



Caneel Bay Redevelopment and Management Plan

2022 Civic Engagement Public Comment Period

Frequently Asked Questions

UPDATED February 2022

1. Why is the NPS proposing to redevelop the Caneel Bay area and how is this different than the 2013 Environmental Assessment (EA) for the site?

In the mid-1950s, Laurance Rockefeller established Caneel Bay Resort (Caneel Bay) as an early model of ecotourist luxury accommodations to highlight the natural beauty of St. John with low-impact facilities. Within the boundaries of the resort are culturally significant ruins and archaeological sites that span the time from the archaic period through European colonialism and post-colonial emancipation. Several buildings and landscapes within the resort reference or build up these eras. The resort was operated from the 1950s through 2017, when it closed due to damage from Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

In 1983, the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. donated the 150-acre property to the NPS for inclusion within Virgin Islands National Park (the park), subject to a retained use estate (RUE). The RUE allows its operator, currently CBI Acquisitions, LLC (CBIA), to use the property as a resort until September 30, 2023. Use of the area after the expiration of the RUE has been the subject of great interest and concern from the community, the park, and potential operators of the resort.

A plan is needed to address ongoing cultural and natural resource impacts and to integrate the Caneel Bay area into the overall management of Virgin Islands National Park, which includes making the area accessible and welcoming to the local community, guests, and visitors, once the RUE expires in September 2023.

The future of the Caneel Bay area was the subject of a 2013 environmental assessment (EA) released to the public, which focused solely on transitioning the fully operational hotel from the RUE to a noncompetitive lease under the terms described in Public Law 111-261. During the EA process, the NPS identified environmental contamination concerns that needed resolution. The NPS was also evaluating historic structures and a potential historic district. Several of these and other elements of the EA were incomplete, and the NPS never finalized a decision document for the EA. Hurricanes Irma and Maria destroyed many of the guest accommodations, and the site continues to suffer from the

impact of those storms. The data from 2013 is not reflective of the current realities at the Caneel Bay area.

2. What are the natural and cultural resources of Virgin Islands National Park?

The park's natural resources consist of coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangroves, and other marine habitats that support sea turtles, corals, and other marine life. Virgin Islands National Park also protects some of the last remaining native tropical dry rain forest in the Caribbean. In 1976, the park was designated as an International Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The park was one of the first protected areas in the world to receive this designation. Of the hundreds of UNESCO biosphere reserves worldwide, the park is 1 of only 30 reserves containing both marine and terrestrial ecosystems. It provides vital habitat for approximately 130 bird species, 400 reef-associated fish species, 17 species of whales and dolphins, 13 reptile species, numerous sponges, and more than 45 stony coral species. A number of marine and terrestrial species within the boundaries of the park and monument are federally listed as endangered or threatened.

The park's cultural resources are abundant and diverse, including prehistoric archeological sites, hundreds of historic structures, offshore shipwrecks, and museum collections that encompass artifacts dating as far back as 840 BC. The Virgin Islands have been inhabited for at least 3,000 years, beginning with hunter-gatherers of the Archaic Period. Settlement continued throughout prehistory and ended with the development of the Taino culture, the pre-Columbian people who were present when Columbus explored the New World. When Europeans arrived, the Virgin Islands became a melting pot, inhabited by people from around the world who came to make a new life on the islands. These colonial settlements date from the 17th century through the 19th century. Visitors can explore the ruins of hundreds of historic structures to get a sense of this rich history.

3. What is Civic Engagement, and how is this different than what the NPS conducted in April 2021?

Civic engagement is a continuous, dynamic conversation with the public on many levels that reinforces public commitment to preserving heritage resources, both cultural and natural. It strengthens public understanding of the full meaning and contemporary relevance of these resources. The foundation of civic engagement is a commitment to building and sustaining relationships with neighbors and communities of interest.

In April 2021, the NPS met with you, the community at large, to discuss the future of the Caneel Bay area. We asked you the following questions:

1. What type of connection have you had with Caneel Bay?
2. What are your thoughts on preserving the history and culture of Caneel Bay and St. John?
3. What have been its greatest challenges?

4. How can the National Park Service improve operations at Caneel Bay for the 21st century?

We closely reviewed and discussed all comments submitted and transcripts from our listening sessions. Although feedback varied, several themes resonated:

- The cultural significance of the area, including the archaic period through European colonialism and post-colonial emancipation;
- The importance of the area being made available for access by local residents and visitors;
- The deep affection for the Caneel Bay area from the employees and community in the early years of the resort in addition to those who have vacationed to the site;
- The importance that any future resort contributes to the local economy, including community stewardship through paying living wages and hiring locals for resort and management positions;
- That the area be rebuilt using sustainable and resilient practices; and
- The importance of and protection of the resources.

