FRIENDS Develops 3 Year Strategic Plan

Taking into account the critical environmental challenges facing Abaco, FRIENDS has identified four goals that will shape the organization’s programs over the next several years. By establishing these goals FRIENDS aims to make a significant impact on these areas by establishing measurable and realistic objectives that are supported by program activities. The focus areas and goals will shape the day to day programs at FRIENDS but will not exclude other pressing issues that may arise. By making education a means to an end FRIENDS can take action on some of the pressing issues in Abaco: the need for conservation in the face of development, protecting our marine resources, decreasing litter and pollution and reducing invasive species.

Goal - Habitat Conservation: Ensure that all primary habitats in Abaco are represented in protected areas
Objective 1: Protect three of the primary habitat types of Abaco: Blue Holes, Wetlands, Flats by working with partners, community and government agencies to lobby for Government approval and community support for these active proposals: East Abaco Creeks National Park, Blue Holes National Park and Cross Harbour and Marls conservation area.
Objective 2: Through community meetings and research identify opportunities for smaller protected areas across Abaco.

Goal - Reduce Human Impact on Abaco’s Marine Resources
Objective 1: Gather long term data on health of Abaco’s Coral Reef systems.
Objective 2: Compile research papers on coastal habitats as a resource for management and development and education.
Objective 3: Raise awareness on the negative effects of touching and standing on coral.
Objective 4: Establish focus on environmental consequences of illegal actions on marine resources and their habitats (i.e. how taking undersized conch will affect the overall population, etc).

Goal - Litter Awareness and Reduction
Objective 1: Use Litter Index (Keep America Beautiful protocol) to establish baseline data to use as a measurement tool.
Objective 2: Reduce highway litter through a litter awareness campaign, with a focus on Ernest Dean Highway between Marsh Harbour and the Snake Cay landfill.
Objective 3: Reduce coastal litter with a focus on Coastal Awareness Month activities, including community based cleanups. Use standardized data collection methods during cleanups to gather information on quantities and sources of litter.

Goal - Invasive Species: Significantly reduce Hawaiian Seagrape within targeted commercial and residential properties
Objective 1: Work with the community to eliminate Hawaiian Seagrape from 100 residential properties across Abaco.
Objective 2: Work with the business community to eliminate Hawaiian Seagrape from 20 commercial properties across Abaco.

FRIENDS was just accepted as a 1% for the Planet Partner! 1% was built to support an alliance of businesses financially committed to creating a healthy planet. By joining, your business can contribute to FRIENDS and benefit from international exposure through their efforts! Contact FRIENDS for more information about the program or to find out how to join.
In a recent newspaper article my son is quoted saying “I was introduced to loving the environment from my Mom, because she was involved in Friends of the Environment for as long as I can remember...”. And my daughter is now applying to college, pursuing a major in environmental studies. When I think about my children, and then look out my own back door, I am reminded why the efforts of Friends of the Environment are so important to me and to everyone who lives in and visits this special place.

FRIENDS began 2012 at a fast pace, with The Abaco Science Alliance Conference and The Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival. Scientists shared exciting research with more than 300 participants, over 200 of them being students from Abaco. The films promoted conservation actions that can be adopted by individuals, with emphasis on reducing the use of plastics, therefore reducing negative impacts to the environment and ultimately the ocean.

The pace won’t be slowing any time soon. The board and staff of FRIENDS gathered for a productive retreat last fall. While FRIENDS programs are making a noticeable difference in Abaco, we wanted to take another step forward by identifying specific goals in order to demonstrate measurable progress in our conservation efforts. These goals include protecting sensitive conservation areas, and our marine resources, decreasing litter and pollution, and reducing invasive species.

Thank you to all FRIENDS members, donors and volunteers. You are an integral part of all of FRIENDS efforts. It would not be happening without you!

