

THE  
**FUTURE**  
OF  
**AMERICA'S**  
**NATIONAL**  
**PARKS**

First Annual  
Centennial Strategy for

# Virgin Islands National Park

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



**Site:** VIIS

**Year:** 2007

**Vision Statement**

Established in 1956, Virgin Islands National Park comprises slightly more than half of the island of St. John island. In 1962, Congress expanded the boundary to include 5,650 acres of submerged lands to protect and preserve the coral reefs and seascapes. And, in 1978 the legislation was amended to add Hassel Island, six acres in the Red Hook, and four acres at the Wintberg Estate on St. Thomas.

VIIS protects internationally significant marine and terrestrial resources. Within its borders lie protected bays of crystal blue-green waters and an abundance of coral reef life, white sandy beaches shaded by seagrass trees, coconut palms, and tropical forests providing habitat for over 800 species of plants. The park's cultural resources are significant in the settlement and colonization of the New World, maritime history and commerce, and African-American history, including artifacts from the Pre-Columbian Amerindian civilization, remains of the Danish Colonial sugar plantations, and reminders of African slavery and the subsistence culture that followed during the 100 years after Emancipation.

The Centennial vision of Virgin Islands National Park is to expand valuable research, projects, and activities critical for the protection of the diverse and complex system of park's coral reefs, which are some of the most biologically rich and economically important coral reef resources in the world; to continue participation in partnerships and to explore other opportunities; and to increase public education and appreciation of the park's history, and participation and stewardship in the preservation of the park's resources.

**Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager**

Mark Hardgrove

Site: VIIS

**STEWARDSHIP**

Provide inspiring, safe, and accessible places for people to enjoy - the standard to which all other park systems aspire.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

VIIS provides access to numerous tropical marine and terrestrial ecosystems and historic plantation era resources. This is accomplished through overlooks, trails, beaches, boat moorings, and historic sites. All are maintained to provide safe access to the resources for the enjoyment and inspiration of our visitors

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

**STEWARDSHIP**

**Improve the condition of park resources and assets.**

**Rehabilitate high-priority historic buildings to good condition, and help communities to preserve their history through programs like Preserve America.**

VIIS has over 500 historic structures which date to the Caribbean plantation era. Currently, 247 of those are on the List of Classified Structures. Current funding only allows for rehabilitation and maintenance of four sites encompassing approximately 20 structures. Proper stewardship of the park's cultural resources includes ensuring that at least these four sites are in good condition, all museum collection protection and preservation standards are met, and that the park's archeological sites are in good condition. The park is partnering with the Friends of VINP and the St. Thomas Historic Trust to rehabilitate the Creque Marine Railway on Hassel Island, the oldest and longest operating marine railway in the Caribbean. Meeting these goals will require funding of numerous PMIS projects and support from local NGOs and volunteers.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

**Restore native habitats by controlling invasive species and reintroducing key plant and animal species.**

VIIS has commenced reducing the populations of feral animals and exotic plants on park lands. Due to the interrelationship with inholdings and adjacent lands, this will be an ongoing effort. While the park has identified the distribution and abundance of feral and exotic species, it will require additional funding of OFS and PMIS requests to accomplish results that will have significant impact to native species. The reduction of exotic plant species has been accomplished through the South Florida/Caribbean Exotic Plant Management Team (EPMT). Eradication of these species requires periodic retreatment, which is dependant on continued funding of the EPMT.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

**Improve high-priority assets to acceptable condition, as measured by the Facility Condition Index.**

The Trunk Bay Sugar Factory is a historic structure (circa 1780) that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (81000088) and appears on the List of Classified Structures for the park. The stabilization of the masonry walls is critical to preventing structural collapse and the loss of significant historic fabric. The preservation and interpretation of this contributing structure to the Colonial Plantation Era is one of the park's management objectives. The structures close proximity to Trunk Bay beach, which can receive upwards of a thousand visitors a day makes this historic resource a crucial element in interpreting the story of the Colonial System on St. John. However, this close proximity to so many visitors threatens public safety. These architecturally significant and fairly high, over fifty feet tall masonry walls are deteriorating rapidly and will collapse in the

