

currents

Newsletter of the Bahamas National Trust

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National Park Developments

The BNT is engaged in a comprehensive exercise to develop management plans for the national park system.

"The commitment to national parks and protected areas is the BNT's principal mandate and consumes over 60 per cent of our resources," said outgoing president Sandy Buckner in her report to the April 22 annual general meeting. "Through our agreement with the United States National Park Service, three consultants are assisting us with legal, policy and organizational issues as well as with resource management, operations and staffing with regard to our national parks."

The consultants are Don Castleberry, a former associate director of the US National Parks Service; Harold Eidsvik, former director of policy for Parks Canada; and Jack Morehead, a former superintendent of the Everglades National Park.

Conservationists around the world have confirmed that building a national park system is essential for any country

seeking to protect its biodiversity. And the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity obligates member states to build park systems. The overall goals of the park system planning process in the Bahamas are:

1. To set priorities for the use of limited resources.
2. To generate funding for unmet needs.
3. To gain public cooperation and political support for the park system.
4. To train management personnel.

The BNT is also establishing a formal partnership with The Nature Conservancy, a leading Washington DC-based conservation organization which will help the Trust create and manage new parks and protected areas with funding from the Bacardi Foundation.

Management plans for each park will include legal background, ecological descriptions, discussions of regional impacts and relationships, assessments of visitor use, identification of goals and objectives, and

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BANNISTER IS NEW BNT CHIEF

Inagua businessman Glenn Bannister was elected president of the Bahamas National Trust recently, succeeding Sandra Buckner whose two-year term ended at the Trust's annual council meeting on April 22.

Mr Bannister, 48, is director of manufacturing operations and vice president of Morton Salt Bahamas Ltd, the biggest employer on Inagua, where the Trust manages a 184,000-acre national park and flamingo reserve.

Prior to joining Morton Salt, Mr Bannister held several positions with First National City Bank in Nassau. He has an MBA degree from the University of Central Florida and an undergraduate degree in business administration from Oklahoma City University. He is a long-term supporter of the Trust's work and has been a member of the Trust's governing council since 1994.

Other Trust officers elected are: John Bethell, deputy president; Ernest Grinrod, honorary treasurer; and Macgregor Robertson, honorary secretary. The 21 members of the BNT council are Durwood Archer, Glenn Bannister, Dr Donald Bruning, Dr David Challmor, Angela Cleare, Dr Donald Cooper, Manuel Cutillas, Elma Garroway, Dr Samuel Gruber, Colin Higgs, Lynn Holowesko, Geoffrey Johnstone, Pericles Mailis, Richard Ring, Macgregor Robertson, Oris Russell, Alexander Sprunt, Dr Melanie Stassny, Robin Symonette and Philip Weech.

Mark Your Calendars

BNT 40th anniversary and t-shirt day Friday, July 16.

IUCN

The World Conservation Union

Bahamas National Trust member since 1963



Education Programme

The Education Office of the Bahamas National Trust has developed and assembled state-of-the-art environmental resource materials to complement Ministry of Education school curricula.

These resources include classroom activities; teaching guides; fact sheets and posters on subjects like endangered species, coral reefs and

national parks; plus a wide range of books and audio visual materials.

Over 6000 people have participated in BNT education programmes over the past year and 51 organizations have been addressed by BNT education officers. Other major activities of the Education Office include:

Travelling National Parks Exhibit

East Nassau Rotary Club is funding the production of two standalone portable exhibits which will present information on each national park and its biodiversity. Plans are to premiere the exhibit during the Trust's 40th anniversary week in July at the downtown post office.



Ecosystem Fact Sheets

These flyers are being prepared for distribution to schools nationwide in September. They will describe various land and sea ecosystems in the Bahamas—from pine forests to coral reefs. A pine forest slide show is also being prepared for use in schools, and an educational poster on pine forests is being produced in a cooperative effort by the BNT, the Department of Lands & Surveys, and the Department of Agriculture.



World Wide Web Site

Education officer Monique Clarke recently attended a United Nations

Environmental Programme workshop on creating and maintaining web sites. The Trust plans to upgrade its site during the coming year to feature interactive access to all of its educational materials and teaching resources as well as improve overall information on all aspects of the Trust's work.



Wetlands Conservation Project

The Wetlands are Wild Puppet Show continues to be used as a valuable teaching tool. It has been presented at 16 public and private schools on New Providence, and nine schools on Grand Bahama as well as to students on Inagua. In addition, the show has been packaged for distribution throughout the region. Modified versions are being shown in Cuba, Cayman, the Turks & Caicos, and the Dominican Republic. A wetlands workbook is being developed to complement the puppet show which dramatizes the ecological importance of wetlands and endangered inhabitants like the West Indian Whistling Duck.

Discovery Club

The Education Office coordinates this popular programme for younger BNT members in two age groups. They are taught about Bahamian culture and environment, and also enjoy camping activities. Discovery Club members have given thousands of hours of voluntary service to the BNT.



Biodiversity Management Project

The Education Office is involved with revision of the government's biodiversity management plan and with preparation of a master database which will be distributed on CD-ROM.



Annual Coastal Cleanup

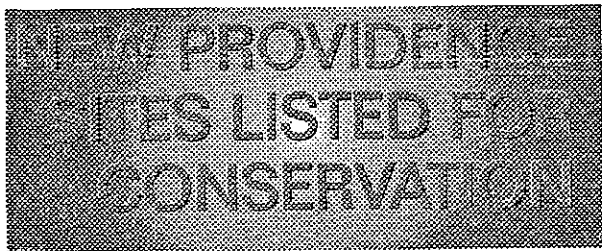
The Education Office implements this volunteer programme in the Bahamas, which is spearheaded internationally by the Centre for Marine Conservation. Last year over 300 volunteers collected 5,000 pounds of debris in the Yamacraw Beach area alone.

An interagency government body recently completed a re-

Committee includes representatives from the Trust, the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, the Department of Lands & Surveys, the Department of Archives, and the BEST Commission.

Wetlands
Marine Parks
Blue Holes
Vegetation & Ecosystems
Lakes & Ponds
Historic Sites

location, ownership, existing and proposed use, and any maintenance required, as well as jurisdictional recommendations. Each site is given a priority rating.



port recommending the acquisition of various sites around New Providence for conservation purposes.

The Land Conservation

One of the committee's first jobs was to develop a classification system to guide the process of identifying sites for conservation. The classifications are:

Windows to the Sea

Areas on and around New Providence were reviewed over the past year based on their environmental, historical or public value, regardless of ownership or usage.

The committee's site inventory includes information relating to

With the review of New Providence basically complete, the committee's attention has turned to the Family Islands.

The committee's recommendations will be submitted to Cabinet for action.

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESULTS

A membership survey was administered for the Trust last summer by Media Enterprises Ltd, a Nassau-based communications agency. Over 3,200 questionnaires were mailed with the Currents newsletter in May 1998. Returns continued until the middle of July when the survey was closed with 268 responses received. This represents 12% of the membership and is a statistically valid sample. Here's a summary of the main findings:

- A high level of respect and satisfaction were expressed for the professionalism, relevance and forward-looking nature of the BNT. Satisfaction was shown regarding effectiveness, influence, excitement and approachability. However, most members did not feel the BNT was quick to act or attracted members.
- Managing parks and educating the public are perceived to be the main tasks of the BNT, with the secondary role of advising the government chosen by 18% of respondents.
- 40% of the Bahamian respondents reported attending one or more educational meetings. 72% attended one, and usually more than one special function.
- Respondents want the BNT to become even more involved in education and communication—47% specified these related items. Secondary choices were to strengthen government relations (19%) and expand the national park system (15%).
- There was no consensus on what should be the main source of funding. About half of respondents expect internal funding (membership fees, bequests, self-generated).
- Most respondents would agree to pay more to the BNT—80% would pay higher dues, buy more BNT products, pay admission fees, or subscriptions.
- The top choices for improving conservation were more enforcement, more publicity and education, and more legislation.
- Most respondents were college-educated, high-income professionals or administrators over the age of 45. No returns were received from members under 18.
- 19% of respondents were non-residents, and 27% were non-Bahamian. (About 18% of the resident population was non-Bahamian according to the 1990 census.)

In 1959 there were...

only about 100,000 people living in the Bahamas and infrastructure outside of the main population centre of Nassau was limited. But there were still major environmental challenges to be faced.

The West Indian Flamingo, once widespread throughout the Bahamas and Caribbean, had been reduced to a single colony in the Inagua wilderness, and would have disappeared completely were

it not for the establishment of a protection society by American conservationists and the heroic efforts of the island's two wardens, Samuel and James Nixon.

In 1962 the BNT acquired 267 square miles of Inagua as a national park and took over the responsibility of protecting the flamingoes. Today, there are an estimated 50,000 birds in this breeding colony which is a major national treasure.

According to Dr David Campbell in his book, *the Ephemeral Islands*, "It may take up to seven or eight years before a pair of flamingoes even replace themselves, let alone add their small increment to the population. With such a low reproductive rate, it is a wonder that the West Indian Flamingo has for three and a half centuries held out against the avarice of man."

INFORMATION DATABASE UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The Education Office is building an electronic reference guide for the BNT library using professional database software (Procite) to catalogue books, journals, off-prints, photos and videos.

This is a result of the Trust's participation in the Bahamas Biodiversity Data Management Project directed by the BEST Commission. This project—which aims to catalogue species and ecosystems throughout the Bahamas—is one of the tasks the Bahamas must complete to help achieve global environmental goals mandated by the United Nations Biodiversity Convention.

As Sandy Buckner noted in her president's report at the April 22 annual general meeting, "For effective biodiversity conservation to happen, decision-makers must have accurate information."

The BNT has participated in the database project since 1997 and has already posted a bibliography with over 3,500 entries. Completion is expected by the end of 1999 when users will be able to search the entire BNT library by ISBN number, author, title, or subject matter—all cross-referenced by keywords or topics.

BNT photos have also been sorted and put into archival sheets and binders for proper storage. And the Trust has introduced Department of Agriculture personnel to the Procite software.

Parks story

zoning guidelines to set aside areas for special protection, general use, and management facilities.

This planning process will further guide infrastructural development in Bahamian parks designed to make them self-sustaining and provide for more public access and enjoyment.

Several projects are already underway. A master site plan (by Alexiou & Associates) for the 11-acre Retreat in Nassau is aimed at merging horticultural and administrative needs. Construction of a nursery/storage building and long-term development of parking areas, restrooms and a BNT shop are priorities. Sun International has donated the services of its landscape architectural firm (Ed Stone & Associates) to develop parking concepts for the gardens.

Work continues on the development of a visitor centre at the Lucayan National Park on Grand Bahama. The Trust loses about 40 per cent of potential revenue from non-tour visitors at this site. The centre will facilitate the collection of user fees, and will include a BNT shop and food concession. A public restroom has already been installed.

A warden's residence has been designed for the Exuma Cays Park (by Arcop and Rowlands Engineering) which will incorporate solar power and rain water collection facilities. Public restrooms have been added to the existing headquarters building.

NATIONAL PARK Photos WANTED

The Trust is producing a hardcover book on the national parks of the Bahamas. We are selecting illustrations for this full-colour publication which will be used to raise funds and celebrate our national parks as national treasures. Members are invited to submit photographs for possible inclusion in the book. Although some historical snapshots may be used, we are seeking professional-quality scenics and wildlife shots relating to our national parks. Please include background information and submit photos to Susan Larson, deputy director.



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