

TRAILS MANAGEMENT AND NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION IN VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

SEASON REPORT 2021/22

OVERVIEW

The Friends Trails Program runs annually from November to June and is essential to keeping Virgin Islands National Park accessible and safe. The Trail Crew performs duties such as trails and historic site maintenance, archaeology, native plant restoration, and trash/debris removal.

The program includes a Summer Trail Crew program for youth and the management of a volunteer corps without whom this work would not be possible. This season 256 volunteers contributed 5,507 hours.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

The Friends Trail Crew's main priority is keeping all 27 miles of hiking trails in VINP open, safe, and accessible. Hikers in the National Park will often see the Friends volunteers clearing vegetation, improving trail watershed, constructing retaining walls and steps, maintaining scenic vistas, and monitoring signage. Many island residents would agree that the trails have never looked better, thanks to the efforts of the Friends Trail Crew.

HISTORICAL RUIN PRESERVATION

The Friends Trail Crew maintains 30 historic sites within VINP. This work involves carefully cutting vegetation that is growing out of and around the structures and carefully applying herbicide as needed. This work is important because these historic sites are venues for education and can help visitors and residents connect with the history of St John and the Virgin Islands.

This season, the crew uncovered several ruins that hadn't been cleared in many years including hidden structures at America Hill, Francis Bay, Leinster Bay Factory, and Hassel Island.



166

**NATIVE PLANTS
PLANTED**

600

**TOTAL COASTAL
PLANTING SINCE 2019**

411

**EARTH WEEK PLANT
GIVEAWAY**

27 MILES OF HIKING TRAILS

30 HISTORIC SITES
maintained



**ONE
SUMMER TRAIL
CREW
11 YOUTH
6 WEEKS**

256

**VOLUNTEERS
5,507 HOURS**



ARCHAEOLOGY PROGRAM SUPPORT

The Friends Trail Crew frequently assists NPS Archaeologist, Ken Wild, in performing important archaeology field work. Over the past 2 years, the focus of this work has been at Cinnamon Bay, where the crew assisted in completing the archaeological compliance associated with the reconstruction of the campground cottages. Volunteers have assisted in the excavation, collection, sorting, and cleaning of artifacts dating back to as early as 700 AD. These artifacts can offer insight into how the indigenous people lived their day to day lives. Most of the artifacts being found by the volunteers include fish, turtle and iguana bones, pottery, charcoal, Taino and Danish smoking pipes, and religious relics such as zemis and carved pendants.

COASTAL PLANTING AND BEACH STABILIZATION

The coastline of St. John was severely impacted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. In response to this devastation, the Friends and the NPS started a coastal planting initiative with the goal of stabilizing and protecting popular north shore beaches from further erosion. Since 2019, over 600 native trees have been planted at the beach berm that separates the immediate tidal area from the non-tidal area.

During the '21-22 season, Friends volunteers planted 166 native plants at Trunk Bay (63), Francis Bay (68), Jumbie Beach (12) and Hawksnest Beach (23). These trees were propagated from locally sourced seeds by horticulturist Eleanor Gibney, who also acts as the lead advisor on the project. After planting, the volunteers use welded wire fencing to protect against marauding wildlife such as deer, goats, tourists, and donkeys. The trees are watered several times a week, depending on the amount of rainfall, by the Friends Natural Resource Intern, Ameir Sprauve.

The native species that have been planted include Buttonwood, Seagrape, Black Torch, Bay Cedar, Turpentine, Nothing Nut, Necklace Seedpod, Gre Gre, Tyre Palm, Frangipani, Orange Manjack, and more.

ENDANGERED PLANT SPECIES PROTECTION

Solanum conocarpum, or marron bacora, is a federally listed endangered plant that is endemic to the Virgin Islands. The world's largest population is located near Salt Pond on St. John and consists of less than 200 individuals. Friends of Virgin Islands National Park has been working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Virgin Islands National Park to protect existing populations through habitat restoration and establish new populations within the boundaries of VI National Park.

