis

Objective 1.5: Formalise effective conservation partnerships with key agencies.

We will develop productive alliances with public and private sector interests to:

- Avoid duplication of effort and maximise scarce resources
- Involve local communities in national park management
- Establish mutually rewarding corporate partnerships
- Implement community outreach programmes

- Support the work of the Bahamas Environment, Science and Technology (BEST) Commission
- Provide scientific advice to the government on environmental issues
- Assist with the development of a national forestry management programme
- Work with the Ministry of Tourism on ecotourism programmes
- Support the government monitoring programme for White-crowned pigeons
- Ensure that our protected areas meet the requirements of the Convention on Biological Diversity at the national level
- Deepen our relationship with the US National Parks Service, BirdLife International, The Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society and other key international agencies
- Re-establish relations with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature
- Implement and expand international conservation programmes in The Bahamas



National Protected Areas Master Plan

The National Implementation Support Partnership seeks to ensure that The Bahamas fulfils its commitments to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

This partnership brings together key agencies to produce a master plan for protected areas that will serve as a national blueprint for biodiversity protection. The master plan forms the basis of The Bahamas' 2020 declaration, which committed the government to conserve at least 20 per cent of our nearshore marine resources and ensure that at least 50 per cent of our national parks and protected areas are effectively managed by the year 2020.

The master plan is based on the findings of a number of ecological research initiatives and outlines specific measures to expand and improve our national park system in line with treaty obligations. These recommendations will be integrated into government planning processes over the next decade, and will act as an important guide for the work of the BNT.

This signals unprecedented cooperation between government agencies and non-governmental organisations to achieve effective management of protected areas across the country. The BNT will play a critical role in this process, and the extent to which we are successful in achieving our strategic goals will largely determine the extent to which The Bahamas meets its 2020 commitment.



Public Education

Goal 2: To inspire greater environmental stewardship through diverse educational programmes.

Environmental education is critical to the success of our conservation efforts. We will build on the achievements of our Education Office to ensure that as many teachers and students as possible understand and appreciate the value of Bahamian ecosystems.

Objective 2.1: Develop collateral materials and teaching resources in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and other agencies.

To ensure that schools have the necessary information to cultivate environmental stewardship, we will:

- Produce and distribute fact sheets on Bahamian ecosystems, wildlife and endangered species
- Develop effective educational presentations that explain the importance of species, ecosystems and national parks
- Develop complementary distance education material
- Research and produce interactive website activities for students
- Develop educational materials on climate change and broadleaf forests
- Host two teacher workshops per year on New Providence
- Host two Family island teacher workshops per year
- Increase the number of students participating in BNT educational presentations from 4,000 in 2006 to 10,000 by 2009
- Schedule regular educational presentations for students and adults

Objective 2.2: Manage an accessible and comprehensive reference library focused on the Bahamian environment.

To ensure that environmental information is readily available, we will:

- Review all current library titles to identify gaps that must be filled
- Create a digital catalogue for publication on our website
- Build a selected digital library to make appropriate documents more accessible to remote users
- Create a digital photo catalogue
- Evaluate the need for new library facilities and equipment
- Recruit a librarian by 2010

Objective 2.3: Increase participation in BNT events and activities by 20 per cent through an expanded multi-media communications programme.

To support membership development, we will:

- Produce more frequent electronic newsletters to improve communication with members
- Maintain an up-to-date BNT website
- Expand our presence in the Bahamian news media
- Produce a monthly newspaper column with a natural history theme

Objective 2.4: Produce interpretive materials for visitor education and public relations.

To support national park management, we will:

- Develop collateral materials for all national parks and protected areas
- Develop guided tours of parks where feasible
- Produce interpretive signage for self-guided tours
- Coordinate production of a video documentary on the work of the BNT



Objective 2.5: Increase education and community activities at the Rand Nature Centre in Freeport by 20 per cent.

To support membership development on Grand Bahama, we will:

- Host a yearly open house for teachers
- Develop guided tours of the Rand Nature Centre
- Develop new activities for the Rand Nature Centre

Objective 2.6: Increase public and community activities at The Retreat.

