

Virgin Islands National Park

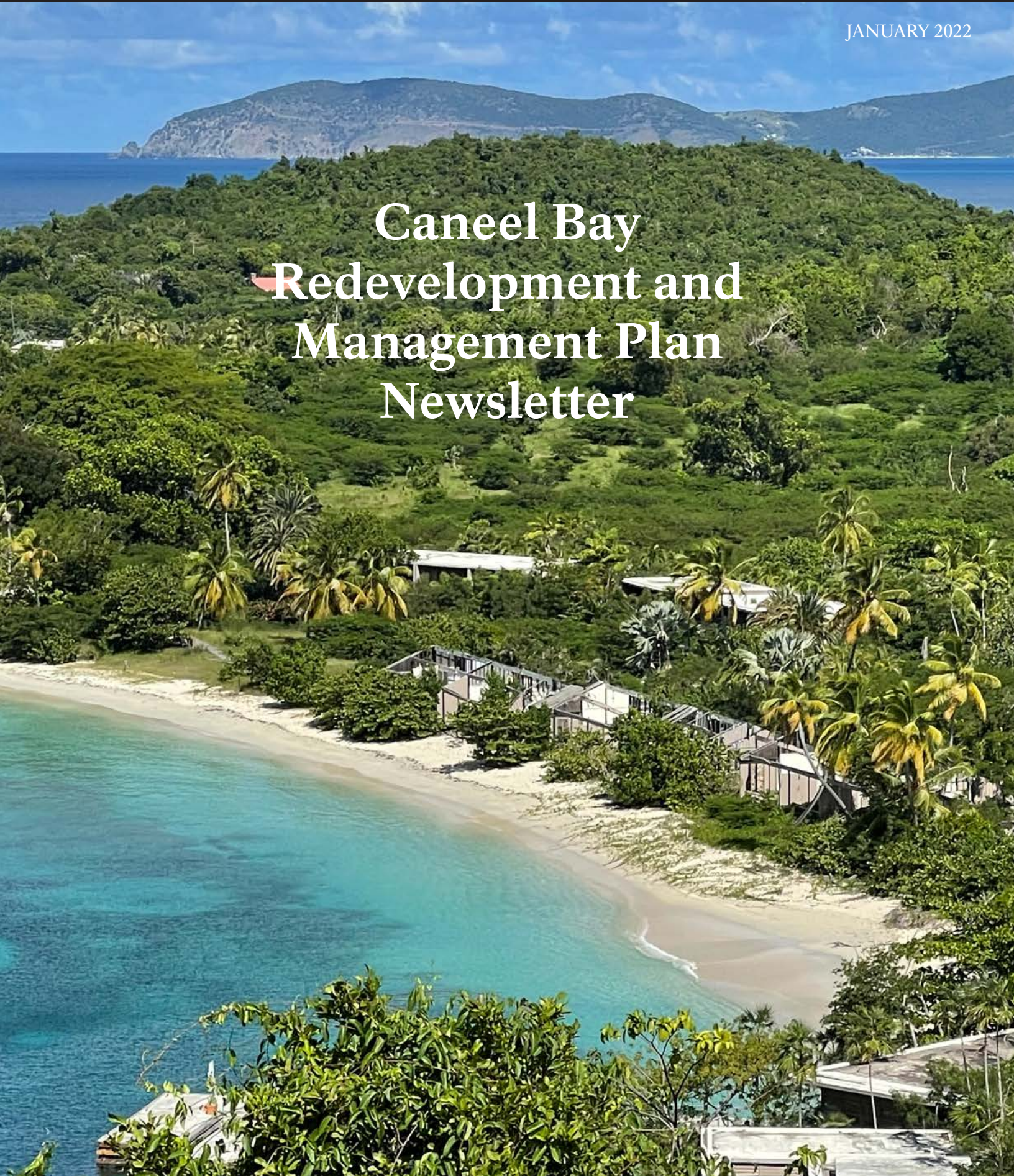
Caneel Bay Redevelopment and Management Plan

National Park Service
US Department of the Interior



JANUARY 2022

Caneel Bay Redevelopment and Management Plan Newsletter



You're Invited.

Dear Board Members,
Staff and Members of Friends of Virgin Islands National Park,

The National Park Service (NPS) is beginning the planning process for the redevelopment and management of the Caneel Bay area at Virgin Islands National Park (Park). This process will establish a management strategy for the 150-acre property currently operated under a Retained Use Estate (RUE) expiring on September 30, 2023.

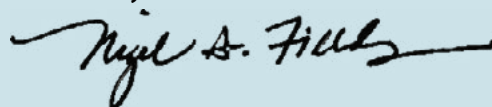
As part of this process, the NPS is initiating a 30-day public comment period. During this period, the NPS will host a series of public meetings, including a virtual public meeting, and conduct other local civic engagement to share information about the planning process, the preliminary purpose and need, the conceptual range of alternatives, and environmental issues in the planning area. The Friends of Virgin Islands National Park (Friends) are encouraged to share observations, comments, and ideas about the information presented in this newsletter and at the public meetings. The NPS will use the information obtained during this civic engagement outreach to refine the conceptual range of alternatives and ensure that we have the necessary information to move forward in the planning process.

As the Park's primarily philanthropic partner with over 30 years of shared investment in conservation, and with your mission to protect and preserve the park resources while connecting visitors to the park and the park to the community your participation is needed. I believe the expertise, resourcefulness and experience base of the Friends can help the NPS across the entire planning process.

Additional opportunities for public comment will be available later this year. Once we have refined the conceptual range of alternatives and can analyze potential impacts, the NPS will begin the second phase of planning, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. At that time, the NPS intends to release an Environmental Assessment (EA) for public comment.

The Caneel Bay area is vital to the heritage, progress, and enjoyment of St. John and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Through this planning effort, the NPS wants to ensure the future of Caneel Bay is planned with consideration for the voices of the communities whose histories we are charged with preserving and our visitors. The interests and issues are broad and complex, and as such, the NPS values the ideas and expertise of your Board, staff and members. We look forward to working with you to create a shared vision for the future redevelopment and management of Caneel Bay.

Sincerely,



Nigel A. Fields
Superintendent

Virtual Meeting Date

FEBRUARY 8, 2022
6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. AST

How to Participate

For information on the public meeting, navigate to <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayRedevelopment> and click on the 'Meeting Notices' tab



Caneel Bay Area Redevelopment and Management Plan

BACKGROUND

In the mid-1950s, Laurance Rockefeller established Caneel Bay Resort (resort) as an early model of ecotourist luxury accommodations to highlight the natural beauty of St. John. Within the boundaries of the resort are culturally significant ruins and archeological sites that span the archaic period through European colonialism and post-colonial emancipation. The resort was operated continuously from the 1950s through 2017, when it closed due to damage from Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Prior to the hurricanes, the property was operating as a luxury resort with approximately 100 buildings and structures used for lodging (166 rooms), food services, recreation, maintenance, security, and utilities. The resort facilities are bordered by pristine beaches and undeveloped land. Prior to the 2017 hurricanes, elements of the property

had been determined by NPS to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as an historic district.

In 1983, Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. donated the 150-acre property to NPS for inclusion within the Park, subject to a 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 of great interest and concern to the community, the Park, and potential operators of the resort.

The future of Caneel Bay was the subject of a previous EA released to the public in 2013 that considered entering into a long-term lease under the terms described in Public Law (PL) 111-261. The NEPA process was never completed. No significant repairs or improvements have been made to the resort since the 2017 hurricanes and the Caneel Bay area is no longer operating as a resort. In July 2021, the NPS announced it would discontinue plans to redevelop Caneel Bay via a non-competitive lease as authorized under PL 111-261. The NPS hopes to solicit qualified applicants through a competitive process for the long-term partnership needed to successfully redevelop parts of the Caneel Bay area while protecting natural and cultural resources. Plans for the Caneel Bay area are subject to compliance with NEPA. An EA will be prepared to evaluate potential impacts from the NPS proposed action and alternatives for the future use of the site.

In April 2021, the NPS conducted civic engagement through a virtual listening session and used the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website to engage the public and gather feedback. From the comments received, several themes emerged including the historic significance of the area, the importance of public access by residents, the value of the resort to the local economy, the deep affection for the Caneel Bay area and the need to protect the existing natural and cultural resources.

PRELIMINARY PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of the plan is to identify a sustainable and resilient redevelopment strategy for the Caneel Bay area that preserves and protects its significant cultural and natural resources while providing a range of visitor experiences, including overnight and day use opportunities, and promotes economic activities that integrate the values and history of the community of St. John.

A plan is needed to address ongoing cultural and natural resource impacts associated with Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 and to integrate Caneel Bay 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.

NPS objectives include:

- Establish a NPS experience through the presence of on-site NPS personnel to provide interpretation, education, and resource protection as well as providing a space for cultural expression.
- Provide for economic opportunities at Caneel Bay through the establishment of commercial services.
- Ensure the redevelopment of Caneel Bay preserves and protects natural, cultural, and marine resources while blending with the landscape as envisioned by Laurance Rockefeller.
- Integrate the current RUE footprint into the park to maximize operational efficiencies and ensure compliance with law, regulation, and policy.