This year, the Friends Trail Crew carefully worked amid the main population of *S. conocarpum* to remove invasive plants like guinea grass (*Megathyrsus maximus*), tan tan (*Leucaena leucocephala*), and catch and keep (*Acacia retusa*). Invasive plant species outcompete native species for space, water, and light as they change the structure of the vegetative community and restrict available resources for native species. The next steps will be to complete an assessment of the existing population, supplement the population with nursery raised plants, and install temporary fencing to keep out deer, goats, and donkeys.

The next phase of this project will be to establish a population of 100 *S. conocarpum* plants in a second location. The plants are currently being raised in the Friends nursery at Cinnamon Bay. The archeology compliance has been completed for this project, and planting should begin in the winter of 2023.



NURSERY MANAGEMENT AND PLANT PROPAGATION

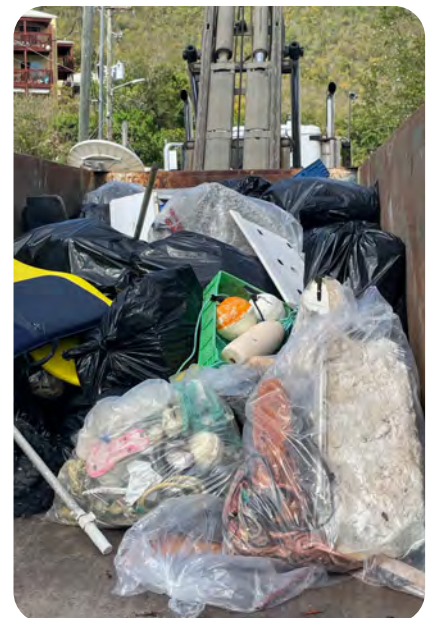
A plant nursery was established at Cinnamon Bay in January 2021 with the goal of raising native trees for coastal plantings, fruit bearing trees for an annual plant giveaway, and rare/endangered plants as part of a federal grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The nursery has also been utilized as an educational space to teach youth about native plants and their traditional uses. Seasonal resident and extraordinary volunteer, Ellie Wasson, contributed 76 hours to the upkeep of the nursery.

During 2022 Earth Week, the Friends gave away 411 plants to community members with the goal of promoting food security and access to fresh fruits. The plants included guavaberry, lignum vitae, soursop, guava, pineapple, and more. The Friends also organized a tree planting activity at the annual Earth Day Fair for local school kids. The kids planted papaya, passionfruit, and kapok seeds that are currently being raised at the nursery.

TRASH AND MARINE DEBRIS REMOVAL

The Friends Trail Crew performed several trash cleanup events this year. These efforts were concentrated on the rocky beaches of the rugged north shore between Waterlemon Bay and Haulover. These areas are prone to accumulating large amounts of ocean debris because of their orientation, facing the prevailing winds. The Friends partnered with Dulce Vita Charters for two Herculean trash cleanup events that removed thousands of pounds of debris from the National Park. The Captan and crew of Dulce Vita are staunch advocates for marine resource protection and generously donated their 45' Leopard Catamaran and time for these trash cleanup events.

Friends staff and volunteers participated in a trash cleanup event at Drunk Bay to commemorate Ocean Week 2022, and a Cruz Bay cleanup in partnership with Get Trashed St John during Earth Week.



SUMMER TRAIL CREW

Summer Trail Crew is a professional summer job opportunity for Virgin Island youth interested in conservation. This six week program is open to high school students (ages 15-19). The trail crew of 11 was lead by Aaliyah Hodge this year.

Kicking off this six week program, the crew toured the park visiting important ruins, introduced to the plant nursery, and hiked Caneel Hill. Then the real work began with the breakdown of the Friends campsite, beach trash pick up, nursery and native plant propagation projects, clearing of vegetation at Leinster Bay Factory ruins, and a lesson in native plant identification and arts and crafts from Delroy "Ital" Anthony. A hike down Reef Bay trail included the petroglyphs and ended with a sailing, snorkeling and Pizza Pi trip on Dulce Vita on Funday Friday!

