



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE

75 Spring Street, S.W.

Atlanta, Georgia 30303

PLAN APPROVAL AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN/DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared a General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan for Virgin Islands National Park. The proposal, as well as alternative planning strategies for the park, are described in the General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment (GMP/DCP/EA), which was released in September 1983; the potential environmental impacts of implementing the plan are also described.

The purpose of this document is to: (1) record the comments received during the public review of the GMP/DCP/EA and to announce resulting modifications to the proposals, (2) approve the modified proposals as the General Management Plan (GMP) for Virgin Islands National Park, and (3) record a Finding of No Significant Impact based on analysis of the assessment.

Copies of the GMP/DCP/EA to which this FONSI should be attached are available on a limited basis from the park superintendent, or they may be inspected at the following locations:

Virgin Islands National Park
Redhook, NPS Dock
Box 7789, Charlotte Amalie
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00801

Cruz Bay Visitor Center
NPS Dock
Cruz Bay
St. John, Virgin Islands 00801

National Park Service
Southeast Regional Office
75 Spring St., SW
Atlanta, GA 30303

Christiansted National Historic Site
Old Customs House
Box 160, Christiansted
St. Croix, Virgin Islands 00820

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC RESPONSE

A preliminary proposal for Virgin Islands National Park was outlined in a brochure published in 1980. Public meetings on that proposal were held on St. John and St. Thomas Islands in July, and the oral and written comments were considered in the development of the proposal and alternatives presented in the GMP/DCP/EA. Comments received from territorial and Federal agencies, as well as from NPS managers and professionals, were also considered.

After the GMP/DCP/EA, along with a summary brochure and public response form, was released, public meetings and open houses were held on September 28, 29, and 30 on the islands of St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. Combined attendance at these meetings was 73 persons; 8 persons presented comments, representing 4 organizations and 3 individuals. The formal review period for written comments lasted until October 15, 1983.

Altogether comments were received from nine individuals, three research groups, two businesses, seven government agencies, and two nonprofit organizations. In addition, two petitions were received, one with 18 signatures and one with 10. The majority of respondents were from the Virgin Islands.

The 23 comments generally favored the proposal; however, the people who commented specifically on Hassel Island seemed to show comparable support for the proposal and alternative 2. The 18-signature petition favored alternative 2 for Lameshur, which would have provided an organized-group camp for use by Boy Scouts from the region instead of the research station. The 9-signature petition was opposed to improvements at Francis Bay.

Several commenters made suggestions for specific program changes--such as environmental education, research needs, protection of resources and visitors, signing, and volunteer work. These concerns have been noted by park management and will be considered by the staff.

PROPOSAL MODIFICATIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

The proposal presented in the GMP/DCP/EA, as modified below, will be implemented as the management program for Virgin Islands National Park.

HASSEL ISLAND

Visitor Use and Related Development

The proposal is modified to allow the development/restoration aspects of alternative 2 for Hassel Island (GMP/DCP/EA, page iv) to be implemented at a later date. If this is done, it will be necessary to

acquire rights to certain non-Federal tracts to provide for effective site circulation and facility development.

The cost estimate for Hassel Island development included in the GMP/DCP/EA (page 133) does not include certain items such as site clearing, restoration, demolition and removal of nonusable facilities, and rehabilitation of utility systems. Such items will be accomplished through the park's cyclic maintenance program. Stabilization costs are listed on page 175 and are included in the park's annual maintenance program.

Management of Cultural Resources

Future management of cultural resources will take into consideration any new data collected during planned studies, as requested by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. If the studies recommend a reduction in the preservation level recommended for the seven sites on Hassel Island, an amendment to the GMP/DCP/EA will be prepared.

Historic properties owned by the Virgin Islands Government (Garrison House, Fort Willoughby, and Cowell's Battery) may be transferred to the National Park Service through a negotiated agreement, as described in alternative 2. Under the proposal, the Park Service is to operate the sites by agreement but would accept ownership by donation or exchange from the Virgin Islands Government. A transfer of ownership may be preferable to the territory because the Park Service would manage adjacent areas and visitor use.

ST. JOHN ISLAND

Visitor Use and Related Development

During the comment period, Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., donated its ownership of some 150 acres (including three offshore islands known as the Durloe Cays) to the National Park Service, retaining the exclusive right for Caneel Bay, Inc., to occupy and use the property for 40 years (see Landownership map, GMP/DCP/EA, page 105). The National Park Service will prepare a management plan for the area to ensure that park resources, visitor use, and facilities maintain their integrity and are managed consistently with the legal requirements.

At Reef Bay, the site will be left undeveloped, in keeping with the intent of the roadless unit to provide a primitive setting.

Management of Natural Resources

Black coral is recognized and will be protected as a special resource.

Improvements called for at Francis Bay (GMP/DCP/EA, pages 34-35) will take into account the bird habitat at Mary Point Pond.

Management of Cultural Resources

Management of cultural resources will take into consideration any new data collected during planned studies, as requested by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. If the studies recommend a reduction in the preservation level of the seven selected sites on St. John, an amendment to the GMP/DCP/EA will be prepared.

The GMP/DCP/EA proposes including Estate Beverhoudt within the park; however, based on a reanalysis of the boundary alternatives, natural and cultural resource inventories and analyses will be conducted first to determine whether this property qualifies for inclusion. If it is included, it will be part of the natural zone; and the estate itself will be treated as an archeological resource, affording it the same protection as other like cultural resources now within the park (see GMP/DCP/EA, pages 57-58).

The State Historic Preservation Officer commented that the archeological data in the GMP/DCP/EA demonstrated a need for further archeological inquiry to better establish the occupational sequence. The proposal calls for this on page 57. The need for improved curation of artifacts is addressed by the proposal to complete a collection preservation guide and to provide environmentally-controlled storage at Lind Point (page 31).

Archeological interpretations of occupational sequences will be refined as a result of the archeological studies proposed in the plan.

Protection of Lands and Waters

Generally, public comments did not support deleting park lands; instead they requested that less or no area be removed from the park. Further studies are needed to determine potential adjustments to the park's boundaries at Bordeaux Mountain/Ajax Peak, Cocoloba Village, and Susannaberg.

Specifically, proposals to delete lands from the park (see GMP/DCP/EA, pages 50-51, 105) raised concerns that valuable resources identified through recent resource studies would be removed from protection. It also was learned that some lands proposed for deletion that were believed to be outside the park's watershed actually drained into the park, posing the possibility of damage to public resources from pollution and sedimentation. The GMP/DCP/EA incorrectly stated that the tracts proposed for removal from the park were not needed "because they do not possess special resource values, are not used by other visitors, and do not protect other parklands." The boundary adjustments recommended in the modified proposal described below correct this statement. Furthermore, surveys and inventories will be made before any areas are deleted to ensure that they do not possess park values.

Park acreage on the island of St. John is limited by Congress to 9,485 acres of land and 5,650 acres of water. Currently on St. John there are 8,896.23 acres of land and 5,650 acres of water. Thus 589 acres of land may be added to the park. The inclusion of the Battery Gut tract (171.60 acres) and the deletion of the incinerator site (15.15 acres) at Susannaberg will result in a net park increase of 156.45 acres.

On page 51, the second sentence of the second paragraph should read "The National Park Service will be guided by the following criteria in protecting lands within its authorized boundary." The park's Land Protection Plan (underway) will describe the land protection strategy and will establish priorities on a tract by tract basis.

Bordeaux Mountain/Ajax Peak. The present boundary in the Coral Bay area will be retained. The vegetation on the upper slopes above Coral Bay is approaching a stable community, and several rare species have recently been found. Under the proposal in the GMP/DCP/EA, the Bordeaux Mountain Road would have skirted the boundary, but owners outside the park could have sought new access ways and possibly disrupted the scenic aspects of the corridor with new construction. Ongoing vegetative studies may indicate areas that may eventually be deleted from the park without loss of important values and thus may warrant adjustment to the park boundary.

Cocoloba Village. The proposal to delete 82 acres of parkland in the Fish Bay drainage will be rescinded. Examination has disclosed that the proposed deletion includes lands that are inside a park watershed, and thus violates the intent of the GMP/DCP/EA (see pages 50-51).

Scientific inquiry has also revealed that over a third of all the nesting by the endangered hawksbill turtle on St. John park beaches occurs on the headland from near Cocoloba Cay northward toward Fish Bay. Although these beaches comprise a tiny percentage of the St. John park beach area, developments upslope could threaten siltation and pollution, which could affect coral survival in the area and potentially impact the beaches. Lights from these developments could also disorient hatchlings during their crucial crawl to the sea. These developable lands are not only within the park watershed and turtle habitat, they are also at the edge of the magnificent watershed/viewshed designated as the Reef Bay roadless unit (GMP/DCP/EA, pages 18 and 47). Additional development here would produce significant impacts on the park's scenic quality, could damage its marine resources, and could further threaten endangered species.

The ongoing Land Protection Plan will identify the agreements/ownerships needed in this area to ensure that existing developments do not significantly impact park resources. It will also ensure that where developments intrude on the Reef Bay roadless area, they will eventually be removed from the park. Incompatible new developments will also be precluded.

Susannaberg. Several tracts in this area that were proposed for deletion from the park will be retained. As a result of these modifications, the boundary at Susannaberg is essentially the same as the existing boundary except that the present incinerator/solid waste disposal site will be deleted, pending a resource survey.

The land owned by the Virgin Islands Government where the hospital is located will be kept in the park. It is in the watershed and viewshed tributary to Hawksnest Bay, and it is also in part of the tributary to Battery Gut, which drains into Fish Bay and is near park beaches where concentrated turtle nesting occurs. (The tract is not privately owned, as shown on the Landownership map, GMP/DCP/EA, page 108.)

The tract east of the hospital tract and south of Centerline Road, which also was proposed for deletion, will be retained to help protect the Battery Gut drainage.

A special inventory of natural and cultural resources in the Battery Gut tract will be done to determine if it should be added to the park. If that study is negative, the need to retain other park lands in the Battery Gut drainage will be reanalyzed.

Land Protection Policy. During the investigation of the Cocoloba Village area, it was observed that development of a private inholding northeast of Cocoloba Cay and immediately above the shoreline has begun.

Development of this tract is producing a significant impact on the scenic quality of the park's roadless unit, and threatens the nesting of endangered turtles on the beaches below and offshore corals because of sedimentation. This situation could compromise NPS management in Virgin Islands National Park.

Based on the imminent development of prime park lands, which could result in significant environmental effects, this document proposes the use of condemnation in crisis cases. The solicitor's counsel will be sought regarding the use of condemnation, and appropriate action will be taken to ensure protection of park resources.

Management Zoning

Due to their significant natural and visual value and their sensitivity to development, white sand beaches and prominent ridgelines are included in the natural zone.

Operations

The Virgin Islands government is seeking a site to incinerate solid waste and dispose of the ash and residue. One site being considered is on NPS land at Hermitage on the eastern portion of St. John. An agreement is in effect with the territory authorizing conditional use of this site for these purposes. Although the issue was not addressed in the GMP/DCP/EA, a separate environmental document (Assessment of Alternatives, Solid Waste Study, Virgin Islands National Park) was published in 1977, and use of the site for solid waste disposal was also identified during the September 1983 public meetings.

This document recognizes that the site may be used for incineration and ash and residue disposal (pending policy clearance) if the territory selects it. In this event, the Management Zoning map (GMP/DCP/EA, page 53) will be modified to include a park development zone at this site.

Any NPS employee quarters that are an intrusion on the natural scene will be relocated, as conditions permit. (The GMP/DCP/EA proposed the relocation of only two residences, at Trunk Bay and Francis Bay.)

The Cruz Bay NPS operations center is subject to flooding. The park's emergency operations plan will be revised to provide for emergency operations at another location in the event of a flood.

SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The potential environmental consequences of the proposal and the alternatives are described in the GMP/DCP/EA (pages 140-150), with the exception of the modifications described in this document. Consequences of these modifications are stated below.

Deleting the proposal to construct a dock at Reef Bay will eliminate impacts of construction and the intrusion of a development. Visitors will have a more natural, but less convenient, experience.

Modifications to the boundary as proposed in the GMP/DCP/EA will retain the vegetative types listed on page 141 within the park.

If the management plan to be produced for the newly added Caneel Bay property contains proposals resulting in potential impacts, then an environmental assessment will be prepared. Historical and other compliance requirements will also be addressed.

An environmental analysis for an incinerator/trash disposal site at Hermitage was included as part of an October 1977 Assessment of Alternatives for solid waste disposal. Further environmental analysis will be conducted before initiating incineration at Hermitage or other potential NPS sites.

The GMP/DCP/EA documents compliance with the Endangered Species Act (see pages 49, 57, 85, and 164-167), Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 concerning floodplains and wetland management (see page 56 and attached Statement of Findings) and other environmental regulations. The GMP/DCP/EA cites future needs for State and Federal permits for dock construction (page 56) and relates the proposal to the territory's Coastal Zone Management Program (page 56). Based on informal consultation with the territory and the territory's response to the GMP/DCP/EA, the National Park Service has determined that the proposed action is consistent with the Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management Plan.

Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, has been completed. This is in accordance with the 1981 amendments to the 1979 Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Park Service, and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers. Pursuant to the 1981 amendments, informal consultation has been held with the State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council. The territory submitted its comments on the GMP/DCP/EA on September 30, and the Advisory Council on October 4. Their comments have been addressed in this document. Upon issuance of this Finding of No Significant Impact, the Advisory Council and the State Historic Preservation Officer will have 15 days to consider the modified plan, under the terms of the Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement.

CONCLUSION

After a review of the GMP/DCP/EA and the public response to it, the proposals as modified by this document are approved as the General Management Plan for Virgin Islands National Park.

The implementation of the revised proposals will not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the human environment, and an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Recommended: _____

Noel Pachita
Superintendent

Virgin Islands National Park

Date: 3-1-84

Approved: _____

Mr. [Signature]
Regional Director
Southeast Region

Date: 3/9/84



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE

75 Spring Street, S.W.

Atlanta, Georgia 30303

STATEMENT OF FINDINGS VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN/DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

In September 1983 the National Park Service published Virgin Islands National Park General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment (GMP/DCP/EA) as part of the process for adopting a new general management plan for the park. Included in the GMP/DCP/EA are criteria for complying with Executive Orders 11988 ("Floodplain Management") and 11990 ("Protection of Wetlands") which require Federal agencies to evaluate the probable impacts of their action on floodplains and wetlands. The objectives of the executive orders are to avoid to the extent possible the long-term and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy modification or destruction of floodplains and wetlands and to avoid indirect support of development and new construction in such areas wherever there is a practicable alternative.

The purpose of this statement of findings is to present the rationale for locating proposed actions in floodplains and to document the anticipated effects on floodplain and wetland values.

FLOODPLAINS AND WETLANDS IN THE REGION

Flood insurance rate maps (FIRM) for the Virgin Islands delineating the 100-year and 500-year floodplains and coastal high hazard areas (i.e., 100-year flood with wave action) were prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1980. Flood levels are general estimates based on predicated storm surges and inland runoff. According to the FIRM's, the coastal high hazard area on St. Thomas and St. John is limited to a narrow margin less than 25-feet-wide along the shoreline. The 100-year floodplain extends inland to the 5-foot elevation on the northern side of the islands and the 6-foot elevation on the southern side. The FIRM's show that the NPS docks and dockside facilities at Redhook (including the dock, visitor contact and storage building), Cruz Bay, Great Lameshur Bay (dock only) are in the coastal high hazard area. Facilities within the 100-year floodplain (but not subject to wave action) include picnic/beach recreation structures at Hawksnest Bay, Trunk Bay, Cinnamon Bay, Francis Bay, Saltpond Bay, and Little Lameshur Bay. More substantial facilities within the 100-year floodplain are the Cinnamon Bay Danish warehouse (historic), the Maho Bay picnic pavilion, the wet lab at Great Lameshur Bay, and two historic structures at Little Lameshur Bay. No park residences lie within the 100-year floodplain.

