



## OUR COMMON WEALTH: OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

The Bahamas is a country made up of more than 700 islands and cays, and boasts a wide range of natural resources. From its vast ocean corridors and diverse marine life, to its lush forests and valuable mineral deposits, The Bahamas is rich in natural resources that support its economy and ecosystem. In this list, we will explore some of the key natural resources of The Bahamas, including ocean, minerals, land, forests, air, sun and water.

### OCEAN

#### **Blue Holes:**

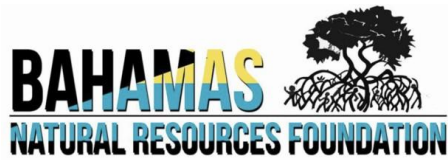
Blue Holes are large openings to deep, underwater, carbonate caverns. They and the land surrounding them are home to various species of marine and terrestrial wildlife. Blue holes are popular tourist attractions, mainly for snorkelling, diving, birdwatching and archaeology. Dean's Blue Hole on Long Island is the second deepest in the world, while Andros has the highest concentration of blue holes in the world. (Bahamas National Trust)

#### **Coral Reefs:**

Coral reefs are vibrant underwater ecosystems. They are formed by coral polyps, tiny organisms which are held together by calcium carbonate and build a rock-like structure. Coral reefs promote biodiversity as they provide habitat and food for about 25% of the ocean's plants and animals. They are also helpful to humans as they provide an economic boost via ecotourism and fishing, as well as reduce wave impact during storms (National Geographic). According to the Bahamas National Trust, "The Andros Barrier Reef is the world's third largest barrier reef, and the third largest living organism on the planet."

#### **Deep Ocean Corridors:**

The Bahamas has an extensive network of deep ocean corridors that provide habitat for a diverse array of marine life. These corridors are especially important for species like sharks, which require large areas of open water to thrive. Islands with deep ocean corridors include Andros, Abaco, and Grand Bahama. According to the Bahamas National Trust, these aquatic formations are "among the richest and most diverse in the world" (Bahamas National Trust).



### **Mangroves:**

The mangrove forests of The Bahamas are important for building coastlines, reducing storm waves, filtering water and providing a nursery for a variety of marine species, including fish and crustaceans. Islands with significant mangrove forests include Andros, Great Exuma, and Grand Bahama.

### **Marine Resources:**

The marine resources of The Bahamas are also vast and include a wide range of fish, shellfish, and other sea creatures. According to the Bahamas National Trust, "The marine resources of The Bahamas are among the most valuable in the world" (Bahamas National Trust).

### **Maritime:**

The maritime resources of The Bahamas include its extensive coastline, which is important for shipping and tourism. The country has a large number of ports and marinas. The Bahamas' strategic location in the Caribbean makes it an ideal stopover point for cruise ships and cargo vessels, while its clear waters and pristine beaches attract yachting enthusiasts from around the world. These are critical for its economy. According to the 2021 Economic Review from the Bahamas Ministry of Finance, the maritime sector accounted for approximately 5.5% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020 (Bahamas Ministry of Finance). The development and management of its maritime resources, therefore, remain critical to the economic growth and development of the country. Islands with notable maritime resources include New Providence and Grand Bahama.

### **Ocean Banks:**

Ocean banks are shallow areas of the ocean that support a diverse array of marine life. These banks are important for fishing and tourism, and are found around many of The Bahamas' islands, including Andros, Bimini, and Eleuthera. According to the Bahamas National Trust, "The ocean banks are among the most productive marine habitats in The Bahamas" (Bahamas National Trust).

### **Seabed/Oil & Natural Gas:**

The seabed around The Bahamas is rich in minerals and other resources, possibly including oil and natural gas. Islands with notable seabed resources include Grand Bahama, Andros, and New Providence. According to the US Geological Survey, "The Bahamas may have significant, as-yet undiscovered, oil and natural gas resources" (US Geological Survey).

### **Seagrass:**

Seagrass is a valuable natural resource found in the shallow waters of The Bahamas. This marine plant grows in meadows along the coastline and plays a critical role in the ecosystem by providing habitat and food for a variety of marine species. In addition to supporting biodiversity, seagrass also helps to stabilize sediment and prevent coastal erosion, making it an important factor in the protection of shorelines. The Bahamas is home to several species of seagrass, including *Thalassia testudinum* and *Halodule wrightii*. These species are important for the country's fishing and tourism industries, as well as for the overall health of its marine environment. The conservation and protection of seagrass meadows is therefore crucial for the sustainability of The Bahamas' economy and ecosystem.

### **Tidal Flats:**

Tidal flats are shallow areas of the ocean that are exposed at low tide. These areas are important for shorebirds and other marine species, and are also used for commercial purposes like salt production. Islands with significant tidal flats include Andros and Great Exuma. According to the Bahamas National Trust, tidal flats are "critical habitat for a variety of marine and bird life" (Bahamas National Trust).

## **MINERALS**

### **Limestone (Calcium Carbonate):**

Limestone is a sedimentary rock that is abundant in The Bahamas, and is used in construction and for making cement. Islands with notable limestone resources include New Providence, Grand Bahama, and Andros. According to the US Office of Science and Technical Information, "The carbonate sediments of The Bahamas are remarkable for their purity."

### **Salt:**

Salt is a mineral composed of sodium chloride, that is found in abundance in salt water. Salt is used for flavoring and preserving food, in the chemical industry, for health benefits and many other purposes. Salt production is Inagua's main industry. They recover the salt from the seawater by using sun and wind energy to evaporate the water and aid in crystallization. The Morton Salt Company produces about a million pounds of salt per year and is the second largest saline operation in North America. (The Official Website of The Bahamas)

### **Sand (Aragonite):**

Sand is the second most used natural resource in the world after water. It is the main component of concrete, glass and asphalt. Here in The Bahamas, we have aragonite - a fine limestone sand found in the seabed - also used in construction materials and farming. Aragonite mining has tremendous economic potential for The Bahamas. However, much like any resource, it must be regulated so as to not deplete it or upset the ecological balance.

## **LAND**

### **Arable Land:**

The Bahamas has limited arable land, with only about 0.8% of its total land area suitable for growing crops, as noted by the World Bank. Islands with notable agricultural production include Andros and Cat Island, but the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) states that "The Bahamian agricultural sector remains small, with only a small fraction of the land being cultivated." This limited availability of arable land is due to the country's small size, rocky terrain, and the fact that much of its land is covered by forests, wetlands, or other natural landscapes. The agricultural sector in The Bahamas contributed approximately 1.2% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018, according to the 2019-2020 Budget Communication from the Bahamas Ministry of Finance. This sector is also an important source of employment and income for many Bahamians, particularly those living in rural areas.

## **FOREST**

### **Deciduous (Coppice) Forests:**

The deciduous forests of The Bahamas are characterized by trees that lose their leaves seasonally. These forests are home to a variety of bird species and are important for soil conservation. Islands with significant deciduous forests include Andros and Grand Bahama. The Bahamas National Trust notes that the coppice forests are "one of the most diverse habitats in The Bahamas" (Bahamas National Trust).

### **Pine Forest:**

Pine forests cover large areas of The Bahamas, especially on the islands of Abaco, Andros, New Providence and Grand Bahama. These forests are home to a variety of plant and animal species and are important for timber

production. According to the Bahamas National Trust, the pine forests are "one of the most important forest types in The Bahamas" (Bahamas National Trust).

### **Medicinal Plants:**

There are many native medicinal plants that grow in the pine and coppice forests of The Bahamas. To name a few examples, the "Five Finger" plant has dark, rounded leaves that grow in groups of five. It is commonly used as a tea to treat stomach pain. (Native Bahamian Plants: Volume 1) Another plant is Cascarilla where an essential oil is extracted from its bark for use in medicines, mainly digestive. It grows most abundantly in Acklins. Cascarilla oil is also an ingredient in Campari Liquor, insect repellent and perfume, making it of great export and economic value. (The Bahamas Development Bank)

## **AIR**

### **Clean Air:**

Air is the primary resource for sustaining the lives of people, plants and animals. It refers to the collection of gases that comprise the Earth's atmosphere. Oxygen is the most important as it is necessary for plant and animal respiration. The Bahamas has some of the cleanest air in the world according to the Air Quality Index from IQAir.

### **Airspace:**

Airspace refers to the portion of the atmosphere above land or sea that is controlled by a country. As The Bahamas has a tourism dependent economy, more airspace capacity can accommodate new flights and destinations. In 2021, the Bahamas government assumed management of its sovereign airspace. Minister of Tourism and Aviation Dionisio D'Aguilar stated this means that any aircraft landing in, departing from or flying over the Bahamas airspace will now "pay fees to an entity solely owned and operated by the government of The Bahamas."

## **SUN**

### **Solar Energy:**

The Bahamas has abundant sunshine, making solar energy a promising source of renewable energy. According to the World Bank, The Bahamas has great potential for solar energy, with an average of 5.1 kilowatt-hours per square meter per day of solar irradiation.

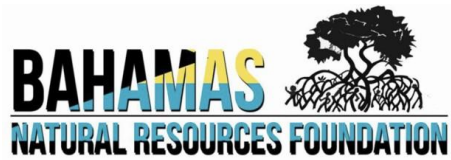
## WATER

### **Fresh Groundwater:**

Fresh groundwater is a valuable resource in The Bahamas. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, it is “the primary source of drinking water” for many of the islands' residents. Islands with significant fresh groundwater resources include Andros, Abaco, and Grand Bahama. (FAO).

### **References:**

1. Bahamas National Trust. (n.d.). Field Guides and Fact Sheets. [Field Guides and Fact Sheets - Bahamas National Trust \(bnt.bs\)](#)
2. Bahamas National Trust. (n.d.). North and South Marine Parks. [North & South Marine Parks - Bahamas National Trust \(bnt.bs\)](#)
3. National Geographic. (2022). Coral. [Coral \(nationalgeographic.org\)](#)
4. US Geological Survey. (2012). Assessment of Undiscovered Conventional Oil and Gas Resources of South America and the Caribbean, 2012. <https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2012/3046/fs2012-3046.pdf>
5. The World Bank. (2020). Arable land (% of land area) - Bahamas, The, Low & middle income | Data. [Arable land \(% of land area\) - Bahamas, The, Low & middle income | Data \(worldbank.org\)](#)
6. Bahamas Ministry of Finance. (2019). 2019-2020 Budget Communication. [2019 Budget Communication \(bahamas budget.gov.bs\)](#)
7. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2015). Country Profile - Bahamas. [CA0430EN.pdf \(fao.org\)](#)
8. The Official Website of The Bahamas. (n.d.). Morton Salt Factory. [Morton Salt Factory - Explore The Bahamas - The Official Website of The Bahamas](#)
9. Office of Science And Technical Information. (1985). Chemistry of calcium carbonate-rich shallow water sediments in The Bahamas. [Chemistry of calcium carbonate-rich shallow water sediments in the Bahamas \(Journal Article\) | OSTI.GOV](#)



10. EcoTings. (n.d.). Native Bahamian Plants: Volume 1. <https://ecotingsbah.squarespace.com/ecoblog/native-bahamian-plants-volume-1>
11. Bahamas Development Bank. (n.d.). Cascarilla. <https://bahamasdevelopmentbank.com/projects/cascarilla/>
12. IQAir. (2023). Air Quality in Nassau. [Nassau Air Quality Index \(AQI\) and Bahamas Air Pollution | IQAir](#)
13. Solargis. (2020). Solar resource maps of The Bahamas. [Solar resource maps and GIS data for 200+ countries | Solargis](#)