The following busy weeks included two days with St. John Rescue learning about CPR and first aid, clearing the land around the new offices of our partners at USDA, picking up trash at Caneel overlook, invasive plant removal in Reef Bay, clearing the Durloo ruins, hiking Ram Head, picking up marine trash and debris on Drunk Bay, and plant nursery projects and carpentry! As well as planting at Annaberg and Maho Bay, trail work on Johnny Horn, coral identification training and snorkeling with Lee Richter (NPS), and turtle monitoring training with the Turtle Protection Team, trash pickup on Lind Point Trail, Maho Bay Beach, Trunk Bay Beach, and the Cruz Bay lookouts, sifting sand for artifacts and helping out the archaeology team, working on the treads on the Johnny Horn trail, expanding the ruin clearing at Leinster Bay Factory ruins, touring the VIERS Research Lab, not to mention two days of major brush clearing and trash pickup on Hassel Island! Thanks to Wharfside Watersports for the boat ride to the island and hauling all the trash back to St. John!

Funday Fridays included new experiences for many like kayaking in Maho, a discovery dive with Low Key Watersports, a kayak trip in Hurricane Hole with VI Expedition Company, and lion fish removal training with the CORE Foundation.

We thank this fabulous young crew for their incredible hard work and their willingness to engage and learn.



VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND MANAGEMENT

This program includes the management of a volunteer corps without whom this work would not be possible. This season 256 volunteers contributed 5,507 hours. The crews are supervised by the Friends' Trails Coordinator, Taylor White.

This program is made possible by our members and donors, and the dedicated sweat equity and hard work of volunteers. Volunteers are either walk ups on Tuesday and Thursdays, or weekly campers at our Cinnamon Bay Campground.

Volunteer Service Camp

The Trails Program hosts groups of volunteers at the Friends Camp at Cinnamon Bay, where participants are offered tent accommodation at a charge of \$100 per week in exchange for work on the Trail Crew.

The entire camp was rebuilt after the destruction of the 2017 hurricanes. Over the past few years, we've added new amenities including a bath house, running water, electricity, and a perimeter fence. We've also constructed additional tent platforms and purchased new tents, tarps, cots, and other equipment. This season we hosted 159 volunteers at the camp, including groups from Soul Trak, Groundwork Bridgeport, Conservation Volunteers International Program, Great Lakes Adventure Club, and YMCA Camp Du Nord.

In particular, thank you to our volunteer camp host Vince Schmidt. This past season, Vince acted as a greeter and liaison for incoming volunteers, a maintenance person at the volunteer camp, and contributed 226 hours of work towards the trail crew. Thank you to KC and Nancy Cushing, Russ and Beth Hilton, and Ric Jablonski for leading the effort to improve the Volunteer Camp. Over the past several years, these dedicated volunteers have repaired tent platforms, constructed new platforms, and replaced old equipment.

The much-anticipated opening of the Cinnamon Bay Campground has allowed Friends volunteers to access the Raintree Cafe, general store, watersports rentals, nightly presentations, guest WIFI and more frequent taxis. The operators of the Cinnamon Bay Campground have been extremely supportive of the Friends Trails Program, generously donating materials and labor.



Walk Up Volunteers

The Walk-Up Volunteer Program takes place every Tuesday and Thursday from mid-October to mid-May. This program offers visitors and residents an opportunity to give back to the island by spending a day of volunteering with the Trail Crew. There are a handful of volunteers who participate every week and form the core of our walk-up program. Special thanks to Anders Lindholm, Teresa Beam, Eric Adolph, and Sam Eberlein.

	Trails	Ruins	Native Plant Restoration	Archaeology	Trash/Debris	Camp Projects
Hours SG	1818	1443	456	295	91	440
WKUP	622	190	99	32	21	0
Total	2440	1633	555	327	112	440
Hours (%)	(44.3 %)	(29.7 %)	(10.1%)	(5.9%)	(2.1%)	(7.9%)

Total = 256 volunteers, 5507 hours
Service Group = 159 volunteers, 4,543 hours
Walk-Up = 97 volunteers, 964 hours



**Anyone interested in volunteering on our trails or staying in our service camp should please visit our website:
www.friendsvinp.org/trails**