
Accessible Trails

Francis Bay Hiking Trail
Project Proposal
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Organizational Background

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park (Friends) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and protection of the natural and cultural resources of Virgin Islands National Park (Park) and promotes the responsible enjoyment of this unique national treasure. As the official private sector partner to the Park, the Friends is a membership organization that raises funds from individuals, corporations and foundations to support projects important to the Park and to further our mission.

Money raised by the Friends supports environmental education, natural resource conservation, cultural preservation and scientific research. The Friends also acts as an advocate for our National Park, particularly on issues that threaten its precious natural or cultural resources.

Incorporated in 1988, the Friends is governed by a 13-member volunteer Board of Directors. Our full-time staff consists of the president, development director and program manager. On a part time basis, we employ an office assistant and bookkeeper. Our office is located just outside the Park in Cruz Bay on St. John, US Virgin Islands.

The National Park Service, Friends of Virgin Islands National Park, and St. John architect Robert Crane, will work in partnership to build an accessible trail around the Francis Bay salt pond on St. John. The total cost of this project is \$71,000.

Project Summary

Virgin Islands National Park is located on the beautiful island of St. John in the Caribbean. While St. John's physical landscape is breathtaking in its natural beauty, its attributes includes many rugged features and steep slopes. It is these very attributes which makes it particularly challenging, and often inaccessible to those with mobility challenges.

Virgin Islands National Park receives over one million visitors each year. At present, the vast majority of VI National Park is inaccessible to those in wheelchairs, or to those who require the assistance of walking aides such as canes and walkers, or even those who are just unsteady on their feet. This thwarts these individuals from experiencing the many benefits of a natural, outdoor encounter, and limits their enjoyment of our National Park.

The goal of the accessible trails project is to deliver an enhanced visitor experience for individuals with mobility challenges, by providing increased access into Virgin Islands National Park, and encouraging greater visitation by visitors with mobility concerns.

VI National Park has 23 maintained hiking trails, which provides Park visitors with a total of approximately 22 miles of vigorous hiking. Unfortunately, not one of these trails is handicapped accessible. It is our goal to create a hiking path that will be accessible to those in wheelchairs, in an area that is relatively flat and easily accessible from an established parking

area. This will provide access to all Park visitors who are looking to be a part of their natural surroundings, and enjoy all that this National Park offers.

This project is the first of several efforts to make several trails more accessible and open the Park to those with mobility concerns. The Francis Bay trail will be made more accessible in two phases. The first phase, the portion of the trail that accesses the lower portion of the trail is the subject of this proposal. The second phase will connect the upper portion of the trail to the beach and the boardwalk. Another project is envisaged at Cinnamon Bay, making the Cinnamon Bay ruins and Loop Trail accessible.

Project Personnel

Chief Law Enforcement Ranger – National Park Service. Chief Ranger in Virgin Islands National Park will serve as the Park’s liaison on the project and ensure that NPS regulations are observed.

Robert Crane – Architect, is responsible for the design of the boardwalk and will provide other technical assistance.

Joe Kessler – President, Friends of Virgin Islands National Park. Joe Kessler will serve as the project director and principal contact, responsible for project and budget management and reporting. .

Proposal

Virgin Islands National Park is comprised of approximately 8,700 terrestrial acres, and another 6,000 acres of submerged lands. More than half of the island of St. John is protected parkland. It is the incredible diversity of deep, lush green valleys, steep mountain peaks, azure waters, wetlands and desert fields, which makes St. John unique in that it sustains a considerable variety of ecological habitats. The grandeur and spectacular beauty of St. John is exactly the substance needed to establish a National Park and why it became our nation’s 29th National Park.

Each year, Virgin Islands National Park receives more than one million visitors. Some of whom require the assistance of a wheelchair, walker, or cane. These individuals are generally surprised and disappointed that VINP has little to offer them in terms of outdoor experiences in the Park due to lack of access. Our goal is to increase access into the Park for these individuals, which will allow them to enhance the quality of their visit.

Francis Bay Walking Trail

The Francis Bay Walk Trail is in Virgin Islands National Park on St. John’s north shore. This is an existing trail, which is 0.4 miles in length and circles a salt pond directly behind the beach at Francis Bay. This trail passes by the historic Francis Bay Estate House ruins, and, as it is one of the prime bird watching venues, is regularly used by park rangers for the Park’s bird watching walks. This area is relatively flat and will more readily lend itself to adaptation for our intended purpose than most other Park trails.

The Francis Bay Trail is long established and the soil is solidly compacted and stable. In many areas, the work that will need to be done is simply grading the trail already in place to make it accessible. This phase of the project will focus on the 700 foot section of the trail that runs parallel to both the beach and the salt pond. To make this area accessible will require the construction of a boardwalk. During rainy season, this portion of the trail can be covered by water, and a boardwalk will eliminate the any challenges an unusually wet season may pose. The trail begins at the Francis Bay access road, about 50 feet from the parking area.

Project Budget

Item	Amount	Notes
1. Construction materials	36,700	See attached materials list; includes shipping costs from Florida.
2. Labor	20,000	2 carpenters & 3 laborers – 4 weeks
3. Equipment rental	2,500	Generator & cement mixer
Subtotal	59,200	
4. Project management	11,800	
Total	\$71,000	

Budget Summary

Two master carpenters will be needed for one month to oversee the technical work of the project. A crew of three labors will be hired for the same one month period to assist in the construction.

The boardwalk will be constructed of Trex™ decking material, a product made of plastic and wood fibers from reclaimed or recycled resources. This product works particularly well in the tropical Caribbean climate. The plastic protects the wood from moisture and insect damage, which will prevent rotting and splitting. The wood will protect the plastic from UV damage. This product requires little maintenance and has a long life span. About half of the cost of materials is for the Trex™. Please contact Karen Brady for a detailed materials list.

Schedule

Work is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2008, assuming that funding is available. The projected timeline for work to be completed is one month.