Cha Boyce

Save the Date
March 10th - Marsh Harbour Reef Ball
April - National Coastal Awareness Month
April 22nd - Earth Day
May 18th/19th - Lionfish Derby
July 16-27th - Summer Camp
August - Sailaway Beach Party and Fundraiser
September - International Coastal Cleanup Month
Nov 3rd - Abaco Kayak Challenge (tentative date)

FRIENDS is a not for profit Society incorporated under the Bahamas Companies Act of 1991. FRIENDS is also a registered 501 (c) 3 organization; that means gifts to FRIENDS are tax deductible in The United States.

FRIENDS Thanks Friends

Wild and Scenic Film Festival, New Vision Ministries, United States Embassay, Hope Town Harbour Lodge, Treasure Cay Community Center, Patagonia
ASAC, Cable Cares Foundation, New Vision Ministries, JS Johnson, Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, Barbara Foreman, Scientific Review Committee, Frank Kenyon, Nancy Albury, Brian Kakuk, Abaco Print Shop, Sally Anstey
Reef Balls, Too many to list here! Thank you to everyone who contributed, attended, and helped make the Reef Ball a success!

Size Matters, The Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program (GEF-SGP), World Wildlife Fund, Bahamas Marine Exporters Association, The Nature Conservancy, Bahamas National Trust, Department of Marine Resources, Roosevelt Curry, Grand Cay All Age School, New Hope Baptist Church, North Abaco

Young Marine Explorer’s Club, Lindsey Borsz, Nikita Shiel-Rolle
Sandy Point Native Plant Fair, Erica Asselin, JA Pinder Primary School, Mrs. Brennell Higgs. Database, Lory Kenyon Misc, Tim Sands, Bellevue Business Depot.
Education Program Transportation, Mr. Herbert Yardley Mermaid Reef, Mike Gould

Education Program Update
Education is the common theme that ties all of our programs together. FRIENDS believes that it is very important for Bahamians to have a true understanding of our environment in order to foster a real appreciation for our natural resources. One of our favourite quotes is by Senegalese environmentalist Baba Dioum; “In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.” This theme of conservation education ties our efforts to those all around the world, working towards a more sustainable future for the global population (and for us here in Abaco).
The Abaco Science Alliance Conference (ASAC), started by FRIENDS in 2004, was designed as a biennial forum for sharing research being conducted in The Bahamas and to help bridge the gap between scientists and the community. Thanks to ASAC, data about The Bahamas is now more accessible to everyone, including students.

This year the Fifth Biennial ASAC, held on January 5-7 at New Vision Ministries in Marsh Harbour, combined a variety of talks and research posters. The conference attracted 217 students from 7 high schools and 2 primary schools, as well as 80 adults. The Cable Cares Foundation and JS Johnson provided funding to allow local students to attend the conference free of charge. Divided into spoken presentations and posters, 25 presenters covered topics ranging from pre-human ecology of Abaco, bats, and the lionfish invasion, to mosquito fish adaptations in fragmented creek systems. The keynote presentation, given by Catherine Booker of Community Conch, focused on recent Queen Conch research, which suggests a need to reform current management practices for this species.

Participants interested in learning even more about local research ventured out on Saturday afternoon for themed field trips on Bats, Dry Caves and Blue Holes; Tidal Creek Systems and Piping Plovers.

In an effort to help FRIENDS with our mission for a more sustainable Abaco, we are able to partner with scientists to improve outreach efforts in the community. Some of the latest research is assisting us in planning for our goal of Habitat Conservation. For example, research by Lauren Yeager and colleagues at Florida International University (FIU) suggests that seagrass beds contribute greatly to the growth of coral reefs. Schooling fish, like grunts, spend their days resting over coral heads, but at night venture out into seagrass beds to feed. They then travel back to the reef the next day and release nutrients through excretion as they rest over the coral heads. Studies have shown that coral heads with grunts grow faster than those without grunts. This means that when we look at conserving coral reefs we also need to consider the surrounding habitats, including seagrass beds.

