Friends of Virgin Islands National Park

TERRESTRIAL PROGRAMS REPORT 2026

The Friends of Virgin Islands National Park Terrestrial Programs encompass the maintenance of trails and historic sites, marine debris clean-ups, habitat restoration, and plant cultivation within the Virgin Islands National Park (VIIS). In alignment with the organization's "Land" Strategic Pillar, the Terrestrial Programs serve to advance the health and sustainability of the Park for future generations. This report runs from October 2025 to September 2026.

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SUMMARY

During fiscal year 2026, the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park Terrestrial Program contributed 6,126 hours of conservation work toward the maintenance of hiking trails, historic sites, habitat restoration, and marine debris cleanups. This included 3,398 hours contributed by 294 volunteers, 2,640 hours contributed by the 14-member Youth Trail Crew, and 1,300 hours of labor from the Friends team of Lila Uzzell, Foster Thomas, Eleanor Gibney and Alison Parker.

Volunteers maintained all 27 miles of official hiking trails within Virgin Islands National Park on St. John and cleared vegetation from 28 historic structures throughout the Park. The Friends hosted 196 volunteers at the Cinnamon Bay Volunteer Camp from November 2025 through May 2026. These volunteers included groups such as American Hiking Society, Appalachian State University, Conservation Volunteers International, Great Lakes Adventure Club, and others. An additional 98 volunteers participated in Walk-up Volunteer events held every Tuesday and Thursday.

The Volunteer Trail Crew planted 110 native plants and trees. All plants used in habitat restoration projects are grown from locally sourced seeds in the Cinnamon Bay Plant Nursery. The crew also performed seven marine debris cleanups, further supporting the health and resilience of the Park's terrestrial and marine environments.

6,126
hours of conservation work

294
volunteers contributed 3,398 hours

14
Summer Trail Crew youth

27
miles of trails maintained

28
historic sites cleared

110
trees, shrubs & mangroves planted

2
overlooks cleared

7
marine debris cleanups

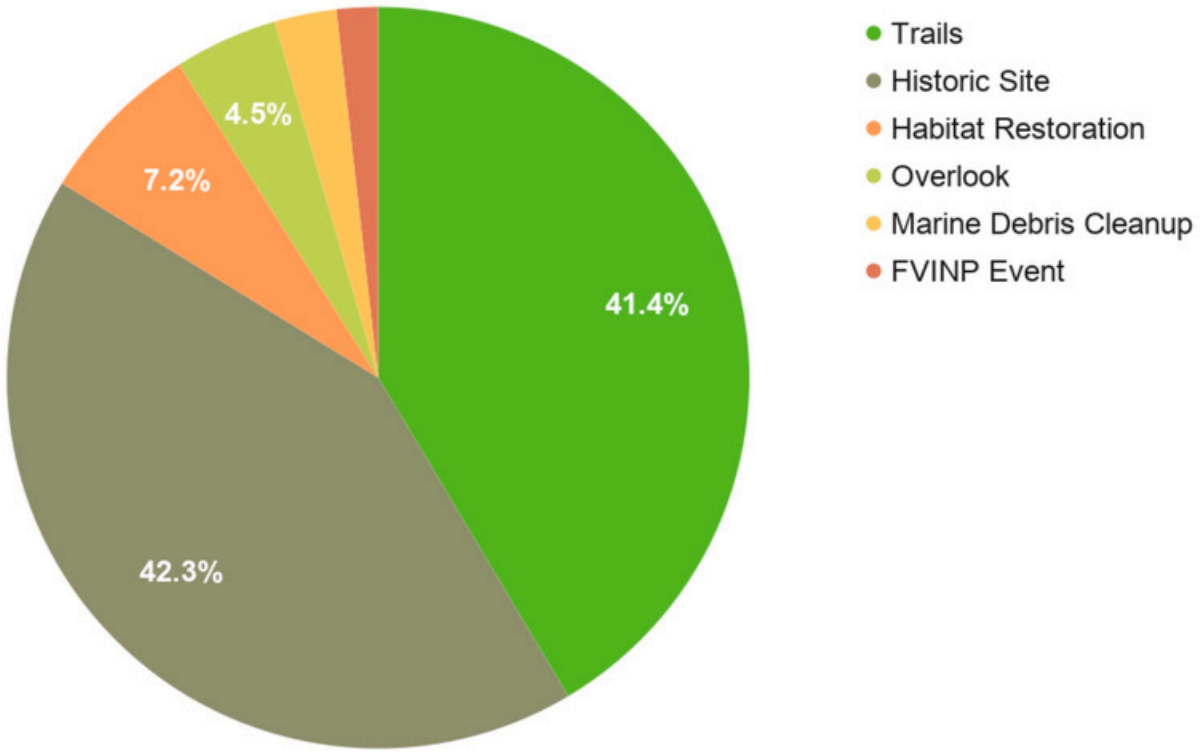
FRIENDS TEAM

In FY26, Terrestrial Programs was managed by the Program Director, Mark Gestwicki and staffed by Alison Parker (Native Plant Intern), Eleanor Gibney (Plant Nursery Manager), Foster Thomas (Trail Crew Leader), and Lila Uzzell (Trails Program Manager). They were supported by trails volunteers and the youth Summer Trail Crew.

VOLUNTEERS

A huge portion of the efforts accomplished within the Terrestrial Programs rely on volunteer service. In FY26, Terrestrial Programs supported **294 volunteers who contributed a total of 3,398 service hours** to the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park.

Contributions were made across all Terrestrial Programs: trails, historic sites, habitat restoration/plant cultivation, marine debris cleanup, and Friends event support.



CAMPGROUND VOLUNTEERS

The Friends of the Park Campground, located at Cinnamon Bay, accommodates both Service Groups and individual campers from November through May. During this season, the campground hosted a total of 196 volunteers. The Friends would like to extend a special thanks to volunteers Nancy and KC Cushing, Beth and Russ Hilton, and Ric Jablonski for contributing 308 hours towards campground set-up and break-down this season.

Service Groups are affiliated with established organizations to participate in the program during the winter and spring months, whereas individual campers are required to submit an online application to secure accommodations during designated weeks in late spring.

SERVICE GROUPS

A total of **10 Service Groups** (116 people) assisted with trails and historic site maintenance over the course of 14 weeks:

- American Hiking Society (2 weeks; 20 people)
- Tree People (2 weeks; 2 people)
- Appalachian State University (12 people)
- Make A Wish Foundation Trailblaze Challenge (6 people)
- Pathfinders (2 weeks; 11 people)
- Conservation Volunteers International (10 people)
- Adventure Quotient (7 people)
- Hiking My Feelings (7 people)
- Great Lakes Adventure Club (2 weeks; 17 people)
- Rudolf Steiner School (24 people)

INDIVIDUAL CAMPERS

The remaining seven weeks available in the season were opened to individual applicants. The Program received 221 responses to our online application (shared via Facebook and Instagram). Of the online applicants, a total of **66 individual volunteers** joined the Friends Campground for trails and historic site maintenance in April and May 2026.

WALK-UP VOLUNTEERS

Every Tuesday and Thursday the Friends invites residents and visitors to join Terrestrial Programs as a “walk-up”. Activities and meet-up times are posted to FVINP social media platforms every Monday. Volunteers can simply walk-up to join the program for a day. Extra tools are provided.

This season, Trails supported a total of **98 walk-up volunteers**. Many volunteers contributed service over multiple days throughout the season as walk-up volunteers. The following rockstars contributed the most time to walk-up: Sam Blythe (23 walk-up days, 80 hours of service), Doug Drysdale (15 walk-up days, 62 hours of service), and Anders Lindholm (14 walk-up days, 46 hours of service). Many trail days were completed more efficiently due to the dedication and good-nature of these individuals. The Friends also hosted multiple groups during walk-ups this season. Walk-up groups included Team River Runner (19 people), GHS Gives Back (17 people), Sierra Club (2 people), Iowa State University (20 people across two trips), and Boy Scouts of America (12 people).

YOUTH SUMMER TRAIL CREW

The Youth Summer Trail Crew is a summer job opportunity for Virgin Islands youth ages 15-18 to participate in trail maintenance, historic site clearing, marine debris cleanups, habitat restoration, community engagement, and educational workshops. This season, the **14-strong Summer Trail Crew contributed a total of 2, 640 hours** of work and **participated in 22 educational and community-oriented activities**.

The 8-week long program recruited the following crew members--paper plate awards given to each individual at the end of the program are mentioned in parenthesis:

- A'Maya Abraham (Most Efficient Worker)
- Amir Hodge (Most Likely to Spot The Wildlife)
- Angel Perez (Best Weed Wacker and Fastest Swimmer)
- Arianna Jackson (The Crew Conversationalist)
- Eibony Torres Cordero (Most Likely To Take On A Difficult Task)
- Jaeden Thomas (Our Crew Comedian)
- Kennya Estrado (Most Intuitive)
- Mikayla Smith (Best Trail Fashion)
- Romari Munoz (Most Dependable)
- Seamus O'Donnell (Our Hardest Worker)
- Shamaiya Charles (Best Attendance)
- Taila Williams (Best Drummer)
- Taire Barnes (Most Supportive and Fastest Hiker)
- Tyler Levons (Best Debater)

Crew members worked at **19 sites within the Park (10 trails and 9 historic sites)** under the supervision of Trails Program Manager, Lila Uzzell:

- Trails: Caneel Hill Trail, Upper & Lower Lind Point Trails, Brown Bay Trail, Yawzi Point Trail, L’Esperance Trail, Cinnamon Bay Trail, Ram Head Trail, Bordeaux Mountain Trail, Genti Bay Trail.
- Historic sites: Catherineberg Ruins, Annaberg Ruins, Durloo Ruins, Annaberg School Ruins, Sieben Ruins, Rustenberg Ruins, America Hill Ruins, Leinster Bay Factory Ruins, Hermitage Ruins.

Summer Trail Crew members also **participated in 22 educational and community-oriented activities**:

- CPR Training (St. John Rescue)
- Coral ID & fragments of opportunity workshop (CORE Foundation)
- Traditional Baking & Gardening (Annaberg Cultural Ambassadors)
- Hurricane/Disaster Preparedness Presentation (Gabrielle Querrard)
- Sea Turtle Monitoring and Protection Workshop (w/ NPS YCC - FVINP)
- Sailing (Captain Sam)
- Music and Plants ("Ital" Delroy Anthony)
- Coral Bay Community Council, trail clearing and marine debris cleanup (Maya)
- Light Carpentry at the Cinnamon Plant Nursery (Mark Gestwicki)
- Coral World Tour (Kelsey)
- Marine Science Methods (Lee Richter)
- Caribbean Folklore (Gabrielle Querrard)
- Yoga, Kayaking, and Paddleboarding (Monika and Jorge)
- Reef Bay Educational Hike (w/ YCC - NPS Ranger Ahmad Toure)
- VIERS Coral Research (Peter Edmunds)
- Learn to Swim (FVINP - Kaitlyn Cummings)
- Finance Presentation (FVINP - Stephanie George)
- VIIS Archaeology Lab Tour (w/ YCC - NPS Ranger Greg Luna-Golya)
- Bird Walk (FVINP - Laurel Brannick)
- Library Grounds Brush Clearing (Beth Knight)
- USDA Office Native Tree Planting (Ed Polachek)
- Senior Center Garden Bed Installation

TRAILS, HISTORIC SITE & OVERLOOK MAINTENANCE

The maintenance of VIIS trails and historic sites constitutes the majority of time spent within Terrestrial Programs, which explains why Friends staff frequently refer to Terrestrial Programs as the “Trails Program”. Trail and historic site maintenance accounted for 84% of the volunteer service time this season.

The primary tools utilized for trail and historic site maintenance include loppers, hand saws, and weed wackers. Herbicide was used to treat woody plants exclusively at select historic sites.

The following **30 Trails and Spurs were maintained**: Upper Lind Point, Lower Lind Point, Caneel Hill Trail, Margaret Hill Trail, Tamarind Trail, Water Catchment Trail, Reef Bay Trail, Petroglyphs Spur, Genti Bay Spur, Francis Bay Trail, Peace Hill Trail, Leinster Bay Trail, Ram Head Trail, Spur to Drunk Bay, Cinnamon Bay Trail, America Hill Spur, Cinnamon Bay Loop Trail, Jumbie Beach Trail, Johnny Horn Trail, Brown Bay Trail, L’esperance Trail, Maria Hope Trail, Yawzi Point Trail, Tektite Trail, Lameshur Bay Trail, Reef Bay Greathouse Spur, Europa Bay Spur, Europa Point Spur, North Haulover Bay Trail, and Bordeaux Mountain Trail.

The following **28 Historic Sites were cleared**: Annaberg, Catherineberg, Peace Hill, Reef Bay Factory, Cinnamon Bay, Leinster Bay Factory, Leinster Bay Guardhouse, Murphy Greathouse, America Hill, Francis Bay Greathouse, Lind Point Overlook, Lameshur Bay Factory, L’esperance, Sieben, Hermitage (Brown Bay Trail), Lindholm, Brown Bay, Maho bake oven, Durloo, Par Force, Yawzi Point ruins, Tektite, Rustenberg, Annaberg School, Josie Gut, Reef Bay Greathouse, Trunk Bay, and Fredriksdal.

Over the course of five visits to **Trunk Bay and Maho Bay overlooks**, the view was improved by clearing vegetation and three bags of garbage were removed.

HABITAT RESTORATION AND PLANT CULTIVATION

The Friends successfully executed four planting projects this season. Friends staff dedicated many hours and significant care into this initiative. The organization intends to expand this program in the coming years, particularly as the Community Garden at Catherineberg develops.

In all, the Terrestrial Programs oversaw the planting of 110 native plant species this season. A total of 22 volunteers contributed 108 service hours to the Habitat Restoration and Plant Cultivation Program.

FRIENDS PLANT NURSERY AT CINNAMON BAY

Successful plant restoration would not be possible without thoughtful nursery planning, tending, and watering provided by skilled horticulturalists. The Friends are lucky to have the local knowledge of Eleanor Gibney working at the Cinnamon Bay Plant Nursery alongside Alison Parker, who provides routine watering and maintenance care to plants after they have been planted.

Friends staff gave **six tours of the Plant Nursery** this season to campground volunteers and school groups.

VIIS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT & SCIENCE FACILITY PLANT BEDS

In November 2026, Friends staff and volunteers planted native plants and trees at the Resource Management and Science Facility located on Lind Point. A total of 58 native plants were established along the building's designated plant beds. Herbaceous plant and tree species include: Button sage (*Lantana involucrata*), Lady of the night (*Brunfelsia americana*), Frangipani (*Plumeria alba*), Autograph tree (*Clusia rosea*), Marron bacora (*Solanum conocarpum*), Privet Stopper (*Eugenia ligustrina*), Agave (*Agave missionum*), Pepper cinnamon (*Myrcianthes frangrans*), Black caper (*Quadrella cynophallophora*), Yellow boxwood (*Schaefferia frutescens*) and more.

USDA OFFICE FACILITY NATIVE TREE PLANTING

Summer Trail Crew planted native tree species with Wildlife Technician, Ed Polachek at the USDA Office located on Lizard Hill in July 2026. Species include: Privet Stopper (*Eugenia lingustria*), White cedar (*Tabebuia heterophylla*), Gre gre (*Terminalia buceras*), Yellow boxwood (*Schaefferia frutescens*), Rodwood (*Eugenia biflora*).

TRUNK BAY COASTAL HABITAT RESTORATION

Friends staff and volunteers planted 19 native plants. Species included: Yellow nickernut or nickerbean (*Guilandina major*), Grey nickernut (*Guilandina bonduc*), Nothing nut (*Cassine xylocarpa*), Sea grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*), Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*)

Since this area experiences high foot traffic and frequent visits from deer and donkeys, plants were fenced-in and labeled with restoration signs. This planting also included archaeological sifting for historic material by NPS Archaeologist, Gregory Luna Golya. Nothing of cultural significance was found.

MANGROVE PLANTING WITH CORAL BAY COMMUNITY COUNCIL (CBCC)

Friends assisted Coral Bay Community council (CBCC) with two mangrove outplanting events. Together, we planted a total of 26 red and white mangroves in Coral Bay harbor.

FIVE-YEAR HABITAT RESTORATION PLAN

This plan focuses on restoring and expanding mangrove habitats, mitigating coastal erosion in priority areas, and protecting rare and endemic plant species through propagation and reintroduction. In FY26, this plan was accepted by VIIS. For FY27, Friends plans to begin augmenting select mangrove habitats in partnership with UVI's Growing Restoration, Research, Outreach, and Education (GRROE) team who will provide mangrove seedlings and monitor outplant survivorship and growth.

COMMUNITY GARDEN AT CATHERINEBERG

Friends is working in partnership with Virgin Islands National Park to develop a Community Garden on a 1.75 acre parcel in Estate Catherineberg. The National Park is currently performing the necessary compliance work to ensure that the project meets NPS standards for cultural and natural resource protection. An archaeological survey performed in August 2026 found no significant cultural resources within the footprint of the proposed garden. An initial survey of the site's plant composition revealed 43 different plant species, but none are considered rare or endangered. The next steps for the garden site will include selectively thinning the forest to increase light penetration to the garden zones, developing a water catchment and storage system, and installing a fence to keep out marauding herbivores like deer, donkeys, and goats.

PROJECTS

MARINE DEBRIS CLEANUPS

Terrestrial Programs participated in 7 marine debris cleanups this season. 23 full sized 33-gallon trash bags worth of marine debris were removed from St. John shorelines, plus other miscellaneous debris items. A total of 63 people participated in cleanups and 79 volunteer hours were recorded.

- Drunk Bay: Drunk Bay was cleaned three times. Thirteen people joined during Ocean Week, putting in 26 cumulative hours of time. Eight bags (33-gallon sized trash bags) of debris were collected and five miscellaneous large items. The other two visits were Earth Day and Summer Trail Crew. The most common items collected at Drunk Bay were single use plastic bottles, plastic bottle caps, small plastic pieces, and polypropylene rope.
- North and South Haulover Bays: 10 volunteers (Great Lakes Adventure Club Service Group and two walk-up volunteers) contributed 10 hours of work to this cleanup.
- Maho Bay Parking Lot: Nine volunteers contributed a total of nine hours of work to this cleanup. More than 33 plastic beachside concession cups were, at least 6 plastic straws, and over 12 glass beverage bottles were collected.
- Coral Bay Harbor: The Summer Trail Crew participated in this marine debris cleanup and collected four bags of marine debris and other miscellaneous items.

FRIENDS EVENTS

Trails volunteers committed service hours to the Beach to Beach Power Swim and Earth Day Fair helping set up tents, tables, and banners.

VIIS SPECIAL REQUESTS

- Sign Cleaning: At VIIS request, all signs along the Reef Bay trail were cleaned and the Annaberg School Ruins sign was cleaned.
- Lameshur Bay Ranger House: Friends staff and volunteers spent four days clearing the Ranger House and access road leading to the ranger house.
- Archaeology Site Clearing: At the request of the VIIS Archaeologist, Friends assisted in clearing a pre-Taino historic site.

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park

THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS, MEMBERS AND DONORS.

YOU MADE THIS AMAZING SEASON POSSIBLE!

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