

### ***New Park User Fees to Support Conservation Management in the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park***

The Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park (ECLSP) is one of the most spectacular and breathtaking places in The Bahamas and the Caribbean. This 232 square mile park was established in 1958 and designated as a no-take marine reserve in 1986. The Park protects a wide variety of marine and terrestrial species including endangered and endemic plants, animals and their habitats. Research has shown that the ECLSP has healthy populations of commercially important species (e.g. Queen conch, Spiny lobster and Nassau grouper) that replenish other areas of The Bahamas.

The ECLSP is operated by the Bahamas National Trust, a non-profit organization charged with managing the national park system of The Bahamas, which currently consists of 27 parks and protected areas. These national parks are national treasures – preserving key ecosystems and natural resources for present and future generations of Bahamians. ECLSP is the oldest national park in The Bahamas and is a fantastic place for kayaking, snorkeling, diving, birding, hiking and observing iguanas and other wildlife. The Park supports environmental research, education and sustainable development planning.

“With more than 100,000 acres of beaches, mangroves, reefs and ocean, the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park is an ambitious and ongoing undertaking. By all accounts, the Park is a great success. Each year thousands of visitors snorkel healthy reefs and stroll along pristine beaches – helping to support thriving tourism-based businesses. However, these successes also present management challenges for our organization” said Lynn Gape, Deputy Executive Director of the BNT.

As a non-profit organization, BNT obtains most of its funding through donations and park fees. The cost to effectively manage ECLSP has increased over the years. To cover these expenses, the BNT draws on Support Fleet membership, mooring fees, and office sales; but rising fuel costs, housing and infrastructure maintenance have increased the costs of managing the Park. Similar to other national parks in the region, BNT will be implementing park user fees.

According to Eric Carey, BNT Executive Director, “The cost to manage the ECLSP and protect its precious natural resources, now approaches 1/2 a million dollars annually. This is actually the minimum cost and to effectively manage the park, provide a positive visitor experience and continue outreach and education efforts we need to double this amount.”

User fees for the ECLSP will include an increase in existing mooring fees and the implementation of new fees for visiting researchers, film crews, dive operators and anchorage fees ( for boats ≥ 90 feet). Yachts that frequent the ECLSP are encouraged to purchase either seasonal or annual anchorage passes and will receive a courtesy flag to display during visits. User fees for ECLSP will take effect on September 1, 2014. Revenue generated from these fees will assist the ECLSP to cover its annual operating expenses, upgrade park facilities, improve enforcement and increase education and outreach opportunities for communities in the Exuma Cays. Krista Sherman (Science Officer, BNT) said, “The Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park is one of the most ecologically significant and stunning areas in The Bahamas. It is essential that BNT continues to advance programmes and establish policies that will maintain and enhance the ecological integrity, improve management and promote environmental stewardship for its overall sustainability. The new user fees will assist with this process.”

All user fees can be paid via credit card at the ECLSP headquarters, Warderick Wells or BNT's office in Nassau, cheque to our 501(c)3 Bahamas National Trust Fund Inc. (Federal Tax ID #37-1697045), or online via BNT's website. For additional details on user fee rates, policies and payment options please visit BNT's website ([www.bnt.bs](http://www.bnt.bs)).

###

The Bahamas National Trust was created by an Act of Parliament in 1959 to build and manage the national park system of The Bahamas. Possibly the only non-governmental organization in the world charged with such a responsibility, BNT as it is commonly known, works daily to conserve and protect the natural resources of The Bahamas, through stewardship and education for present and future generations. There are currently 27 National Parks managed by BNT with more than 2 million acres of marine and terrestrial areas protected.

Website: <http://www.bnt.bs/> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Bahamas-National-Trust/25034035861?ref=hl>