There are various ideas presented by the public and from NPS for the appropriate use of the area, which has substantial cultural and ethnographic resources and connections to the community.

The NPS has assembled an interdisciplinary team of staff from the park, our regional office, and other NPS offices who want to hear from you again. These team members have expertise in sustainable development, community planning, commercial services, environmental engineering, and cultural resources management, among other disciplines. Together, this interdisciplinary team has developed a preliminary range of options for the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area, and we are seeking your feedback on our initial ideas. As part of our planning process, we are initiating a 30-day comment period on a conceptual range of preliminary alternatives for the future of the Caneel Bay area. You are encouraged to share your observations, concerns, and ideas about the information presented in the newsletter and during public meetings. The NPS will use the information obtained during this civic engagement public comment period to refine the conceptual range of preliminary alternatives, refine issues, and ensure that we have the necessary information to move forward in the planning process.

4. How will the public's ideas and contributions be used by the NPS during this round of Civic Engagement?

We aim to share our preliminary range of options (also referred to as alternatives) for the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area during this civic engagement public comment period, including information regarding resources that may be impacted by our proposals, and seek your feedback. You are encouraged to share your observations, concerns, and ideas about the information presented. After the close of the 30-day civic engagement public comment period, the NPS will review all public comments and refine the preliminary range of alternatives and issues. This information will inform the range of

alternatives and environmental issues the NPS will analyze in a subsequent National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

5. What is a NEPA process?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a law that guides the environmental analysis component of agency planning. This law defines a process that federal agencies must follow when proposing to take actions that have environmental impacts. The NEPA process ensures that information on the environmental impacts of proposed actions is available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made. NEPA requires the use of an “interdisciplinary approach” to ensure that information from a variety of disciplines, including natural and social sciences and cultural resources, is integrated into analysis and decision-making. Once the NPS has a range of alternatives that can be meaningfully evaluated, it will commence its NEPA process. Through this process, the NPS will release an EA for public review and comment. The NPS will review and respond to substantive comments on the EA before issuing its final decision for the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area.

6. Was there a deal already made for the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area? Was a lease or concessions contract already signed?

No. In July 2021, the NPS announced that it would employ a competitive lease or concessions operation strategy to redevelop the Caneel Bay area at Virgin Islands National Park, subject to a decision made through a NEPA process. The NPS aims to solicit qualified applicants for the long-term partnership needed to successfully redevelop parts of the Caneel Bay area while protecting natural and cultural resources. The Caneel Bay RUE, currently held by CBIA — a unique arrangement crafted by Laurance S. Rockefeller in 1983, setting aside the 150-acre resort for independent operation and management — will remain in place until its expiration on September 30, 2023.

Through this planning process, the NPS will determine what visitor services are necessary and/or appropriate for the Caneel Bay area and determine what portions of the site may be leased and what areas could provide concession operations. The NPS leasing program provides a pathway for parks to enter into public-private partnerships to revitalize park properties and make them available for public use. The Caneel Bay competitive process may include Requests for Qualifications (RFQ), which could begin rolling out by this summer, 2022. The NPS may also issue a request for proposals and/or a concession services prospectus once a decision is made on the future of the Caneel Bay area. Regardless of the chosen mechanism, the business opportunities at the Caneel Bay area would be open to the public, and we encourage all interested parties to submit a response. The Caneel Bay area is vital to the heritage, progress, and enjoyment of St. John and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The decision to employ a competitive lease or concessions operation strategy reflects the NPS’ commitment to ensuring the future of the Caneel Bay area is planned with consideration for the voices of our communities whose

histories we are charged with preserving here, as well as our visitors. A competitive lease or concessions operation process will help foster a broad and equitable resolution that honors the intent of the park's establishment while addressing 21st century needs.

7. How does this planning effort relate to the environmental investigation and clean-up effort at the Caneel Bay area?

The NPS's top priority currently is to secure the environmental future of the Caneel Bay area. In the summer of 2021, the NPS released the first round of environmental investigation data, the Engineering Evaluation and Cost Analysis (EE/CA) Report and hosted public sessions specifically to engage the community. The NPS conducted an additional round of sampling in Fall 2021 to fill some data gaps and expects to complete the full contaminant investigation by Summer 2022. Then, the NPS's goal is to have the documented contamination addressed as soon as possible. Clean-up efforts have not begun.