To enhance visitor and educational experiences we will:

- Develop a maintenance plan for palms at The Retreat garden
- Inventory the palm collection and acquire new specimens
- Prepare a comprehensive plan for development of The Retreat
- Implement the plan over a two-year period
- Re-introduce guided and self-guided tours
- Produce new collateral materials for The Retreat

Objective 2.7: Implement a public awareness programme for the sustainable use of wetlands.

Working with RARE, the conservation marketing organisation, we will implement a campaign to build public support for wetland protection, with a focus on Harrold and Wilson Ponds National Park. The campaign will:

- Evaluate public awareness of conservation threats facing wetlands
- Develop collateral materials and implement outreach programmes
- Train personnel in the use of commercial marketing tactics to build awareness, influence attitudes, and effect meaningful change

Objective 2.8: Establish new Discovery Club chapters for schoolchildren on New Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco, Andros, San Salvador, Inagua and Exuma.

To support the development of younger members, we will:

- Recruit and train additional Discovery Club coordinators during 2008
- Develop new activity courses for Discovery Club members
- Expand Discovery Club membership to junior high school students by 2010

Objective 2.9: Introduce summer camps on all islands where there are staffed BNT parks.

To improve public access to national parks, we will:

- Operate children's summer camps on Grand Bahama and New Providence
- Expand the duration of summer camps to 14 days from 2009
- Develop guidelines for the introduction of summer camps at other locations
- Develop support materials for summer camps
- Hold workshops for summer camp coordinators in 2009



Environmental Advocacy

Goal 3: To advise decision-makers on ways to balance economic development with natural resource protection.

The BNT will draw on its experience and knowledge of environmental best practices to contribute to a better understanding of sustainable development issues in the public sector.

Objective 3.1: Strengthen relationships with government agencies and cultivate consultation in environmental decision-making.

To enhance our contribution to economic decision-making, we will:

- Participate in BEST Commission meetings and activities
- Provide government agencies with information on national parks
- Provide government agencies with BNT annual reports
- Provide opportunities for decision makers to visit national parks

Objective 3.2: Collaborate with others on critical environmental issues.

To increase our leverage with decision-makers we will:

- Formulate common positions with other environmental groups
- Collaborate with other environmental groups on personnel recruitment
- Discuss topical environmental issues with all BNT stakeholders

Objective 3.3: Review environmental issues and make recommendations to appropriate government agencies.

To encourage decisions that lead to sustainable development, we will

- Refer environmental issues to the science advisory committee
- Advise government agencies on recommended strategies to mitigate potential environmental problems





National Parks and Climate Change

Our national park system encompasses over 700,000 acres of marine and terrestrial ecosystems. The viability of these protected areas can be affected by climate change, which stresses ecosystems through higher temperatures, altered rainfall patterns and more frequent and extreme weather events. A changed climate can also open the way for non-native harmful species to invade disturbed ecosystems.

Burning fossil fuel releases carbon dioxide into the air, which contributes to global warming. The negative impacts of this notably include a rise in sea levels as a result of melting glaciers and ice caps. The protection of natural ecosystems like forests, wetlands and coral reef systems can help alleviate these impacts because they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in a process referred to as “carbon sequestration”.

The new reality of climate change poses important questions for the BNT. How will it affect the natural and cultural resources protected within our parks? How can these changes be recognized and monitored? The BNT will be deciding on the most appropriate responses to ecosystem changes and will be acting to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We will also recommend to government that more forest areas be added to the national park system.

Climate change in The Bahamas is of national importance and the BNT will collaborate with government and other agencies to devise a national action plan to mitigate its effects. Our parks and associated infrastructure will become models of sustainability. And we will work to reduce our own carbon footprint as we educate others.

Membership Growth and Fundraising

Goal 4: To expand membership and launch a major capital campaign to secure the BNT's financial future.

The responsibilities of the BNT have grown exponentially over the past 50 years. Providing the infrastructure, personnel and tools to manage a national park system requires considerable resources and public support. Government grants are not enough. We must build our membership and implement a major fundraising campaign.

Objective 4.1: Initiate a capital campaign to raise \$25 million.

To provide the financial resources needed to carry out our mission, we will:

- Complete a strategic planning study by mid-2008
- Implement institutional assessments on an annual basis
- Execute a major capital campaign to begin in 2009

Objective 4.2: Identify additional fundraising opportunities.

To maximise the fundraising potential of BNT activities and programmes, we will:

- Evaluate all membership and fundraising initiatives
- Promote corporate membership and business sponsorships
- Provide opportunities for professionals to invest in a Friends of the BNT society
- Enlist corporate partners to support protected areas on Grand Bahama
- Increase membership appeal returns by 10 per cent over five years
- Encourage sponsors to adopt and underwrite BNT services

Objective 4.3: Strengthen relations with major donors.

To improve our leverage with financial supporters, we will:

- Implement a public recognition programme for donors
- Acknowledge receipt of all financial contributions
- Develop a database of donors and create special donor events
- Develop and display recognition signage for donors

Objective 4.4: Implement the sustainable finance plan that is a part of the National Protected Areas Master Plan developed for the Biodiversity Convention's Programme of Work on Protected Areas.

To improve our funding of national parks, we will:

- Execute a financial gap analysis of current funding versus anticipated needs for effective management of the national park system
- Execute a comparative analysis of current compared to optimum costs, based on estimates to cover new protected areas and improved management
- Execute a SWOT analysis of potential finance mechanisms
- Identify and capitalise on organisational strengths to achieve fundraising goals
- Implement a budget process to guide the fundraising plan
- Build capacity to coordinate fundraising efforts
- Screen potential funding mechanisms for feasibility

Objective 4.5: Commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park.

To leverage our track record as a conservation body, we will:

- Publicise and promote the 50th anniversary of this park
- Produce educational materials on the park
- Produce a commemorative photo book on the park
- Organise a commemorative expedition to the park
- Evaluate the feasibility of a major commemorative fundraising event



Objective 4.6: Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Bahamas National Trust.

To further demonstrate our effectiveness and longevity as a conservation body, we will:

- Invite the Duke Of Edinburgh to attend a commemorative event in Nassau
- Publicise and promote the 50th anniversary of the BNT
- Organise special events at selected national parks
- Coordinate a natural history lecture series
- Coordinate a commemorative golf tournament
- Coordinate a major fundraising ball in 2010
- Produce educational materials on the BNT's history
- Issue a commemorative postage stamp

Goal 5: To recruit new members and involve more existing members in conservation activities.

Membership is our lifeblood and the BNT recognises the critical need to expand the involvement of current members in organisational affairs as well as to actively recruit new members.

Objective 5.1: Ensure that 80 per cent of members renew their subscription.

To sustain membership interest, we will:

- Communicate effectively and regularly with all constituents
- Create an attractive package of membership incentives
- Survey lapsed members to develop appropriate incentives
- Maximise the potential of our existing membership database

Objective 5.2: Increase membership by 10 per cent per year.

To support membership growth, we will:

- Identify opportunities for membership recruitment
- Promote BNT membership to corporate sponsors and government agencies
- Develop cost-effective recruitment tools

Objective 5.3: Establish new chapters or alliances on major islands.

To expand our reach geographically, we will:

- Establish new regional chapters or partnerships with local agencies
- Use national parks to build community support groups

Objective 5.4: Create new membership events on at least three islands.

To support our expanded membership reach, we will:

- Organise three events per year on Grand Bahama
- Organise five events per year on New Providence
- Organise one event per year on Exuma, Abaco, Andros and Inagua

Objective 5.5: Develop a volunteer programme.

To build more support for BNT activities, we will:

- Create and maintain a database of volunteers
- Recruit volunteers through outreach activities



Financial Development

Goal 6: To provide timely and accurate financial information to all stakeholders.

The provision of timely and accurate financial information is necessary to maintain our credibility and integrity as a non-profit membership organisation that accepts and allocates grants and donations.

Objective 6.1: Develop policies and procedures to improve financial accountability.

To improve the efficiency of our existing accounting systems, we will:

- Produce written financial policies and guidelines updated annually
- Standardize forms and reports and make them available electronically
- Train all staff on financial policies and procedures
- Establish Indirect Cost Recovery Rate
- Implement systems to track fixed assets and inventory
- Provide managed remote access to the accounting system

Objective 6.2: Implement regular reporting requirements.

To ensure financial transparency and accountability, we will:

- Implement clear project coding
- Establish systems for expense reporting, time management and payments
- Set clear reporting requirements for donors and grant givers
- Ensure timely payments to suppliers

Objective 6.3: Implement quarterly budgets and financial reviews.

To monitor our financial status, we will:

- Train staff in accounting software
- Train management in financial supervision
- Implement strategic financial planning
- Create 2009 budget by end of November 2008
- Enter budgets into BNT accounting system
- Set quarterly financial reviews and reports
- Implement mid-year budget review

Institutional Development

Goal 7: To provide cost-effective administrative, human resource and management support for the primary programmes of the BNT.

Administrative depth and greater organisational efficiency are important pre-requisites for the BNT to meet its expanded obligations.

Objective 7.1: Implement industry-standard human resource policies.

To attract and retain qualified staff and reinforce existing HR systems, we will:

- Review and update salary scales and benefits
- Review and update employee policies and procedures
- Develop employee orientation programme
- Implement employee evaluations as a motivational tool

Objective 7.2: Develop employee training opportunities.

To retain staff and maximise their potential, we will:

- Review employee training needs
- Identify at least one major training opportunity for each employee per year
- Propose annual training budget
- Train staff in financial compliance procedures



Objective 7.3: Implement effective staff reporting and time management procedures.

To improve operational efficiency, we will:

- Develop a system for effective time management
- Establish employee reporting cycles
- Develop annual work plans for each employee
- Track activities against work plans

Objective 7.4: Provide sufficient infrastructure to accommodate all staff.

To maximise employee productivity, we will:

- Ensure that each employee has appropriate work space
- Enable remote access to BNT servers
- Digitalise priority historical materials
- Improve record-keeping to ensure institutional memory

Objective 7.5: Improve overall performance levels and customer service.

To improve our service to internal and external customers, and meet the needs of constituents, we will:

- Implement strategic, business and operational planning
- Evaluate institutional performance against these plans
- Establish a benchmarking system for organisational performance
- Revise business processes to meet higher service standards

Objective 7.6: Develop protocols for good governance.

To minimise conflicts and clearly demarcate responsibilities and lines of authority, we will:

- Outline clear roles for councillors, executives and managers
- Periodically review governance to ensure compliance with mission and vision
- Recommend legislative changes to ensure democratic governance



Implementation

Annual business and operational plans will be prepared to adapt this strategic plan to the financial and human resource realities of the BNT.

These plans will ensure that there is a shared understanding among council members, managers, staff and stakeholders of the roles, functions, and expectations of the Trust. They will also be used as a marketing and public relations tool to disseminate clear messages to donors and stakeholders.

At the operational level, BNT staff will use the annual business plans to define their specific tasks and benchmarks, while also refining budgets and human resource needs to achieve them. Annual plans will be evaluated and revised each quarter and will form the basis for individual work planning within the BNT.

Financial Outlook

BNT annual expenditures grew from about \$750,000 in 2000 to an estimated \$2 million in 2007. The 2008 spending estimate is \$2.5 million with revenues estimated at \$2.6 million. The major income categories are:

Membership	\$	110,000
Donations		250,000
Endowment Funds		245,000
Park User Fees		200,000
Merchandise Sales		70,000
Special Events		134,000
Government Grants		1,125,000
Programmes		500,000

Total Anticipated Revenue \$ 2,634,000

Funding limitations over the past two years have limited our ability to fully execute some planned activities. An increase in long-term funding is needed to secure the organisation's future.

We will also seek to maximise returns from park visitation and develop sustainable financing plans for all parks.



Photo Credits

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Bahamas National Trust
Strategic Plan
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DATE	PROJECT	BNT SIGN OFF	MEL SIGN OFF
Sept 5/08	Strategic Plan 2008-2013		Larry Smith