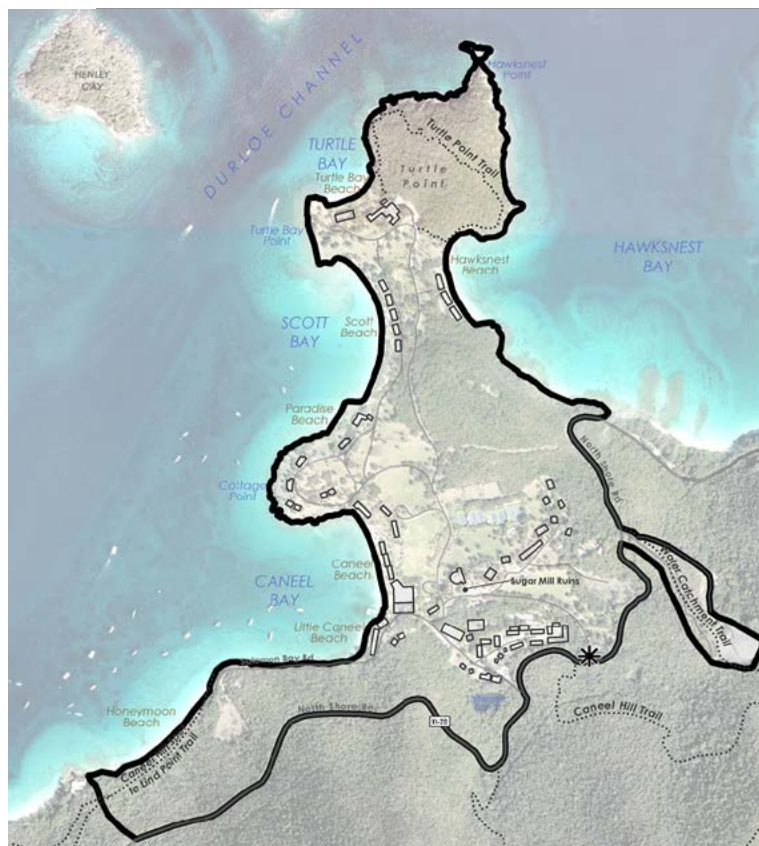


Figure 1. Maps showing the study area within the Virgin Islands National Park which includes the Caneel Bay area (right) and the existing Park's maintenance facility in Cruz Bay.

STUDY AREA

The study area for the redevelopment and management plan includes the 150 acres subject to the RUE and surrounding areas as shown in Figure 1. The study area also includes the Park's existing maintenance facility on North Shore Road in Cruz Bay.

CONCEPTUAL RANGE OF PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

Conceptual Range of Preliminary Alternatives
The NPS' conceptual range of preliminary alternatives includes a no-action alternative, a proposed action, and two other action alternatives, presented below and supported by Figures 2-4. For all preliminary alternatives,

the NPS anticipates that the environmental investigation and remediation under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), and its implementing regulations, the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP), would be completed prior to redevelopment activities. Under all alternatives, the NPS would assume management responsibilities of the Caneel Bay area.

NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The no-action alternative would largely leave the historic structures in place and preserve the buildings' forms and outlines. Potential removal of portions of isolated or compromised twentieth century architectural features would occur. The NPS would manage the site to allow the proposed historic district to retain its integrity to the extent resources are available. Existing trails and viewing area(s)

may be rehabilitated, and information on site hazards would be provided for public safety, education, and protection of the site.

The NPS would identify a management approach (such as stabilization) to address the damage to resources from the 2017 hurricanes and deferred maintenance. The NPS or partner groups would monitor natural and cultural resources such as sea turtles, shorebirds, coral, historic ruins, and archeological sites, as necessary and required by law. Existing moorings would be used as is, and no new moorings would be added at the Caneel Bay area.

ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL PRELIMINARY ACTION ALTERNATIVES

CULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION – Cultural resources protection would occur in all action alternatives, including surveys to determine the condition of historic structures, historic ruins, and archeological sites as defined in Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The NPS would take measures to address the damage to historic properties caused by the storm events. Historic properties include archeological sites, colonial era ruins and buildings, and historic mid-century architecture of the resort.

NPS and its partners would continue monitoring and protecting natural resources such as sea turtles, coral, seagrasses, and sensitive vegetation species. NPS would provide management and oversight of resource protection and compliance activities at the Caneel Bay area.

CONTEXT SENSITIVE REDEVELOPMENT - Future site redevelopment would maintain the visual quality of the site and protect the Park’s viewsheds and dark night skies by using down lighting; rebuilding within the existing building footprints to the extent practicable; only elevating structures for storm surge and flood resiliency; and using exterior paint colors

that blend in with the environment. Future redevelopment would be consistent with the goals and policies of the Virgin Islands (VI) Coastal Zone Management Program, and new development would only occur outside of the existing floodplains. Redevelopment would be designed to be sustainable, resilient, and energy efficient, as well as to meet accessibility requirements. The site developers/operators would be required to comply with applicable environmental laws and NPS requirements, which would be written into or incorporated by reference into a lease or concessions contract.

RESORT GUEST EXPERIENCE COMMENSURATE WITH THE SITE HISTORY – Under all preliminary action alternatives, the NPS would work with a developer/operator to create a visitor experience that is in keeping with the design intent of the original resort. All resort concepts proposed by a developer/operator would not exceed previous lodging capacity to create a visitor experience consistent with the vision of Laurance Rockefeller.

GREATER PUBLIC ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES – All preliminary action alternatives provide for greater public access to the Caneel Bay area, including day use access at some locations. There are variations to the public access approach described under each of the preliminary action alternatives.

