

Chapter 5

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT



Photograph by Dr. Steve Bach

South Shore of Buck Island

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CHAPTER 5 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of a proposed action or project and for identifying issues related to the project. During scoping for this General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement, NPS staff provided an overview of the project, including purpose and need and preliminary issues. The public has been involved and was asked to submit comments, concerns, and suggestions relating to the project and preliminary issues. The notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement was published in the *Federal Register* on February 28, 2003.

The public had varied avenues by which it participated during development of the plan: participating in public meetings, responding to newsletters, and submitting comments on the park's website by e-mail or letter. Input from the interested public, organizations, and local, state, and federal agencies was gathered throughout the planning process. At the beginning of the process, both internal NPS and external input was obtained as part of the scoping process. Input gathered during scoping was used to develop the alternatives and assess and compare the effects of management alternatives.

Internal scoping consisted of initial identification of issues by NPS staff based on what they had encountered with respect to managing park resources and experiences with visitors who enjoy the park. NPS meetings were held in Christiansted, St. Croix during the week of February 9, 2004 to obtain the park's initial input into the process.

The external scoping process provided early identification of concerns, issues, expectations, and values of existing and potential visitors, neighbors, cooperating associations, partners, scientists, scholars, and other government agencies. Public scoping meetings were advertised early June 2004. A newsletter describing the General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement process was prepared and distributed in June 2004 and also announced the public meeting schedule. A scoping letter was mailed to local, state, and federal agency representatives and the public in May 2004. The scoping letter contained information on the purpose and need for the general management plan, information on the planning process, and methods available to the public for communicating with the NPS planning team and participating in the planning effort, including public meeting locations and times.

The public was invited to voice issues and suggest ideas for the future of the park at three public scoping meetings held on June 23, 24, and 25, 2004 at the Park Headquarters (also headquarters for all 3 Virgin Island's park units). Press releases were issued prior to the public meetings, and comment cards and Internet addresses were provided for public use. Meetings were held with stakeholders during February 2004. These stakeholders included representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, local governments, environmental and other interest groups, local businesses, fishermen, the boating community, and concessioners. Information regarding the general management planning process was provided at the visitor center. Park staff also provided information to visitors regarding how to comment.

The public scoping comment period was open for 30 days, and 10 meetings were held with the interested public and stakeholders to obtain public comment on the process. Over 484 comments were received during scoping. The majority of comments pertained to mooring and anchoring, resource protection, enforcement, and presence of NPS staff. Issues identified are summarized in Chapter 1.

A second newsletter was prepared and distributed in July 2005 that described how the management alternatives were developed based on agency and public input, and announced public meetings that were held in August 2005. The alternatives were presented to the interested public during three meetings held in Christiansted, St. Croix on August 2, 3, and 4, 2005. Press releases were issued prior to the public meetings; radio announcements were made and interviews were held with the Superintendent. Fliers and signs announcing the meetings were posted. Comment forms were provided, and the public was notified how to comment via the Internet.

As a result of public meeting input, the alternatives were modified to provide one alternative with bow and stern anchoring as well as to increase the number of vessels the mooring areas and Anchoring Zones could accommodate. Concerns over the need for large vessel anchoring were also addressed by evaluating the historic demand / use by large vessels. Based upon resource conditions, avoidance of seagrasses, and presence of deep sands, five deep anchoring locations were identified for incorporation into all of the action alternatives. Subsequent to the public meetings, elkhorn and staghorn coral were listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Several measures were proposed to provide additional resource protection; the Marine Hazard Zone was prescribed and the Recreation Zone was adjusted to avoid sensitive corals. The plan was also updated to provide descriptions of climate change and potential effects to resources; the user capacity analysis was also updated to reflect NPS guidance.

Subsequent to the public meetings conducted in 2005 the park has provided updates regarding the status of the plan via radio interviews and public speaking engagements with local stakeholders and representatives.

The Next Steps

Following the distribution of the Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement, there will be a 60-day public review and comment period after which the NPS planning team will evaluate comments from other federal agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals regarding the draft plan. The team will incorporate appropriate changes into a Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement. The final plan will include letters from governmental agencies, any substantive comments on the draft document, and NPS responses to those comments. Following distribution of the Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement and a 30-day no-action period, a Record of Decision approving a final plan will be signed by the NPS southeast regional director. The record of decision documents the NPS selection of an alternative for implementation. Implementation of the plan can proceed upon final approval.

The General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement, newsletters and other information are posted on the Internet at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/BUIS>.

CONSULTATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES/OFFICIALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to the consultation described above, additional consultation with agencies was conducted prior to completing the Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement. Agency coordination letters are included in Appendix E.

In accordance with 36 CFR 800 and the Programmatic Agreement between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, and the NPS, a letter was sent to the State Historic Preservation Officer and to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to initiate consultation during June 2004. The letters invited them to participate in the planning process and informed them that the NPS plans to use this environmental impact statement to fulfill the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act as well as comply with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act. A meeting was also held in 2004 with the Virgin Island Historic Preservation Officer, and comments discussed were incorporated into this document.

