



## Buck Island Reef National Monument

General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

Newsletter #4 February, 2014

### News from the Superintendent

The National Park Service is pleased to provide an update on the Buck Island Reef NM General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS). We received unprecedented attention from the on-island community and off-island visiting public resulting in a wealth of input for the final GMP/EIS Document. We continue to work with our Virgin Islands, Federal, and community stakeholders to ensure that these comments will result in a substantive General Management Plan to guide the park, St. Croix's first Marine Protected Area (MPA), into the mid-21<sup>st</sup> Century. This newsletter shares results from Federal and Territorial agency consultation regarding protected species that guided NPS GMP/EIS development team's decisions. We anticipate release of a final GMP/EIS in Spring/Summer 2014. NPS looks establish a lasting programs to ensure protection of park resources and to educate the next generation of park stewards for Buck Island Reef NM; the final 2014 GMP/EIS will have us on the right course. We continue to be proud to be the first MPA in the National Park System.

Joel A. Tutein

### Round-up on General Management Plan/EIS Stakeholders Comments

In March 2012 we held two evenings of public meetings. The meetings were well attended; NPS engaged the community of Buck Island Reef NM supporters. Up for discussion were proposed alternative management strategies for the park. The 'no-action' alternative, required by law, represents current park conditions. The three proposed 'action' alternatives utilize prescribed management zones (Marine Hazard, Resource Protection, and Island Discovery Zone) that were configured to protect resources and meet requirements of the 2001 Presidential Proclamation 7392 that expanded the park and changed a number of park uses.

Nearly 400 people attended the public meetings. During a 90-day period we received 760 pieces of correspondence and an additional petition of 810 signatures from the public. Many of the comments received from the public expressed similar concerns about access or were complimentary; all were reviewed and registered.

We received six letters from relevant Virgin Islands and Federal agencies regarding the Draft GMP/EIS during the review period. Of these, all were supportive of the agency's preferred alternative, Plan B.

Additionally, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), has since proposed the listing of elkhorn and staghorn corals as endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. NPS has entered into formal consultation with this agency to ensure that any actions identified in the final GMP/EIS meet the requirements of any new or future regulation to protect these species and their critical habitat. We are in the final

stages of consultation with NMFS on the plan and expect to receive a biological opinion from this agency soon.

In all, we developed a list of approximately 200 substantive comments. These comments covered 13 different topic areas that included: Access, Anchoring, Enforcement, Snorkeling vs. Swimming, and Facilities. We continue to write substantive replies to each of these comments as we prepare the final GMP/EIS; responses to comments will all be provide in the final GMP/EIS Record of Decision Document. Where possible NPS has been able to modify several management zone prescriptions to the agency's preferred alternative that will be presented in the final GMP/ EIS.



Listed below are some of the proposed changes to the GMP or issues that have been addressed in response to public input on the plan:

*Marine Hazard Zone:* Is renamed the "Coral Protection Zone" in keeping with the main focus for resource protection. This zone has also been reconfigured and reflects access issues addressed in some of the received comments.

*Swimming vs. Snorkeling:* These two activities are considered to be the same, and will be permissible throughout the monument's Recreation, Coral Protection, and Resource Protection Zones.

*Education Programs:* With support from the National Parks Foundation, NPS has taken over 600 5<sup>th</sup> Grade public school students to Buck Island Reef, in the last and current school years, for an interpretive field-trip. December 2013, NPS completed a 10-minute film celebrating Buck Island Reef National Monument 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, to improve visitor understanding and enhance public awareness.

*Facilities:* NPS has completed upgrades to the park restrooms, grills, and other visitor amenities. The pier has been completely renovated and is currently available for visitor drop off-pickup.

*Anchoring in the Park:* NPS continues to work with Regional Planners and U.S. Solicitors to better define the appropriateness of anchoring in the park to meet the requirements of the Presidential Proclamation 7392 (2001).



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**U.S. Department of the Interior**

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The Buck Island Reef Management Team thanks you for your continued involvement, patience and support during this planning process. All stakeholder input received during comment period has been addressed resulting in the Final Buck Island Reef National Monument GMP/EIS – 2014.

**Comments or Questions?**

Please contact:

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**Buck Island 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Film:**

***Caribbean Gem: Buck Island Reef National Monument***

Slave Market (Former Post Office Building)  
Thursday February 13 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

*Free parking at Fort Christiansvaern will be available until 7:00 p.m. The Film will be shown in the EN Bookstore, Scale House Building, Christiansted NHS, Christiansted, VI*

**Coming 2014- NPS-St. Croix Phone App:**

- Coverage of All Three Parks on St. Croix
- Virtual Trails -Natural Resource and Historical Information