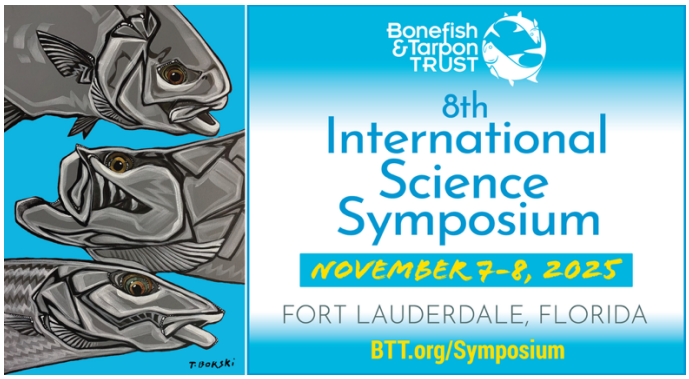


Multifaceted approach to Bonefish (Albula vulpes) habitat conservation in The Bahamas through science, angler advocacy, and education.

Justin Lewis

The Bahamian archipelago spans 470,000 km², a large portion of which is flats environment. Bonefish (Albula vulpes) call the flats environment home and are an economically important sport fish throughout its geographical range. In The Bahamas, the recreational catch and release flats fishery has an annual economic impact exceeding $169 million, and the fishery has high cultural value. Despite the fishery's importance, its sustainability is threatened by habitat loss and degradation, and to a lesser extent illegal harvest. Bonefish & Tarpon Trust (BTT) collaborates with fishing guides, fishing lodges, anglers, and local communities to obtain data on bonefish habitat use and movements and undertake habitat restoration efforts. Data from this collaborative work – from scientific research as well as fishers ecological knowledge – has led to the identification of essential bonefish habitats including home ranges, migratory pathways, and pre-spawning aggregation sites. Data collected from research and habitat restoration efforts are incorporated into outreach and education initiatives to inform fisheries managers, government officials, fishing guides, anglers, and students. The partnerships with these stakeholders have fostered advocacy for habitat conservation and restoration. In fact, fishing guides have played leading roles in habitat conservation and restoration efforts. Concurrently, we work with resource management agencies to incorporate these data into conservation strategies. This multifaceted approach increased stakeholder involvement, leading to improved relationships between stakeholders and resource management agencies. Evidence includes the designation of thirty-one marine protected areas to conserve bonefish habitats, and ongoing work toward additional habitat protection and restoration.