THE BAHAMAS NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Background:

The Bahamas is an archipelago of islands with unique features that lends to the country having very great biodiversity abundance- even greater than the entire insular Caribbean.

It is recognized that species within and ecosystem are not independent of each other; they are interdependent. An example of this concept in The Bahamas is the functional relationship between a mangrove forest, an offshore reef and the deep ocean. Given this fact that whole habitats are to be incorporated and interrelated, effective conservation methods are to be in line with this. This approach (integrated ecosystem management) is imperative and is best to take into account when developing a functional NBSAP.

There are three bioregions throughout The Bahamas with have very different characteristics and would have different needs in terms of conservation. The Northern region is very dry with stony and alkaline soils, the central region has a population of coppice/hardwood vegetation, the Southern region consists of xerophytic vegetation as well as low canopy shrubs. It is also important to consider the marine environment throughout the country that consists of both reef and rock habitats.

Formulation of the NBSAP:

The NBSAP began in September of 1996 and completed in 1999. As biodiversity is the basis of the country's natural wealth and is the natural capital of a country, the theme " A Strong Nation Rooted in a Health Environment" was given to the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.

At the national level there was a consultative process. Stakeholders included farmers, fishermen, residents local government officials and all other concerned and interested parties. A series of workshops were held at locations throughout the country. This process was first and foremost in the formulation of the NBSAP.

Two actions preceded the consultative process: the formulation of the BEST Commission as well as a National Biodiversity Task Force

The Bahamas Environment Science and Technology (BEST) Commission is the central coordinating body for all environmental dealings in The Bahamas. BEST coordinates the work of all the various Governmental and NGO groups with responsibilities and concerns for the environment as well as resolving conflicts of interest to ensure the most effective use of resources. The Commission would function better if established as a legal entity, but unfortunately, the most that has been achieved is the DRAFT Environmental Protection and Planning (EPP) Act that is still in draft form. It is not known whether the current administration will enact this.

National Biodiversity Committee is the task force that was formed to provide *inter alia* a forum for exchange of information among those agencies with responsibilities for conservation and biodiversity. The committee was charged with the role of preparing and conducting the consultative process for the Action plan. The committee is a means of information disbursal with all matters regarding CBD, biodiversity and the environment.

Actions of the NBSAP (and updates):

Nine actions were developed and designed specifically to conserve the biodiversity of the Bahamas.

1. Formulation of The BEST Commission.
    a. The Commission was established in 1999 and has been functioning up to date, but as an advisory body to the Government. It is also very understaffed as original needs were stated as 230 people and the Commission works with approximately 20 staff. The Commission deals with Environmental Policy Review (there is a completed NEP). It has reviewed information for management systems, designed EIA guidelines and procedures. It is time for an update of the needs of the commission, such as development of a long-term financial plan for the Commission as well as preparation of a quality control program for the commission. This can only be done when there is a final decision on whether or not BEST will remain advisory of become regulatory.

2. Establishment of the National Biodiversity Task Force (Biodiversity Committee) and preparation for the National Consultative Process.
    a. The Biodiversity Committee was formed, but its function is not limited to a consultative process. The committee currently consists of representatives from government, NGOs, Academia and the private sector and deals with all activities that enable the country to meet its obligations under the CBD.

3. National Consultative Process.
    a. The consultative process was completed. Further action is needed as a review of the NBSAP. Completing this review would include *inter alia* gathering information and updates, publishing the relevant documents and creating public awareness documents. Funds are needed to complete this process.

4. Implementation of the Recommendations of the Biodiversity Data Management Project.
    a. The biodiversity management project was revised during the biodiversity enabling activities projects, but has not been operationalized as yet. This project still needs to be implemented.

5. Preparation of Bioregional Guidelines.
    a. This has not been done yet and it would be good to complete this through the NBSAP review process. There was work done through an Ecological Gap Assessment, but more needs to be done.

6. Planning for a System of National Parks and Protected Areas.
    a. Although this is a process that will always be ongoing in terms of management plans and preparation of legal implements for protection, this action needs much updating. This whole section of the NBSAP needs to be reviewed as there are so many more national parks and so much work has been done since the original NBSAP. BNT is no longer the only entity involved in the process and other agencies have come on board. The vast majority of the work has been done through a Master Planning Process. This action will always be ongoing and there will always be need for improvement.

7. Development of Monitoring and Evaluation Methodologies.
    a. The UNDP Early Action Grant will enable this activity for Protected Areas. There is a chance that the same methodologies used for protected areas can be transferred to other areas, and this needs to be looked into.

8. Protection and Rehabilitation of Threatened or Degraded Ecosystems and of Threatened Species
    a. This has not been done in a coordinated way in the country. Some work has been done for wetlands, marine turtles, reefs, and invasive alien species, but there is need for a comprehensive national plan.

9. Improvement of the Botanic Gardens to Enhance its Capacity for *Ex Situ* Conservation.
    a. The NBSAP needs to be updated to include the following actions:
        i. Invasive Alien Species Management
        ii. Biosafety/Biosecurity
        iii. Mapping Biological Resources/important ecosystems
        iv. Protection of Traditional Knowledge
        v. Climate Change

In Conclusion:

Ten years after the completion of the NBSAP, there is a need for an update of the Plan through a review process. Funding will be very important to the success of such an initiative.

Rough Cost estimates are as follows:

ACTION	COMMENT	COST ESTIMATE
Establish BEST as a legal entity	This would be advantageous	$USD 5.3 Million
Establishment of a Biodiversity Task Force	Completed: The National Biodiversity Committee has this function	n/a
Review of NBSAP	This would include development of a public awareness campaign as well as educational materials.	$USD 639, 100
Biodiversity Data Management	This would enable operationalization of the database	$USD 75,000
Formulation of Bioregional Guidelines	This would enable The Bahamas to build on the Ecological Gap Analysis which was completed in December,2007	$USD 150, 000
Developing of Monitoring and Evaluation Methodologies	Enables The Bahamas to build on the methodologies developed for Protected Areas as well as formulate new methodologies for other areas of biodiversity conservation	$USD 25,000
Protection or Rehabilitation of Threatened or Degraded Ecosystems and of Threatened Species	Enables forumlation of a comprehensive national plan for rehabilitation as opposed to dealing with issues in a fragmented manner	$USD 100, 000

Improvement of the Botanic Gardens to Enhance its Capacity for *Ex Situ* Conservation	As the Botanic Gardens dos not have many Bahamian plants in its collection,a more systematic collection is needed, including representatives of the rarer species.	$USD 50, 000
Inclusion of Invasive Alien Species (new activity)	Including IAS is key in conservation of biodiversity as they play a big part in degradation	$ USD 150,000
Biosafety/Biosecurity (new activity)	No funding would be necessary for this activity as the Biosafety Implementation Project could fund this	n/a
Mapping (new activity)	This would enable The Bahamas to complete groundtruthing for all islands in the archipelago	$USD 250,000
Traditional Knowledge (new activity)	Putting this	$USD 50,000

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