We are building an amazing network of scientists doing work in The Bahamas. FRIENDS is working with Dr. Craig Layman (FIU) and other partners in research to publish a new blog called The Abaco Scientist, which is helping with this effort (http://absci.fiu.edu/). Research presented at the conference will be featured on the blog as well as other ongoing projects throughout The Bahamas.

FRIENDS hopes to encourage more research in the area for educational purposes and to stimulate the use of these findings in local environmental management decisions.

Some feedback from students attending the conference

Shannon Steele: “I learned a lot of new things and I am very grateful that FRIENDS gave me that opportunity.

Aly Boyce: “It was so great the Cable Cares gave FRIENDS a grant to let us be a part of a fun, interesting and very educational day. I definitely learned a lot about the issues in our country as well as amazing scientific research being done right in Abaco! I will share this new knowledge in school, my community and hopefully it will open the doors to future research and educational opportunities”.

Nathan Grammatico: “It was nice to see scientists' presentations that presented facts about both species I was not even aware existed in the Bahamas and ones I have known forever. I particularly found the presentations about the sea grass, conch, and Lion Fish very interesting. I also enjoyed the poster about the Cassiopea (upside down Jelly Fish) and wrote an essay about it, even though I was only required to write a paragraph because I really thought this creature was interesting”.

Thanks to Ancilleno O. Davis, Kendria Ferguson and Ellen Jedrey for the use of their photographs!
Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival inspires Abaco!

This winter FRIENDS hosted the Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival for the second time thanks to a grant from the Festival’s creator the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL, pronounced ‘circle’). SYRCL is a California based watershed advocacy group that was started in 1983 by a small group of concerned citizens who banded together to fight against several proposed dams. They started the Wild & Scenic Film Festival in January 2003 to promote local community building and explore environmental issues through an exciting and influential medium. The Wild & Scenic Film Festival is now the largest film festival of its kind in the United States.

Putting the Film Festival on tour allows SYRCL to share their success with environmental groups like FRIENDS. Their goal is to build a network of grassroots organizations connected by a common goal – to use film to inspire activism.

Abaco’s Film Festival highlights included the film Bag It, which investigates the use of plastic in our lives, the problems it causes, and ways to reduce our use of plastic bags and other items with a sense of humor. The documentary Witness interviewed photographers about the link between photography and its influence on conservation around the world. What’s so Great about Turtles? was the work of James Boyce, the winner of the student film contest launched at 2010’s Wild and Scenic Film Festival. Made with partner Loggerhead Productions, the film is touring local schools and can be seen at www.ConchSaladTV.com

Photo Contest Announced
This year as a part of the Festival FRIENDS, in partnership with the US Embassy, is sponsoring a conservation based photography contest inspired by the Witness film. The theme is conservation in Abaco and there are adult and student (under 18) categories. Entries must be received by March 15, rules and entry forms are available on the FRIENDS website. All entries will be posted on FRIENDS Facebook site for electronic voting. The top 10 in each category as a result of those votes will be forwarded on to a professional panel of judges who will select the winners. One winner will be selected from the Adult and Student category and will be announced at an event on Earth Day, 2012 where their prize will be awarded. First place prize for students is an iPad. Second and third place will also be selected for each category, and will be part of a traveling exhibit of photographs throughout The Bahamas, including the US Embassy.

FRIENDS’ Mission: To preserve and protect Abaco’s terrestrial and marine environments in order to achieve sustainable living for the wildlife and people of Abaco, Bahamas.

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Congratulations to Hope Town Primary School!
The first public school in The Bahamas to earn The Eco-Schools Green Flag Award!

The Green Flag is an international award that recognizes schools for showing their commitment to the environment. In order to achieve the green flag, teachers and students and other community members on the schools “Eco-Committee” had to complete an environmental review of the school and design projects in the areas of water and energy conservation, litter, school grounds, and biodiversity. The stand out project was Hope Town School’s “Give Back Garden”, where they are successfully growing herbs and vegetables and recycling on-campus gray water. Proceeds are donated to local charities.