The NPS consulted with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Offices under the terms of the Nationwide Programmatic Agreement for Section 106 compliance. Based on this consultation, the NPS determined what actions are programmatic exclusions, and for all other undertakings what actions would be required for review and comment under 36 Code of Federal Regulations 800.

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), the NPS contacted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service by letter to initiate consultation regarding threatened and endangered species. The Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources was also contacted by letter. Consultation letters were also sent to the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, and other agencies. A list of agencies contacted is provided in this chapter.

PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The Draft General Management Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement for Buck Island Reef National Monument represents thoughts of the NPS, Buck Island Reef National Monument staff, and the public. Consultation and coordination among the agencies and the public were vitally important throughout the planning process. The public had four primary avenues by which it participated during the development of the plan: participation in public meetings, responses to newsletters, comments submitted through the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment system (PEPC)(available on the internet at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/BUIS>), and comments submitted through the mail.

AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING A COPY OF THIS DOCUMENT OR NOTIFICATION OF AVAILABILITY

Federal Agencies

- Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
- Department of Homeland Security
- Federal Aviation Authority
- National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration/ National Marine Fisheries Service
- United States Attorneys Office
- United States Coast Guard
- United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- United States Department of the Interior Office of Insular Affairs
- United States Environmental Protection Agency
- United States Federal Bureau of Investigation
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- United States Geological Survey
- Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument

Leadership and Officers of the Virgin Islands

- Congresswoman Donna M. Christensen, Delegate to Congress
- Governor John P. de Jongh, Jr.
- Lt. Governor Gregory R. Francis
- Attorney General, Department of Justice
- President of the 29th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
- Senators of the 29th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
- St. Croix Administrator

Virgin Islands Government Agencies

- Caribbean Fishery Management Council
- Chief Executive Officer, Economic Development Authority
- Commissioner of Education
- Commissioner, Department of Housing, Parks & Recreation
- Commissioner, Department of Planning and Natural Resources

- Commissioner, Department of Public Works
- Commissioner, Department of Tourism
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs
- Director, State Historic Preservation Office
- High Intensity Drug Trafficking Agency
- Inspector General, Office of the Virgin Islands
- St. Croix Fisheries Advisory Committee
- Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Coastal Zone Management
- Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Coastal Zone Management, East End Marine Park
- Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Environmental Protection
- Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife
- Virgin Islands Energy Office
- Virgin Islands Fire Services
- Virgin Islands National Guard
- Virgin Islands Police Department
- Virgin Islands Port Authority
- Virgin Islands Territory Emergency Management Agency
- Waste Management Authority
- Water and Power Authority
- Estate Judith's Fancy Homeowners Association
- Farchette & Hanley Real Estate, Christiansted
- Florida Caribbean Cruise Association
- Gertudes
- Girl Scouts of America
- Golden Hook Fisherman's Club Inc.
- Green Cay Marina
- Hovensa (Hess Oil Venezuela South America)
- Island Resource Foundation
- Joint Institutes for Caribbean Marine Studies, Michael Bayer
- National Parks and Conservation Association
- N2 The Blue, Frederiksted
- Rotary Club of St. Croix (East, Mid-Island, and West)
- Salt River Homeowners Association
- SCUBA
- Scuba West
- Seaborne Seaplane Adventures
- Seven Seas Limited
- Sierra Club
- St. Croix Board of Realtors
- St. Croix Chamber of Commerce
- St. Croix Commercial Fisherman's Association
- St. Croix Environmental Association
- St. Croix Fisheries Advisory Committee
- St. Croix Foundation
- St. Croix Landmarks Society
- St. Croix Marina Corp.
- St. Croix Rescue Inc.
- St. Croix Tourism and Hotel Association
- St. Croix Yacht Club
- St. George Botanical Gardens
- Sweet Bottom, at Carambola Resort
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Ocean Conservancy
- Trust for Public Land
- U.S. Virgin Islands Hotel & Tourism Association
- VI Bare Boats

Organizations and Businesses

- Anchor Dive Center
- Boys Scouts of America
- Buccaneer Hotel
- Cane Bay Dive Shop
- CHANT
- Crabs Dive Club
- Cruzan Marine Services LLC.
- Dive Experience
- Divi Hotel

- VI Charter Yacht League
- Virgin Island Sea Trans – St.Croix Fast Ferry
- Virgin Islands Audubon Society
- Virgin Islands Sustainable Farm Institute

Media

- St. Croix Avis
- St. Croix This Week
- VI Source
- Virgin Islands Daily News
- da vybe Radio Station 107.9
- WJKC ISLE 95.1 FM Radio
- WSTX AM/FM Radio

- WVIQ Sunny 99.5 FM
- WSVI TV Channel 8
- WTJX TV Channel 12

Concessioners

- Big Beard Adventure Tours
- Caribbean Sea Adventures Inc.
- Dragon Fly
- Jolly Roger Charters
- Llewellyn's Charters
- Teroro II Inc.

Other Interested Individuals

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