In addition to flood levels shown on the insurance rate maps, specific flood levels have been mapped by the U.S. Geological Survey for the Cinnamon Bay campground. Although the campground is not shown on the flood maps to be within the 100-year floodplain, portions of it are periodically subjected to flooding from upland runoff.

On Hassel Island the historic wharves and the contemporary boat landings at the Royal Mail Inn, the Garrison House, and Careening Cove are within the coastal high hazard area according to the FIRM's. Historic ruins and nonhistoric apartments and other structures at the Royal Mail Inn, and Careening Cove are within the 100-year floodplain, as are the historic ruins of Creque's Marine Railway.

Wetlands within the park consist of mangrove swamps and salt ponds. These habitats are highly valued for their ecological role in shoreline stabilization and wildlife protection.

THE PROPOSAL IN RELATION TO FLOODPLAINS AND WETLANDS

A proposal and three alternative strategies are described in detail in the GMP/DCP/EA. Since publication of the GMP/DCP/EA the proposal has been revised as described in the enclosed Finding of No Significant Impact, General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan, Virgin Islands National Park. The revised proposal does not call for new development locations within the park, but rather proposes upgrading or expanding existing developed sites.

Under the proposal, beach recreation facilities, historic structures and some park operations facilities (for example, docks, picnic tables, and changing stalls) will remain within the coastal high hazard area and 100-year floodplains. Because their functions depend on being close to water, such developments are excepted under NPS guidelines from the restrictions of Executive Order 11988, "Floodplain Management" (see Federal Register, August 23, 1982). Rehabilitation of the existing dockside operations/visitor contact center at Cruz Bay will incorporate methods for minimizing flood damage, as contained in the national flood insurance program's "Floodplain Management Criteria for Flood-Prone Areas" (44 CFR 60.3). Although campground facilities are excepted under NPS guidelines from restrictions on floodplain development, the proposal calls for modifying portions of the existing Cinnamon Bay campground, which will better ensure visitor safety and restore floodplain values to the extent practicable. Existing residences on Hassel Island now owned by the NPS will be removed. The park staff will continue to maintain a preparedness plan to provide for adequate evacuation time and property security in floodplains prior to a hurricane or major storm; the preparedness plan has proven effective in the past.

Protection of floodplain and wetland natural values is a primary emphasis in proposed resources management. Mangrove stands and salt ponds have been designated within the "outstanding natural features" subzone of the park, and such sites will be diligently protected from future development or other disruption. Mangroves and salt ponds will be used for their educational, recreational, and scientific qualities through expanded interpretive and research programs.

The three alternative strategies in the GMP/DCP/EA vary only slightly in the extent of developments in floodprone areas and in the degree of floodproofing of structures. An alternative to remove all facilities from floodplains was not considered feasible because the primary recreational resources in the park are water related, wetlands are sufficiently protected under the proposal and each alternative.

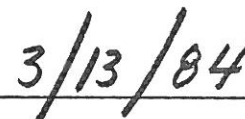
CONCLUSION

The National Park Service concludes that there is no practicable alternative to locating facilities at Virgin Islands National Park in the 100-year floodplain and coastal high hazard area. However, under the proposal no new floodplains or wetlands will be occupied and visitor safety and property protection from flood damage will be improved. Floodplain and wetland values will be enhanced by proposed interpretive, research and resource management actions, by removal of nonhistoric structures on Hassel Island, and by rehabilitation of the Cruz Bay operations/visitor center and Cinnamon Bay campground. The NPS finds the proposal to be acceptable under Executive Orders 11988 and 11990.

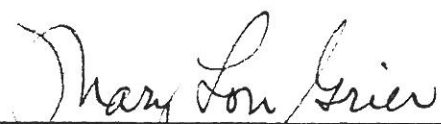
Recommended:


Regional Director
Southeast Region

Date:



Approved:


Director, National Park Service

Date:

