



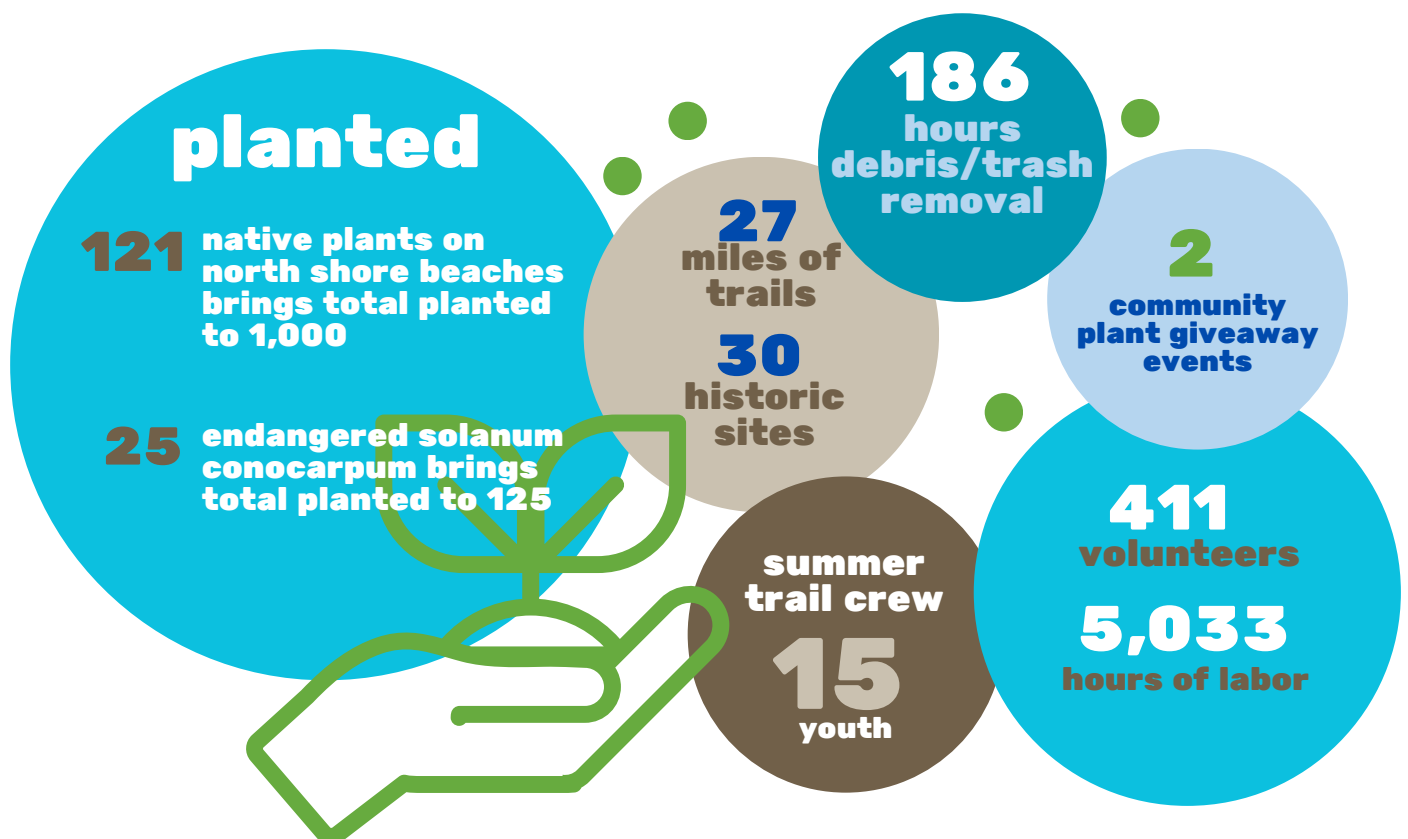
## TRAILS MANAGEMENT AND NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

### SEASON REPORT 2023/24

#### Overview

The Virgin Islands National Park Trails Program managed and funded by Friends of Virgin Islands National Park runs annually from November to August and is essential to keeping the Park accessible and safe. The program aims to protect natural and cultural resources by maintaining all 27 miles of hiking trails and over 30 historic sites in the park, restoring native plants, and removing trash and debris. This year, the program included 411 volunteers, who contributed 5,033 hours of labor towards the improvement of Virgin Islands National Park with additional hours contributed by the Summer Trail Crew youth program.