The NPS performed an EE/CA investigation for three areas of the resort to assess the nature and extent of contamination, assess risks to human health and the environment, and determine a preferred clean-up alternative. The NPS is investigating the Caneel Bay area using its authority under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), and its implementing regulations, the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP), which govern response actions at sites where hazardous substances present a potential risk to human health or ecological receptors. Under CERCLA, the NPS may seek to recover up to 100% of its response costs from potentially responsible parties (PRPs).

Cleaning up the Caneel Bay area allows the NPS to plan the future redevelopment free of unacceptable risks to human health or the environment. A clean site enables the NPS to negotiate a fair lease or concessions contract on behalf of the American public. Cleaning up the Caneel Bay area and fulfilling the NEPA planning process are related but separate processes. The NEPA document will not address the environmental contamination or clean-up efforts but will instead focus on the future of the Caneel Bay area and present alternatives and impacts related to redevelopment.

8. Will this be the only set of public meetings on the future use of the Caneel Bay area?

An additional opportunity for public involvement will be available during this planning process. Once the NPS has refined the preliminary range of alternatives with public input and can analyze the potential impacts, we will begin the second phase of planning. At that time, the NPS will initiate the formal NEPA process and subsequently release an EA for public review and comment. We will hold additional public meetings to seek feedback on the EA. After reviewing and responding to substantive comments on the EA, the NPS will issue a decision document detailing the NPS's selected action for the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area.

There may be additional opportunities in the future, separate from this redevelopment planning process, to comment on the environmental contamination and CERCLA process.

9. How are the public meetings organized? What is expected from participants?

NPS expects to host virtual public meetings to share preliminary options for the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area. The session(s) will provide descriptions of the preliminary alternatives and allow participants the opportunity to ask questions. After a PowerPoint overview, the facilitator will likely review each option one-by-one. Participants will then be asked to share their thoughts and comments during the allotted time for each of the options when addressed by the facilitator. The NPS is most interested in gaining feedback on the preliminary purpose and need, the conceptual range of alternatives, environmental issues in the planning area, and to understand what data are missing from any given option.

10. I cannot attend the public meetings, but I want to share my thoughts. Where and how can I submit my comments?

The public comment period will be open for 30 days, from January 18 to February 17, 2022. We encourage everyone to submit their written comments via the following website: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayRedevelopment>.

You may also hand deliver or mail your written comments to:

Caneel Bay Redevelopment and Management Plan
Superintendent
1300 Cruz Bay Creek
St. John, VI 00830

Mailed comments postmarked by the end of the stated comment period will be considered.

11. Can you explain the lease and concession process, including key milestones, who the decision-maker is, and the role the public plays in this process?

The processes for evaluating and awarding leases are outlined in 36 C.F.R. § 18.8. There are additional requirements and determinations within these regulations and the NPS Regional Director has been delegated the authority to make these determinations and execute the lease on behalf of the NPS. While the public does not have a formal role in the leasing process, they have a critical role to play by providing the NPS their opinion on the scope and scale of the services that could potentially be offered as part of the proposed redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area.

The NPS Regional Director also is delegated authority to execute concession contracts on behalf of the NPS up to certain revenue and term thresholds. Beyond these thresholds, the NPS Director or the NPS Associate Director of Business Services would execute concession contracts. Key milestones include the determination of necessary and appropriate services, prospectus development, selection of the best offer, and award of the concession contract. Similar to the leasing process, the public does not have a formal role in the concession contracting process, but they may provide the NPS their opinion on the scope and scale of the services that could be potentially offered as part of the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area.

12. Under the action alternatives, how will access to the site be addressed for non-resort guests?

Access to the beaches at the Caneel Bay area would be increased under all four preliminary alternatives, both commercial (action) alternatives and the non-commercial (no-action) alternative. Comments from the public are especially helpful if they describe to the NPS the level of access desired under any alternative concept.

13. When will the NPS analyze the environmental impacts from each of the preliminary alternatives?

In the next phase, the NPS will begin the NEPA process and will prepare an EA which will analyze the environmental impacts from the range of alternatives. NEPA reviews must take a “hard look” at impacts that alternatives under consideration would have on the human environment if implemented. Analyzing impacts means considering how the condition of a resource would change, either negatively or positively, as a result of implementing each of the alternatives under consideration. The public will have an opportunity to review the refined range of alternatives and impact analysis and provide comments on the EA when it is released for public review in the fall of 2022.

14. Where is the NPS in this planning process and what happens after the close of this civic engagement public comment period?

The NPS is early in the planning phases of this project. The NPS has not entered a formal NEPA process yet. The NPS is proactively reaching out to the public through this civic engagement process to present a conceptual range of preliminary alternatives. FAQ #3 discusses the civic engagement process in more detail. The NPS identified a preliminary proposed action as part of this civic engagement process. A preliminary proposed action is simply the initial NPS proposal to address the purpose and need and is not necessarily the NPS preferred alternative. A proposed action is one option (alternative) for addressing the purpose and need.

After closely reviewing all public comments submitted through this civic engagement process, the NPS will begin the NEPA process and prepare an EA in late summer/early fall of 2022. The EA will present a range of alternatives and impacts resulting from each alternative. The NPS Regional Director will identify a preferred alternative at that time,

which will be disclosed in the EA. The NPS will release the EA for public review and comment and host additional public meetings to seek feedback on the range of alternatives, environmental issues, impacts, and other document elements. The NPS will review and respond to substantive comments on the EA and prepare a decision document. The decision document will detail the selected action and include the NPS's responses to public comments on the EA and any changes to the EA as a result of public comments. The NPS anticipates that the NPS Regional Director will sign a decision document in Winter 2023.

Once the decision document is released and depending on the selected action, the NPS may move forward with a commercial services strategy at that time. This could include a Request for Proposals or a concessions prospectus for potential commercial services at the Caneel Bay area.

15. What type of comments are most helpful to the process?

Public involvement is a process that occurs on a continuum that ranges from providing information and building awareness. The NPS's role is to provide opportunities for the public to be involved in meaningful ways, listen to their concerns, values, and preferences, and consider these in shaping our decisions. The NPS opened a 30-day civic engagement public comment period and extended it by 15 days to allow for meaningful public comments on the information presented in the newsletter and other materials available online.

Public comments submitted through a civic engagement public comment period or a NEPA process are not a form of voting. Comments are most helpful if you can state specifically what you like and don't like and what improvements you think can be made to the information presented. Comments should be as specific as possible. For this phase, a substantive comment may provide new information about the conceptual range of preliminary alternatives; the draft purpose, need, and objectives; identify a different way to meet the need; and includes feedback on the environmental issues presented in the newsletter.

16. Who will decide what alternative is selected for implementation?

The NPS Regional Director will select the alternative for implementation with input from the interdisciplinary project team. After the EA is released for public review and comment, the NPS will consider and respond to substantive comments. If substantive comments do not result in the need for significant changes to an alternative for consideration or a need for reevaluation of environmental issues and/or impacts, and the results of the analysis show that the actions would not result in significant adverse impacts, the NPS Regional Director will sign a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) which will identify the selected alternative and summarize the environmental effects. The FONSI will be posted on PEPC and the public will be notified of the decision.

17. What role, if any, does the VI Territorial Government play in this planning process?

The VI Territorial Government has a consultation role during this planning process. For example, consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office and the Coastal Zone Management Program in the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) are ongoing.

18. How will the NPS ensure natural and cultural resources are protected at the Caneel Bay area once the RUE expires?

At the expiration of the RUE, regardless of the alternative selected for implementation, the NPS will assume management responsibilities for the natural and cultural resources at the Caneel Bay area. The NPS will manage natural and cultural resources consistent with the NPS Organic Act of 1916, NPS Management Policies 2006, the park's enabling legislation, and other park planning documents.

The NPS Organic Act of 1916 requires the NPS "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." The NPS's first obligation is to make sure that our decisions do not compromise park resources and the right of future generations to enjoy them.

When considering offering commercial visitor services through a concession contract, within a National Park unit such as Virgin Islands National Park, the NPS is required to ensure that public accommodations, facilities, and services are provided only under carefully controlled safeguards against unregulated and indiscriminate use so that visitation will not unduly impair those resources and values. Development of public accommodations, facilities, and services within Virgin Islands National Park would be limited to locations that are consistent to the highest practicable degree with the preservation and conservation of the resources and values of Virgin Islands National Park (54 USC § 101912).

After a decision is made through this planning effort, if the NPS issues a lease for the facilities at the Caneel Bay area, the NPS is required by law to ensure there will be no degradation of the purposes and values of Virgin Islands National Park (54 USC 102102).

After a decision is made through this planning effort, if the NPS issues a concession contract for necessary and appropriate visitor services at the Caneel Bay area, the NPS will consider the effect on, or need for, additional infrastructure and management of operations and be based on a determination that the facility or service is consistent with the enabling legislation of Virgin Islands National Park, compliments the park's mission and visitor service objectives, incorporates sustainable principles and practices, and will not cause unacceptable impacts to natural and cultural resources.