Site: VIIS

**STEWARDSHIP**

**Improve the condition of park resources and assets.**

very near future if stabilization efforts are not addressed. Completion of the project will eliminate a serious threat to visitor safety as well as restore and preserve one of the park's most valuable assets. (PMIS 63867)

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

**Improve the natural resources in parks, as measured by the vital signs developed under the Natural Resource Challenge.**

Vital Signs for VIIS have been identified through the South Florida/Caribbean Inventory and Monitoring Program. Park staff and other collaborators (NOAA, universities, scientists) are monitoring water and air quality, coral reef health, reef fish populations, tropical forest dynamics, seagrass dynamics, sea turtles, etc. Approximately 215 moorings in park waters are enabling recovery of seagrass communities in many bays. And marine resource protection patrols prevent damage to coral reefs from illegal anchoring and prevent loss of endangered species (3 species of sea turtles) by poaching or nesting disturbance. Continued funding of the I&M Program and funding of several PMIS projects are necessary to ensure continued improvement of natural resources in VIIS.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

**Complete all cultural resource inventories for designated priority resources.**

VIIS along with VICR are unique as they preserve one of the most diverse collections of cultural and natural resources in the nation. Within the parks are resources that are essential to the maritime history of the Caribbean. The remains of hundreds of historic structures found throughout VIIS are critical to the preservation of Virgin Islands history as they represent the full range of historic themes including military fortifications, plantations, slavery, hospitals, and maritime industry. The large numbers of prehistoric sites in the park span the range of human occupation in the Caribbean and are some of the best preserved in the Nation. The significant ceremonial sites make them critical in the understanding the Caribbean's prehistoric past. Curatorial needs include proper dedicated storage and display, timely accessioning and cataloging, systematic routine housekeeping and maintenance, and pest control. In order to give the collections the care they deserve and require to meet NPS standards, a museum curatorial technician is required. (OFS Number: 12675A)

Site: VIIS

STEWARDSHIP

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The Park's greatest need in resource protection and visitor safety is to reduce impacts caused by boating visitors and to maintain boat exclusion zones to protect swimmers. Installation of new navigational aids and buoys will accomplish this goal. Resource protection buoys, 125 regulatory buoys, 300 moorings will be installed and maintained. Implementation of these measures and new actions will mitigate human activities that are causing a rapid degradation of coral reef and seagrass ecosystems. A consistent and properly funded maintenance program for all buoys in VIIS waters provides for visitor safety, resource protection, and a reduction in liability and tort claims. Mooring buoys assist novice boaters while preventing anchor or chain damage to benthic communities, regulatory buoys prevent boats from running aground on coral reefs, and boundary buoys clearly demarcate VIIS waters, alerting unfamiliar visitors that they are within a National Park. This would protect the existing National Park Service investment in buoys while safeguarding the unique natural resources of the VIIS. (OFS Number: 8448A)

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

STEWARDSHIP

Serve as the Preeminent resource laboratory by applying excellence in science and scholarship to understand and respond to environmental changes.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

VIIS is the site of many seminal research efforts in the Caribbean, starting in the early 1950s. VIIS strives to solicit and encourage scientific research in both natural and cultural fields to better understand the processes and dynamics involved in tropical biology and ecology. Considerable work is being done at VIIS in understanding changes in coral reef ecosystems as it relates to changes in local, regional and global variables. Changes in dry tropical forests due to hurricanes and seasonal rainfall patterns, coral reef changes due to bleaching and disease, and changes in reef fish populations due to habitat changes and fishing pressures are being monitored to better understand and respond to environmental changes.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

STEWARDSHIP

Encourage children to be future conservationists.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

VIIS has employed an Education Coordinator to work with the local schools and education groups to carry the park's message to the schools and facilitate school children in visiting the park. The park supports an EcoCamp program which brings approximately 180 children into the park for a two night stay at the Virgin Islands Environmental Resource Station for a hands-on experience in a natural setting. Nearly every school in the St. Thomas/St. John school district has visited the Cinnamon Bay Taino Indian archeology site. Here they have learned about some of the original inhabitants of these islands and experienced archeological methods in uncovering this history.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

**ENVIRONMENT**

**Reduce environmental impacts of park operations.**

**Reduce the environmental impacts of park operations on air and water quality.**

A concrete block pit toilet at the Reef Bay hiking trail rest area needs to be replaced with a new composting style toilet facility. The existing toilet was constructed in 1970 is inadequate to meet current demands. Its location is also intrusion on the historic scene of the Reef Bay Plantation and is visible from the beach area, creating a negative impact on the visitor experience. The Reef Bay Trail is the most popular hiking trail in the park and attracts high visitation. Multiple hurricanes, tropical storms and the harsh subtropical conditions at this isolated location have deteriorated the facility. The park receives constant visitor complaints about the facility appearance and unsanitary conditions. Replacement of this pit toilet will allow for the accommodation of increased visitation. After a steep 3-mile hike, this upgraded facility will be a welcomed sight to the weary hikers. Public comment on the upgrading of this facility is positive and it would greatly increase the visitor satisfaction to this historic cultural trail area. The new facility will require fewer visits by maintenance staff to the boat-only access location and reduce operational costs. PMIS 57645

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

**Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)**

As part of the Green Energy Parks Program, we plan to construct an electric charging station near park headquarters in Cruz Bay and purchase six electric vehicles. These vehicles would be used in the vicinity of headquarters and in a variety of other operations along the North Shore Road. The charging station would be located in the Cruz Bay maintenance area and powered by photovoltaic cells. Virgin Islands National Park is currently working in a multi-level effort with gateway communities, local and territorial agencies in preparing regional transportation planning and in beginning to look at alternative transportation for visitors in the vicinity of the Cruz Bay headquarters area where gridlock occurs on a daily basis throughout the year. Unfortunately, the park has not had the funding resources available to begin to address the use of alternative fuels. Funding would send the message to the public and the over one million visitors annually to Saint John Island that the National Park Service is serious about greening its operations, as well as encouraging partners to do the same. PMIS 67658

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS



Site: VIIS

**ENVIRONMENT**

Inspire an environmental conscience in Americans.

Demonstrate environmental excellence through increased use of alternative energy and fuels at every park.

To achieve this goal, Virgin Islands National Park will continue to use and maintain their solar water heaters on park residences. the park will continue to maintain its current system of photovoltaic cells and will work to add new ones where appropriate.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

**RECREATION**

Encourage collaboration among and assist park and recreation systems at every level—federal, regional, state, local—to help build an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.

Rehabilitate over 2,000 miles of trails within or connected to national parks, including trails accessible to those with disabilities.

Virgin Islands National Park has no trails which are wheelchair accessible, other than very short restroom or short beach access trails. This joint project with the Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park would provide persons who are less than fully mobile an opportunity to visit two resources that are representative of Virgin Islands National Park. The 1/4 mile Francis Bay boardwalk trail would allow visitors to travel through a mangrove salt marsh to a viewing platform on Francis Bay Beach. The Cinnamon Bay Ruins Boardwalk would take visitors through a Sugar Plantation era ruins with accessible wayside exhibits. Completed boardwalk will provide access to Francis Bay Beach and Cinnamon Bay Ruins. There will be an increase in use on the these trail from less than fully mobile visitors. (PMIS 133928)

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Develop culturally diverse educational programs and make presentations at various locations within the park to included past and future acquired artifacts discovered within the park.

Design special signage and Kiosk information template at entrance to various sites.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

RECREATION

- Establish "volun-tourism" excursions to national parks for volunteers to help achieve natural and cultural resource protection goals.
- Increase annual volunteer hours by 100 percent, from 5.2 million hours to 10.4 million hours.

Continued with the on-going volunteer program which includes participation of various community groups and local organizations, and foster new opportunities by reaching other organizations willing to adapt and maintain park assets as partners and steward of our resources.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

RECREATION

- Expand partnerships with schools and boys and girls associations to show how national park experiences can improve children's lives.
- Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Educate local community organizations, schools, churches, VI University, and visitors about the mission of the park.