The trails program is possible thanks to our members and donors, our National Park counterparts, and the dedicated hard work of our volunteers and Summer Trail Crew. Thank you.



## Trail Clearing & Maintenance

Trail crew volunteers on the Park's 27 miles of trails contributed 2,048 hours of labor this season. The trail crew began the season by first clearing trails that are most accessible and frequented, or have a guided hike on them. Priority trails include Lind Point, Caneel Hill, Reef Bay, Francis Bay, Leinster Bay and Ram Head/Drunk Bay. Other trails completed in the first quarter include Cinnamon Bay, Maria Hope, Water Catchment and Tamarind. After the priority trails have been completed, the trails program moves on to other popular trails and vistas in the park such as Brown Bay, L'Esperance, Johnny Horn, Bordeaux Mountain and Lameshur Bay, as well as the Cruz Bay, Caneel Bay, Trunk Bay and Maho Bay Overlooks. Less frequented trails are then cleared including Tektite/Cabrite, Europa Bay/Point, and Yawzi Point.

Depending on the worksite, volunteers may be asked to cut and haul brush, dig new tread, and/or improve drainages. With erosion as one of the main hazards on the trails, watershed management is important. Additionally, the trail crew works to remove hazardous or invasive species from the trails corridor to ensure hiker safety. Common plants that are cut on the trail include Wild Tamarind (*Leucaena leucocephala*), Casha (*Acacia macracantha*), Catch and Keep (*Acacia riparia*), Wild Pineapple (*Bromelia pinguin*), Christmas Bush (*Comocladia dodonaea*), and Hillside Manchineel (*Euphorbia petiolaris*).

Friends works to create a balanced volunteer experience that exposes them to all the different types of forests on island (moist, dry, scrubland and coastline), educates them on common plants, and takes them to places they may have never been before, while also getting meaningful and necessary work done in the Park.

The tools provided by Friends of Virgin Islands National Park include loppers, weed whackers, hand saws, mcleods, pick mattocks and shovels. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn at all times while working. Volunteers are expected to be physically capable of hiking up to 5 miles on uneven terrain and performing manual labor in hot and humid conditions and must sign a Friends of Virgin Islands National Park Volunteer Waiver.







## Historic Site Conservation

The trail crew spent 2,171 hours preserving historic sites and ruins in the Park. Priority historical sites are those that are most frequented and accessible, and/or have been determined by NPS Archeologists as such. They include Annaberg, Catherineberg, Cinnamon Bay factory/Ossuary, Reef Bay Factory, Jossie's Gut, Par Force, Murphy's Great House, Leinster Bay Factory and Guardhouse, Peace Hill, Lameshur Bay Factory, Mary's Point Great House and Carl Francis Factory, Estate Lindholm, Lind Point Overlook, and Sieben ruins.

The crew then moves on to other sites including expanding clearance around structures that have previously been overgrown with bush. These include Durloo, Hermitage, Brown Bay Factory, America Hill, Annaberg School, Tektite/Cabritte Horn structures, Yawzi Point structures, the grave site at the base of Bordeaux Mountain trail, Fredriksdal factory, Taino Ballcourt, Rustenberg and L'Esperance Historic District ruins. This season, much time was spent expanding the clearance around the Leinster Bay Factory ruin which was accepted into the NPS Network to Freedom program three years ago.

Guidelines for clearing historical sites in the park include cutting vegetation from the structure, as well as the area 10 feet from the base of the ruin. Before clearing the structure, the Trails Coordinator evaluates the risks and dangers that must be avoided at the site and volunteers are instructed never to remove vines or plants by pulling down on them or yanking them out of the base of the structure, as this can result in a collapse of the structure and possible injury. In addition, care is taken to not weed-whack too close to the structure to avoid damaging the historic brick and plaster. The last step of clearing these sites is the application of herbicide by the Trails Coordinator who has had the necessary safety training. Select herbicides are approved for use in the Park and are recommended for the elimination of exotic non-native plants and the removal of small plants that are not embedded too deeply into the historic fabric of the structure.

## Nursery Management, Plant Propagation & Planting

Volunteers contributed 350 hours assisting with coastal planting and native plant restoration projects. Plants are initially propagated by local horticulturist and expert Eleanor Gibney, who also acts as a lead advisor. In addition, the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park established a **Plant Nursery and Learning Lab** at Cinnamon Bay in January 2021 with the goal of raising rare and endangered plants, native trees for coastal plantings, and fruit bearing trees for community plant giveaways. The nursery is also utilized as an educational space to teach youth about native plants and their traditional uses.

This season, the trail crew spent 192 hours **coastal planting**. 121 trees were planted on Cinnamon Bay and Maho Bay beaches bringing the total to over 1,000 trees that have been planted on the North Shore to help combat erosion in the last four years. The native species that have been planted include buttonwood, sea grape, black torch, bay cedar, turpentine, nothing nut, necklace seedpod, frangipani, orange manjack, and more. After planting volunteers use welded wire fencing to protect against humans, deer, goats, and donkeys.

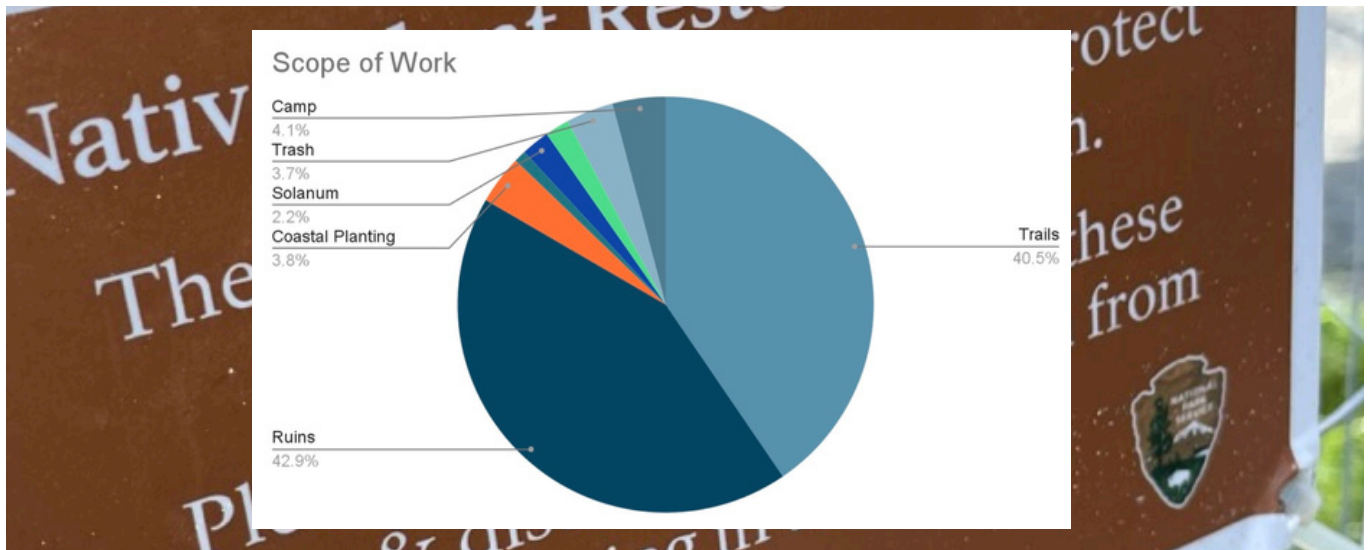
St. John has several federally listed **endangered species** on the island including *Solanum* *carnocarpum* or Marron bacorra which is endemic to the Virgin Islands. A few years ago, there were only about 200 documented *Solanum* trees on St. John. The trail crew has worked to protect these existing plots and in the 2022/23 season planted 100 more trees in the Peace Hill area. The trees were grown in the Friends Plant Nursery and this season 110 hours were spent removing hazardous and invasive species from the plots, fencing half the population at Peace Hill, as well as planting 25 more trees, bringing the current total of *Solanum* to over 300.

48 hours were also spent maintaining our **mangrove restoration** project in the Annaberg area where some 2,000 mangroves were planted in the 2022/23 season. With the assistance of Iowa State University students, volunteers spent time removing invasive species from the plots, fixing and adding more fencing, and planting more red, white and black mangroves.

## Trash & Debris Removal

186 hours were spent picking up trash at Drunk Bay, Brown Bay, Honeymoon Beach and North/South Haulover Beaches. Through our School Kids In The Park (SKIP) program, 162 of those hours were completed by local youth learning about volunteerism and trail work. Additionally, Friends holds a trash cleanup on Drunk Bay every Ocean Week in October and Earth Week in April.

Common items found during these trash pickups include marine debris such as rope and fiberglass, multiple different types of plastics, as well as larger items such as tires, engines and more. Volunteers are trained to identify the difference between trash and historic artifacts, and are instructed not to remove any artifacts from the location they are found. Volunteers are also trained to be aware of what they are picking up in case they come across dangerous materials, which would be disposed of more carefully than the regular trash.



## Volunteer Management

Volunteers on the crew participated through a Tuesday/Thursday walk up program or as weekly campers in the Friends Volunteers Camp at Cinnamon Bay under the guidance of the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park's Trails Coordinator, Frank Barton.

This season the trail crew welcomed 204 **walk up volunteers** who contributed 954 hours of labor working alongside visiting service groups staying in the camp. Weekly worksites are posted every Monday on social media. The walk up program is also offered as a field trip through our School Kids in the Park (SKIP) program. This season 56 local youth participated and contributed 256 hours conducting trail work on Lind Point trail and the Leinster Bay Factory ruin, and also picking up trash on Honeymoon, Brown Bay and North/South Haulover beaches. The goal of this field trip is to teach students about volunteerism, conservation, history and most importantly, how to take pride in their home by keeping it clean and safe.

The Friends appreciate the 207 **camp volunteer groups and individuals** who contributed a total of 4,079 hours of labor on the trail crew. Groups that stayed at the campground this season include Soul Trak, American Hiking Society, Conservation Volunteers International Program, Sierra Club, Appalachian State University, Vermont Commons High School, Woman's Impact group, Pathfinders, Make a Wish Trailblaze Challenge (NC) and NPS Volunteers in the Park (VIP) from St. Croix's Buck Island Reef National Monument. Friends continues to consciously expand outreach to include diverse, differently abled and student groups to stay at the volunteer campground.

Weekly camp volunteers commit to working on the trail crew for 4 days. The Trails Coordinator uses the Friends van to transport the crew to and from the worksites, and to the grocery store to provision. Campers are encouraged to attend Friends Cinnamon Bay Campground Chats located in the Cinnamon restaurant where culture bearers, local subject experts and scientists present on topics that range from sea turtles, mangroves, local flora and fauna, history, music, crafts and more. Special planning is also made in the work schedule to be near Annaberg on Mondays and Tuesdays when cultural demonstrators are there.

In addition to the normal scope of work, trail volunteers are invited to help with community events such as Earth Day and the Power Swim. This season, 96 hours were spent assisting with these events.



## Summer Youth Trail Crew

Summer Trail Crew is an eight-week summer job opportunity for Virgin Island high school students aged 15 to 18. This program is an opportunity for students to gain professional experience, develop leadership skills, work outdoors as part of a team, and learn about Virgin Islands National Park. As the next generation of environmental stewards, participants gain an appreciation and passion for the natural world and conservation.

This year, the hard working, dedicated crew consisted of 15 youth, 4 of whom were returning for a third year. The participants were V'Kesha Adams (crew leader), Jack Oram (crew leader), Kemoi Thomas (crew leader), Aleja Meade, Ebony Torres Cordero, Romari Munoz, Aubrey Logsdon, Tumayah Bartlette, Xenia Brathwaite, Taire Barnes, Alexia Brookes, Taila Williams, Shari Raphael, Makaiya Woodrup and K'Nyah Molyneaux. They were supervised by Trails Coordinator, Frank Barton.

The crew performed trail work, habitat restoration, and historic site maintenance at various sites throughout the Park. Trail work was interspersed with learning opportunities including CPR and First Aid, financial literacy, recycling, swimming, and presentations from local experts on traditional arts and crafts, sea turtles, coral, native plants and frogs. Every Friday is Friday Fun Day with students enjoying recreational activities such as paddle boarding, kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving, cooking local foods, and yoga.



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