PUBLIC LAW 111- 261

Public Law 111-261 signed on October 8, 2010 authorized the NPS, subject to several limiting conditions, to enter into a long-term lease with the owner of the RUE for continued resort operations upon relinquishment of the remaining term of the RUE. The conditions include the requirement that the NPS may only enter into such a lease if it ensures that the general character of the resort property remains unchanged, including a prohibition against any increase in the overall size of the resort and any increase in the number of guest accommodations available at the resort.



Commercial operations at the site would be operated in a manner consistent with the sustainability ethos of the NPS. Developers/operators would be selected through a competitive commercial services process by the NPS and would be required to demonstrate their ability to execute a sustainable commercial operations. Visitor services such as food, beverage, water sports rental would be managed by a developer/operator in areas designated by the NPS. Commercial operations at the Caneel Bay area would contribute to the local economy of St. John by creating jobs and providing local business opportunities. The developer/operator would be responsible for designing and operating any on-site utility systems for the needs of the resort, including water, wastewater, power, security, and communications systems. Any new utility systems would use the existing footprint of the resort utilities to the extent possible.

As part of any commercial operation at the site, the NPS would specify that developers/

operators provide opportunities for local businesses and community engagement at the site. Examples could include a commitment to fair wages and employment of the residents of St. John, partnerships with local organizations such as the University of the Virgin Islands for candidates in the hospitality and tourism management degree program and culinary experiences, and opportunities for local artists and vendors to sell local goods at the site.

ALTERNATIVE A – PRELIMINARY PROPOSED ACTION

The NPS preliminary proposed action, identified as Alternative A, aims to balance enhanced public access, recreational opportunities, resource protection, and Park operational efficiency while reestablishing an overnight experience at the resort that

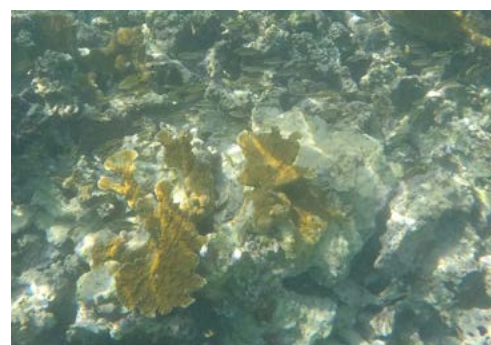


AB FORCES NEWS COLLECTION / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Photo Left: Storm damage from the 2017 hurricanes at Scott Beach and Hawksnest Beach.

Photo Right Top and Bottom Right: A "coastal zone" includes many features such as cultural resources, corals, seagrasses, beaches and shorelines. This coastal zone is home to many sensitive plant and animal marine species such as green turtles (photo source NPS) and coral species such as staghorn coral.



considers the Caneel Bay Resort legacy. Figure 2 shows the NPS redevelopment and management approach for the Caneel Bay area. Management zones are described below.

RESORT ZONE – The resort area would be designated for the resort and its operations through a commercial services agreement with a developer/operator selected through a competitive process. In addition to the actions described in the “Elements Common to All Action Alternatives,” other features included in this zone are as follows:

- *Caneel Bay Beach, Scott Beach, Paradise Beach, and Turtle Point Beach* would be designated for resort guest use and guest services would be the responsibility of the resort developer/operator at these beaches.
- *Scott Beach cottages* would be removed or redesigned due to their location in the floodplain. Guest rooms may be relocated to a more resilient location within the

existing disturbed footprint of the resort.

- *The existing pier at Caneel Bay* would be available for resort use as well as NPS use.
- *The water catchment area* would be available for use by the developer/operator, but the road and trail would be managed by the NPS for visitor enjoyment.

INTERPRETATIVE/ENGAGEMENT ZONE (NON-COMMERCIAL) – This zone would provide visitors an opportunity to engage with the NPS, supported by partnerships with the local community. The NPS would provide an interpretive experience for visitors at sites such as the Sugar Mill ruins and other known archeological resources. A NPS contact station would be considered near the entrance to the Caneel Bay area, offering an opportunity for park visitors, resort guests, and the local community to interact with the NPS. Within this zone, the NPS would provide a space for an organization to design, fund, construct, maintain and manage a community space such as an amphitheater, museum, or cultural center.

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Caneel Bay Area - Alternative A (Proposed Action)

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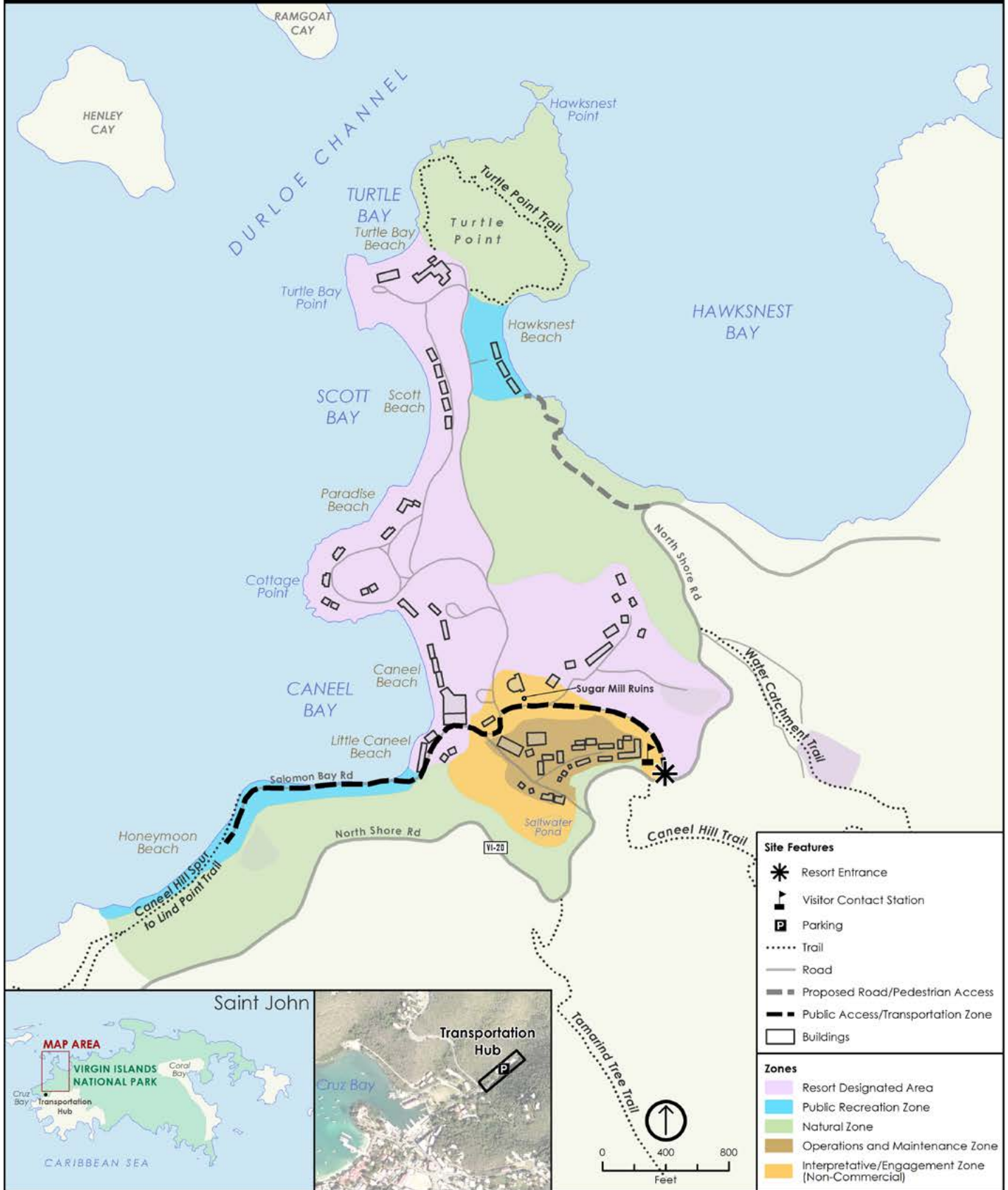


Figure 2.

RECREATIONAL ZONE – Honeymoon and Hawksnest Beaches would be available for public use. Each area would have opportunities for added visitor services such as food, beverage, water sports rental, and public facilities such as restrooms and showers. The NPS would provide a mid-range overnight experience at Hawksnest Beach, separate from the resort, using the existing infrastructure of the Hawksnest Beach cottages. The NPS would connect trail systems to allow visitors to access the Caneel Bay area from Cruz Bay and other areas.

OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE ZONE – Using the current Caneel Bay Resort maintenance area, the NPS may create a maintenance campus that could house the Park’s maintenance equipment and operations. A separate space would be designated for the resort maintenance and operations on this campus. This approach would provide for a more centralized location for park operations, offer efficiencies by sharing some facilities such as vehicle wash areas, and create an opportunity to repurpose the existing NPS maintenance facility in Cruz Bay. Future planning would be needed to determine space needs for the Park and the resort operator. The existing maintenance entrance would be used and would remain separate from the public entrance.

NATURAL (UNDEVELOPED) ZONE – Areas designated in the natural zones would remain undeveloped except for trail improvements and trail maintenance.

TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS ACTIONS – Transportation and access improvements identified as part of Alternative A include the construction of a new access road with shuttle and pedestrian access from North Shore Road to Hawksnest Beach. The NPS would use a historic roadbed to the extent practicable to minimize impacts. Alternative A would provide for public access to Honeymoon Beach from North Shore Road via the Caneel Bay entrance and Solomons Bay Road or visitors could hike in via the trail network. The existing NPS

maintenance area would be repurposed as a transportation hub to provide additional parking and an area for shuttle services to the north shore beaches of the Park, as well as to the Caneel Bay area.

ALTERNATIVE B

Alternative B offers a similar management approach to Alternative A, except the area for the resort would be expanded, as shown in Figure 3, and the mid-range overnight experience and public access at Hawksnest Beach is removed. The resort developer/operator would be responsible for the management of Hawksnest Beach area, including the Hawksnest Beach cottages, and access to the site would be provided through the resort in lieu of a new road maintained by the NPS. The NPS would provide for public access to Honeymoon Beach from North Shore Road to Solomons Bay Road, as described in Alternative A. The NPS may construct a new maintenance area as described in Alternative A, and the existing NPS maintenance facility would be repurposed as a transportation hub. In addition to the NPS use of the site, space in the maintenance campus would be dedicated for the resort developer/operator. The NPS would not provide interpretation of cultural resources near the Sugar Mill ruins, and this site would be part of the resort. The NPS would provide a community space at the Caneel Bay area similar to Alternative A.

ALTERNATIVE C

In Alternative C, the resort zone would be similar to that of the historic boundaries of the RUE and would include all resort zone elements identified in Alternative A. The NPS maintenance facility and new transportation hub would be separate from the Caneel Bay redevelopment and, therefore, not included in Alternative C. Some day-use access may be provided as negotiated with the NPS

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Caneel Bay Area - Alternative B

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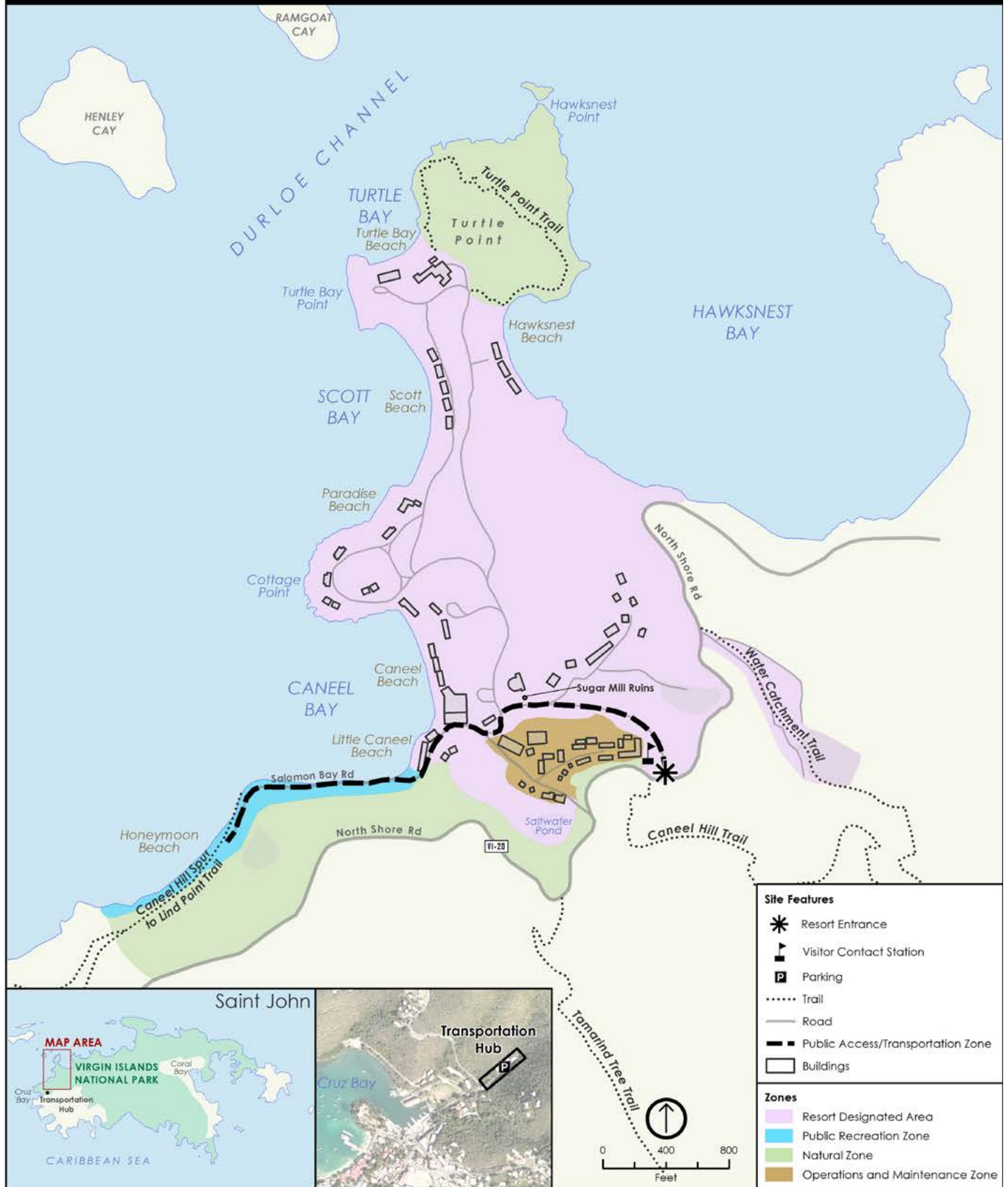


Figure 3.

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Caneel Bay Area - Alternative C

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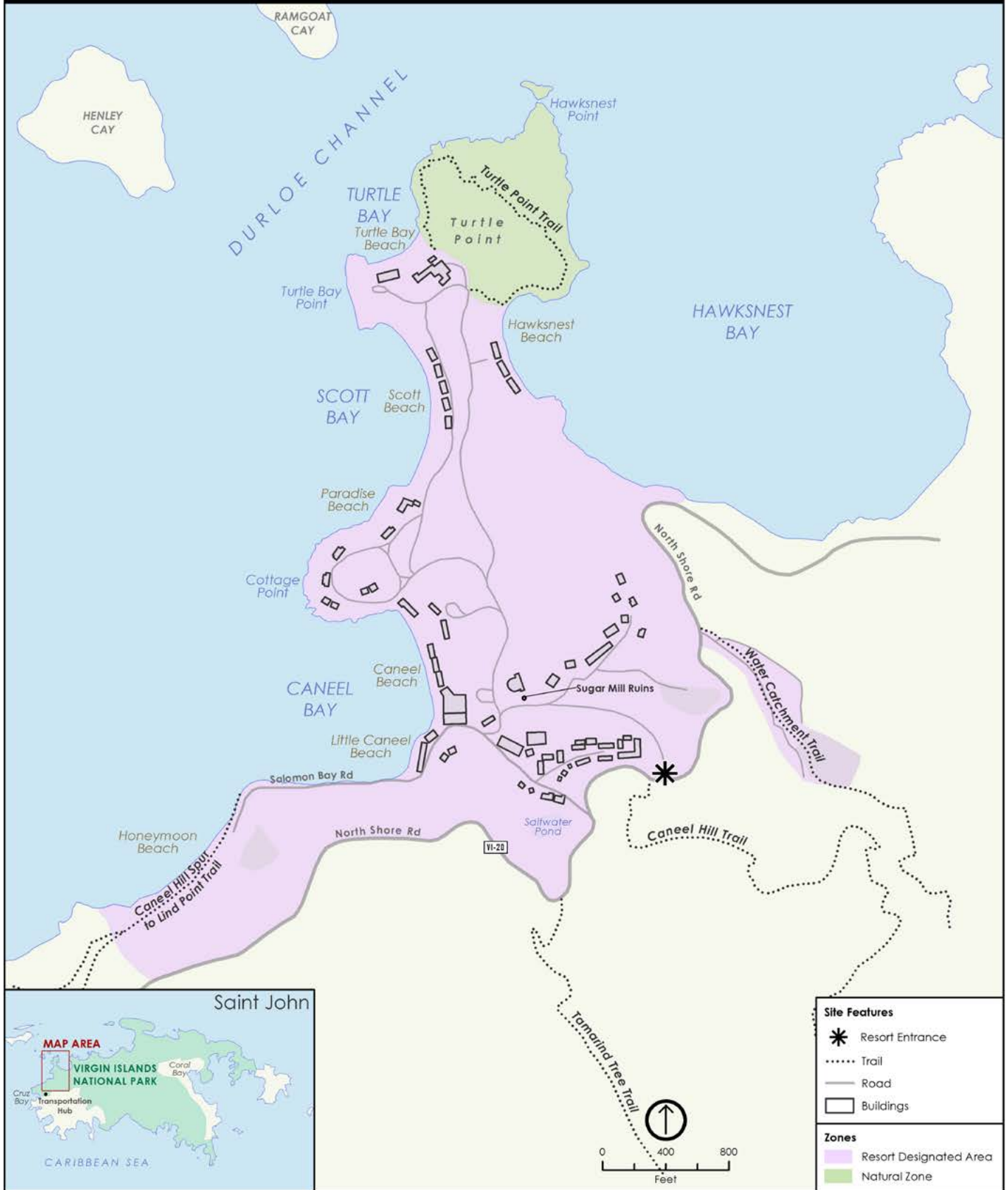


Figure 4.

and the developer/operator. No mid-range overnight experience would be provided at Hawksnest Beach. The NPS would not provide interpretation of cultural resources near the Sugar Mill ruins, and this site would be part of the resort. The NPS would not provide a community space at the Caneel Bay area.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Identifying significant issues related to a proposal is an important part of the planning process. In the context of this planning effort, “issues” or “environmental issues” can be problems, concerns, conflicts, obstacles, or benefits that would result if the conceptual range of preliminary alternatives, including the no-action alternative, are implemented. Below is a preliminary list of issues that we may focus on during this planning effort.

CULTURAL FEATURES INCLUDING ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES, HISTORIC BUILDINGS, HISTORIC DISTRICT, AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RESOURCES - Caneel Bay is a rich cultural environment reflecting human occupation from the pre-contact Archaic period through European colonialism and post-colonial emancipation to the modern era. Redevelopment would have the potential to affect both archaeological sites and historic resources. Both known and unknown archeological resources exist in the Caneel Bay area from the archaic period through European colonialism and post-colonial emancipation. Redevelopment activities such as site clearing, ground disturbing activities, and rehabilitation of buildings have the potential to impact cultural resources.

Under all the preliminary action alternatives, the NPS has an opportunity to strategically approach the restoration of historic buildings at the site following the 2017 hurricanes. This opportunity includes working with partners to restore some buildings that were contributing features to the proposed Caneel Bay Historic



NIK WHEELER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



District. The conceptual range of preliminary alternatives may adversely impact some historic structures through removal or to create safe access, habitable spaces, and buildings that are more resilient to climate-related events, including storm surge and hurricanes.

Under all action alternatives, the NPS and its partners would strategically work to resolve the adverse effects to the proposed Caneel Bay Historic District caused by the storms while supporting its long-term preservation through adaptive reuse. Some of the actions within the preliminary alternatives may require the changes to the mid-century resort to allow redevelopment, address safety issues, provide for habitable spaces, and ensure resilience during future storm events, all while maintaining the character of the historic district.

Although not thoroughly documented, the Park potentially possesses ethnographic resources which may be of value to traditionally associated people such as descendants of the Taino, Carib, Kalinago or other Caribbean indigenous groups and the descendants of Maroon communities. These resources include pre-contact ceremonial sites, colonial era plantation sites of enslavement, and natural resources such as heritage trees. NPS Management Policies 5.3.5.3 states that the NPS is responsible for identifying ethnographic resources and considering the effects that NPS actions may have on them. Research gaps surrounding ethnographic resources and traditionally associated groups highlight the importance of community engagement to determine if these resources are ethnographic, and if so, to better understand how they might be affected by the conceptual range of preliminary alternatives.

Left: Photograph of the Caneel Bay Plantation Ruins from 2008 prior to the 2017 hurricanes.

VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE (INCLUDING ENHANCED ACCESS) – The conceptual range of preliminary alternatives would provide for varying degrees of visitor experiences and day-use access opportunities. Under some of the preliminary alternatives, visitor opportunities would be expanded, and there could be additional recreational and public opportunities, resulting in beneficial impacts for visitors seeking these experiences. Additional services may be provided under some alternatives, such as day-use food, beverage, and water sports rentals. The preliminary proposed action (Alternative A) provides a variety of overnight accommodations, including a luxury experience at an eco-resort, as well as a mid-range experience at Hawksnest beach.

FLOODPLAINS – Rehabilitating or reconstructing buildings that currently exist in a floodplain may occur to ensure buildings are safe, accessible, and resilient to future climate-related events. NPS activities with adverse impacts on floodplains would follow the procedures outlined in NPS Director’s Order 77-1 Floodplain Management. Part of the study area near Scott Beach and Hawksnest Beach are within a designated FEMA floodplain.

COASTAL ZONE – Redevelopment activities could result in impacts to the coastal zone. Sedimentation from construction could impact water quality. Coral reefs and seagrass beds may be impacted by the increased presence of humans at Caneel Bay, and wildlife habitat may be temporarily disturbed during construction activities.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES CONSIDERED – Other environmental issues are being considered such as sea turtles, vegetation, wildlife, environmental justice, soundscapes, socioeconomics, and more. These issues will be addressed in the EA but have not been identified as needing a detailed impacts analysis at this time because they may not be central to the decision, would not be significantly impacted, and a detailed analysis of the impacts is not necessary to make a reasoned choice between the preliminary alternatives.

CANEEL BAY REDEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT SCHEDULE

■ Redevelopment and Management Plan Civic Engagement/Comment Period Begins	January 18, 2022
■ Redevelopment and Management Plan Virtual Public Meeting	February 8, 2022
■ Redevelopment and Management Plan Comment Period Closes	February 17, 2022
■ EE/CA Addendum Report-- 45 Day Public Comment Period	April/ May 2022
■ EE/CA Addendum Final Report	July 2022
■ EE/CA NPS Action Memorandum	September 2022
■ Redevelopment and Management Plan/EA Release – 30 Day Public Comment Period	Fall 2022
■ Redevelopment and Management Plan Finding of No Significant Impact	Winter 2022

*Request for Qualified Applicants (RFQ) is expected to be released TBD in 2022. Request for Qualified Proposals (RFP) is expected to be released TBD in 2023.



Recreational users
on Honeymoon
Beach

How to comment

THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO COMMENT

1 Submit comments electronically at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayRedevelopment>

2 Mail or hand-deliver written comments to the park headquarters:

Caneel Bay Redevelopment and Management Plan

Superintendent

1300 Cruz Bay Creek

St. John, VI 00830

THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD WILL CLOSE FEBRUARY 17, 2022. Please note that the park has many other ongoing projects, such as the USA-GVA Preliminary Land Exchange and the EE/CA at Caneel Bay. For this comment period, please focus your comments on the CANEEL BAY REDEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT PLAN.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about past activities and stay current on the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area, please visit:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayRedevelopment>

Comment forms are available at the Park Headquarters. Comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.