Provide stimulating and inspiring educational programs that reflect the culture of the Virgin Islands and its people through demonstrations and songs.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

RECREATION

Focus national, regional, and local tourism efforts to reach diverse audiences and young people and to attract visitors to lesser-known parks.

Increase visitation by 25 percent at lesser-known parks through a national tourism effort aimed at helping people to discover the breadth of parks and experiences.

Establish and foster better relationships with the local tourism agencies. Expand interest in Virgin Island culture and the park to wider audiences by including the park programs in tourism publications and magazines.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Increase the number of visitors that attend ranger-facilitated programs such as campfire talks, hikes, and school programs.

Request funding for and construct a more attractive amphitheater. Offer more culturally sensitive program to increase local visitation. Use various promotion media such as radio and news paper continuously for achieving our objectives.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

EDUCATION

Cooperate with educators to provide curriculum materials, high-quality programs, and park-based and online learning.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Partner and collaborate with other governmental and non-governmental entities to provide on and off-site curriculum based programs regarding the natural and cultural history of the Park. The Park's Environmental Coordinator will work with teachers and the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park in order to provide assistance with transportation for those classes which are unable to provide for such.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

**EDUCATION**

- Introduce young people and their families to national parks by using exciting media and technology.
- Increase the number of web hits through the introduction of advanced, interactive features that attract young people to national parks.

Virgin Islands National Park will expand the use of its website by creating interactive tools and other media features that would enable visitors who are not able to travel to the Park to learn about the resources.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

**EDUCATION**

- Impart to every American a sense of their citizen ownership of their national parks.
- Increase visitors' satisfaction, understanding, and appreciation of the parks they visit.

Increase the number of visitor contacts through both informal and formal interpretation. Virgin Islands National Park will seek to have interpreters and/or volunteers stationed in high visitation areas such as scenic vistas, beaches, and historic sites to answer visitors' questions and provide general information regarding the Park, including its significance.

The Park will seek to increase by 50% the number of formal interpretive programs. The programs will include statements of the Park's significance and follow themes supporting said significance.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

**PROFESSIONALISM**

- Use strategic planning to promote management excellence.
- Establish a structured professional development curriculum to provide park managers with the skills to apply best business practices and superior leadership.

The park will increase the use of the Telestation to ensure that park managers and supervisors meet or exceed their annual training requirements.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

**PROFESSIONALISM**

Promote a safety and health culture for all employees and visitors.

Reduce the number of employee lost-time incidents and serious visitor injuries by 20 percent.

The park is proactive in developing a strong Incident Command structure for hurricane preparedness. Activities including maintaining a well stocked emergency cache, pre-season check of generators, and conducting partial shutdown drills prepare the park staff for safe and efficient operations during storm emergency situations.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Continue 365 day a year lifeguard protection at Trunk Bay. Trunk Bay is the most visited site in Virgin Islands National Park. Daily lifeguard coverage improves swimmer safety by warning visitors about hazards, keeping powerboats out of the swim area, assisting/rescuing swimmers in trouble, and providing immediate emergency medical care for injuries. Redesign and rebuild lifeguard stands for increased effectiveness.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: VIIS

**PROFESSIONALISM**

Make national parks the first choice in philanthropic giving among those concerned about environmental, cultural, and recreational values.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

This Park is one of the most important and exhilarating examples of the value of philanthropy within the NPS. This park was established as a direct result of the vision and generosity of Laurance Rockefeller who donated the property that became Virgin Islands National Park. At the December 1, 1956 dedication ceremony, he stated, "To those everywhere who love natural beauty it is an important step forward in the continuing cause of permanently preserving for all men those matchless places that, once spoiled, may be lost forever."

It is the continuing support of the Rockefeller family, Friends of Virgin Islands National Park, Jackson Hole Preserve, Eastern National, Volunteers-in-Park, and many other groups and individuals who believe in the natural and cultural conservation of the park that allow us to achieve our mission.

The park will continue to seek partnerships and the support of those who believe preserving our resources so that the national treasure that is Virgin Islands National Park will continue be enjoyed today and by future generations.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS