

HISTORY OF PROTECTED AREA INITIATIVES in the U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

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History of Protected Area Initiatives in the U.S. Virgin Islands

Historical Background

For the U.S. Virgin Islands, the second half of the twentieth century was witness to a steady growth of mostly failed but increasingly more focused, occasionally collaborative and certainly professional landscape, seascape and ecosystem conservation planning and management efforts. These sprang up principally in response to the socio-economic development process that affects all small islands and their natural resource systems.

As in the rest of the insular Caribbean over the same period, protected area initiatives in the U.S. Virgin Islands were triggered more by escalating, public-spirited conservation philanthropy than from any visible change in local public policy or commitment of public funds for protecting the “commons”—whether wet or dry, natural or physical, terrestrial or marine.

Local conservation leadership has been a lonely and discouraging task during much of the five decades since 1950. Virtually every high-priority site currently identified for immediate protection carried a similar ranking in similar environmental surveys *for the past thirty to forty years*.¹ While the studies have continued,

- buffer zones have shriveled,
- pristine sites and habitat for threatened species have been lost,
- biodiversity has been reduced,
- invasives species have prospered, and
- land acquisition costs have risen geometrically.

Certainly the task of protecting unique natural resources in the U.S. Virgin Islands is much harder now than when actions were initially proposed.

In retrospect, there have been a number of encouraging starts, often launched by well-meaning Federal officials—especially from the Department of the Interior—who sought to jump-start a Virgin Islands Territorial Park System. In almost every case, local leadership and local institutions have not been engaged in the process and have not followed through. Plan after plan has fallen victim to legislative disinterest and a lack of vision about the multiple advantages of environmental conservation. Since World War Two, the U.S. Virgin Islands has been living out its own special development

¹ In the annotated chronology below, each of these wide-ranging environmental assessments is labeled as “[*Survey #1*]”, “[*Survey #2*]”, etc.

success story that has, unfortunately, too often obscured its parallel “tragedy of the commons”, with too many good intentions gone astray.

Nevertheless, while acknowledging that even failures can be instructive, what can we learn from this half-century of experience? The following chronology and narrative are designed to help answer that question.

Chronology of USVI Protected Area Initiatives

Pre-1950

1939: A visiting U.S. National Park Service team inspected and recommended that the island of St. John be developed as a new national park. This was only a preliminary screening that was followed by no action and ultimately stalled by the Second World War.

1943: Arthur Fairchild offered to give to the Virgin Islands people a 58.2 acre [23.6 hectare] park at Magens Bay on the north side of St. Thomas where he resided and had built a botanic garden. He provided, in advance, a plan for a Park Management Authority. Government delays and paper work slowed the donation process, and the Deed of Conveyance was not completed until April 22, 1947. But the park still exists today, as a monument to his generosity, forward thinking, and insistence on an independent statutory authority with a separate board and management.

1950 – 1959

1952: Conservation philanthropist Laurance S. Rockefeller visited Caneel Bay and St. John on his yacht *Dauntless* as part of a larger Eastern Caribbean survey. The idea of combining a sugar plantation restoration/hotel within a park-like setting was of interest to him, and he returned to the island later to buy 600 acres at Caneel from the Textron Corporation and to build a resort at Caneel Bay. The hotel opened in December of 1956. In spite of skepticism expressed about the economic feasibility of such a substantial investment in environmental amenities, the critics were to be proven quite wrong over time, as the Caneel Bay Resort became one of the most profitable in region.

Meanwhile, through intermediaries, Mr. Rockefeller had been acquiring acreage adjacent to the Caneel Bay Resort for an eventual donation to the National Park Service. The end result was creation of a quasi-coastal “park system” that featured coastal forests, historic buildings, a hotel, dive sites, hiking trails, coral reefs and underwater trails. Meticulous attention was paid to landscaping, natural resource husbandry, and horticultural amenities.

1956: Dedication of the Virgin Islands National Park (VINP), St. John. Laurance Rockefeller transferred deeds for all property he had purchased outside of Caneel Bay to the National Park Service.

1960 – 1969

1960 [*Survey #1—Survey of recreational needs, sites and services in the USVI*]: In late 1959, at the quiet suggestion of Mr. Rockefeller, the Department of the Interior joined forces with Virgin Islands Governor John D. Merwin and the St. Thomas and St. Croix Chambers of Commerce to sponsor a survey of recreational needs, sites and services in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Such sites were seen as possible St. Thomas and St. Croix supplements to the new National Park on St. John, then being assembled through a land acquisition program.

The needs survey was carried out by a licensed landscape architect, Kenneth B. Simmons, on contract to the National Park Service, following the protocol of the Congressionally authorized “Recreational Area Study Act” of 1936 (49 Stat. 1894). This study was done specifically to encourage the Territorial Government to develop a territorial park system (similar to state park systems in the continental United States). The 65-page report contained dozens of illustrations and three USCGS foldout charts (#s 3242, 3240, and 3241). It provides evaluations of 23 territory-wide recreational sites and 37 proposed new candidate sites. Approximately half of these were coastal sites.

In retrospect, this 1960 Department of the Interior inventory was remarkable in its foresight, scope and ranking priorities. For example, four of the St. Croix sites that were highlighted some forty years ago—East End, Great Pond, Cramer Park and Salt River—have been consistently featured on virtually all subsequent survey efforts and have precedence to this day.

1961: The Buck Island Reef National Monument with 283 hectares of surrounding water and reefs was officially designated by the U.S. Department of the Interior, which was eager to set an example for the Territorial Government in protecting some of the offshore cays (see the 1960 survey).

1962: A marine component of 2,287 hectares was added to the original terrestrial area of the Virgin Islands National Park originally created in 1956. This opened up the unusual opportunity of developing an integrated land and sea marine park and tied the two ecosystems together in one “coastal system” planning framework. Furthermore, this “marine protected area” now stands, some four decades later, as one of the oldest such sites in the world, a veritable working model of tested management practices and lessons learned regarding a tropical insular site.

Mid-1960s: Governor Ralph Paiewonsky took the lead in searching for ways to obtain more lands for public use and open space. With the help of Stanley Cain (Department of the Interior), his administration established the ingenious but short-lived and now-defunct Hess Oil Conservation Fund to purchase potential park land and open space areas. This was to be funded by a small royalty paid by Hess Oil on each barrel of crude oil imported by its refinery on St. Croix. Later the arrangement with Hess was abandoned and the fund dismantled. Although no significant parklands were ever purchased under its provisions and its appointed advisory board never met, there

were expectations during the early 1970s that if appropriate conservation initiatives were launched, appropriations would be available to support them through the Hess Conservation Fund.

1968 [*Survey #2—Survey of selected resources for recreation, tourism and open space*]:

Under sponsorship of the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Massachusetts carried out a study of selected resources in the U. S. Virgin Islands and their relationship to recreation, tourism and open space. A subsequent report, entitled *The Islands*, was prepared by Dr. Irvin Zube. It included an extraordinarily detailed set of eleven maps and excellent reviews of shoreline zones, corals, offshore cays and resource concentrations. This report was not widely circulated as it openly favored the Jersey Bay/Mangrove Lagoon site on St. Thomas as a protected area, exactly where (at the time) the Virgin Islands Government proposed to construct a new airport.

1969: The Department of the Interior selected St. John's Lameshur Bay as the preferred site for a "Man in the Sea" saturation diving project called TEKTITE, which was extended as a project into the 1970s and attracted the attention of a number of well-known coral reef ecologists and fisheries biologists. Because of TEKTITE, the Governor's office at this time had a parallel interest in promoting the Virgin Islands as a coral reef and marine ecosystem research center, but this never fully evolved (despite Interior's encouragement and the investment of Fairleigh Dickinson University in the West Indies Lab on St. Croix).

The TEKTITE project was successful but was summarily moved to Puerto Rico. In this particular case, as in the later Virgin Islands and the Sea initiative (below, 1970), good intentions by Interior came to naught because of an absence of local political support—despite the Lieutenant Governor's appointment as head of a new Virgin Islands Marine Resource Council, which also accomplished little and eventually faded away. It was a lost opportunity.

1970 – 1979

1970 [*Survey #3—Survey of "the Virgin Islands and the Sea"*]:

In July, the Department of the Interior sent a senior marine specialist, William Beller, to the Virgin Islands to head up a citizens-based study team charged with looking at the Territory's marine resources from a development and conservation perspective. After 100 volunteer "specialists" were recruited and dozens of public meetings held over a 90-day period, this *ad hoc* group produced a 170-page report filled with practical recommendations on "*The Virgin Islands and the Sea*". The Lt. Governor's Office issued a preprint with limited circulation, but the Governor's Office declined to publish it and the venture never moved ahead to an implementation phase. Mr. Beller of Interior moved on to Puerto Rico and later to Hawaii, where he successfully developed similar

“island and the sea” community-based studies that were published and have, in recent years, been revisited with new and updated editions.

1972: Quite unexpectedly, in 1972, Senate Act No. 3190 was proposed, calling for establishment of a “Territorial Park System” for the Virgin Islands. The objectives of the Act, sponsored by then-Senator Virdin Brown, were “to preserve and enhance landscapes and seascapes typical of the Virgin Islands, the habitats of wildlife and sea life and historical and archaeological sites.” Unfortunately, the Act also reorganized the relatively new Department of Conservation and Cultural Affairs (DCCA), predecessor to the current Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), and the administration of then-Governor Melvin Evans was not interested in the proposed administrative reorganization. Therefore, apart from some serious planning, nothing happened. It was, in retrospect, a good idea whose time had not yet come.

During this period, submerged lands within the three-mile boundary limit were transferred by the Federal Government to the Territorial Government (Act No. 3667 entitled “Trustlands Occupancy and Alteration Control Act”). One objective of this act was to place inshore dredging activity under local monitoring and regulatory control. Federal oversight had proven insufficient.

In 1972, Alan Robinson, the Virgin Islands National Park’s resident scientist in St. John, completed a detailed development study and plan for a marine protected area at Lagoon Point, Coral Bay, St. John. No follow-up action was taken except the site later became an Area of Particular Concern (APC) in the Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management Program.

1973 *[Survey #4—Survey of public recreational sites in the USVI]:*

A three-island conservation inventory was undertaken by the Virgin Islands (federally funded) Soil Conservation Service. A professionally assembled report was published including a new inventory of public recreation sites (actual and proposed) with maps. An agenda for maintaining coastal water quality was included. The recreational sites were picked up under the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), published every 5 years since.

1974: DCCA’s Director of Planning and Development, Robert Mathes, recommended establishing “marine reserves within the Territorial Park System” for the protection of natural and/or cultural-historic marine resources. He sought to restrict some areas as “controls” to monitor environmental change elsewhere in the Territory. There was no follow-up.

In 1974, the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act was modified just prior to passage to include the Territory of the Virgin Islands. The Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management Act was to be five years in the making (see below, 1979).

1975: The DCCA Director of Planning and Development, Robert Mathes, proposed specific new Territorial Marine Reserves as follows:

PROPOSED TERRITORIAL MARINE RESERVES: 1975		
	PRIORITY 1	PRIORITY 2
ST. THOMAS	Coki Point Mandahl Bay and Salt Pond (environmental restoration experiment area)	Botany Bay/Sandy Bay Jersey Bay/ Mangrove Lagoon (western portion)
ST. CROIX	Eastern St. Croix Reef System Great Pond Bay	Long Point Mangrove Lagoon Manning Bay Mangrove Lagoon Altona Lagoon Southgate Pond
ST. JOHN	Santa Monica Wreck Site	

In 1975, Dr. Alan Robinson, formerly the chief natural scientist at the VINP, prepared an official survey of marine and coastal parks in the United States. Of the 21 sites included, only the VINP and Florida park areas had the highest rankings of both *prime significance* and *representative coverage* in four classification categories. The paper was presented to the 1975 World Marine Parks Conference in Tokyo.

1975 [*Survey #5—Survey of priority conservation sites in the USVI*]:

In 1975, the National Park Service commissioned a team from the West Indies Lab of Fairleigh Dickinson University, led by John Adams and John Ogden, to highlight top priority conservation sites. Their report, *Potential National Natural Landmarks: US Virgin Islands*, included coastal and marine priority sites, offshore cays and other landscape features for conservation.

1976: [*Survey #6—Work plan for implementing Territorial Park System*]:

The prospects of implementing Act No. 3190 to create a Territorial Park System (see 1972) improved when the bill's sponsor, Viridin Brown, was appointed Commissioner of Conservation under the new administration of Cyril E. King. Commissioner Brown, assisted by two of his assistants—Bob Mathes, who headed Planning and Development, and Tim Still, a park planner—prepared and circulated a work plan for implementing the long-awaited Territorial Park System [*Survey #6*]. The plan in outline form included a proposed budget of \$199,000 (of which \$150,000 was designated for external consultants to support in-house staff). The work program anticipated:

... planning and developing the park system in an environment of scarce resources and a climate of cooperation. A first class, multi-faceted park system is the goal, comprehending conservationist, recreational, educational and managerial roles (Brown Memo, November 22, 1976).

Meanwhile, the 5,118-hectare Virgin Islands National Park on St. John and significant adjacent marine waters were formally designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO

(after it was so nominated by the U.S. Department of the Interior). It is classified within the IUCN Uvardy System as a component of the Lesser Antillean biogeographic province.

1977 [Survey #7—Listing of SNA and APC sites under USVI CZM Program]:

The first draft of the U.S. Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management Program was developed under sponsorship of the U.S. Coastal Zone Management Act. The process of listing and assessing APCs (areas of particular concern) and SNAs (special natural areas), each of which required site studies and ranking, began at this time. DCCA developed a list and map of SNAs, and the Planning Office prepared a selected list of APCs. (See the VI/CZM Program Plan, pp. 139 to 169 and/or the Impact Assessment Document, pp. 84 to 107.) Sites identified were:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| St. Thomas: | Jersey Bay Mangrove Lagoon
Mandahl Bay Lagoon Restoration Area |
| St. Croix: | St. Croix Reef System Reserve
Green Cay
East End/Isaac Bay
Long Point Mangrove Lagoon
Manning Bay Mangrove Lagoon
Altona Lagoon
Southgate Pond
Salt River – Sugar Bay
Sandy Point
Great Pond Bay |
| St. John: | Lagoon Point |

1977 [Survey #8—Ecosystem inventory of the U.S. Virgin Islands]:

Under contract with the Virgin Islands Planning Office, the Island Resources Foundation assembled a study team of scientists, geographers and planners with the aim of developing a planner's handbook characterizing the component parts and functional elements of the Virgin Islands insular ecosystem (marine, terrestrial and benthic). This document, which was entitled *Marine Environments of the Virgin Islands [Technical Supplement # 1]* and published in 1977, included an inventory of natural resources, an analysis of biophysical relationships, coastal zone planning guidelines and scoping information for resource management, including APC and SNA coverage and ranking.

1978: Act. No. 4163 authorized the addition of 121 acres, donated by Fairleigh Dickinson, Jr., to Cramer Park (St. Croix) as a territorial park, with a shore front easement for "studies in ecology, marine biology, oceanography, etc." This area was to be named the Fairleigh Dickinson Territorial Park.

1979: Act No. 4248 “Virgin Island Coastal Zone Management” was enacted by the V.I. Legislature. The actual Program Plan had been previously vetted by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process carried out by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

1978-1979 [*Survey #9—Survey of potential marine sanctuaries*]:

During this period, a team of lawyers from Chelsea International in Washington, DC was employed by the Office of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce under the framework of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Program. The team was charged with conducting a survey of four possible Marine Sanctuary sites in the Virgin Islands and identifying a preferred site to develop under the aegis of an emerging Virgin Islands Territorial Park System. A public hearing was held on the preferred site in 1978 while DCCA was reformulating the marine component of its stalled territorial park plan. Other sites on St. Thomas were later surveyed, and DCCA developed a Marine Sanctuary Advisory Board to help with site selection and planning.

In November 1979, NOAA (U.S. Department of Commerce) printed a Notice of Intent in *The Federal Register* to “prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for a proposed marine sanctuary in the Virgin Islands”. Consultation began with other Federal agencies (Caribbean Fisheries Management Council, the Army Corps of Engineers, Department of the Interior), local NGOs and local fisheries cooperatives. The site selected, Jersey Bay, generated significant opposition from the Virgin Islands fishing community, and the planning process ultimately ended in a stalemate, with no marine sanctuary. [See “Issue Paper on a Proposed St. Thomas USVI Marine Sanctuary”, Sanctuary Programs Office, OCZM, NOAA (July, 1979).]

By the end of the decade, DCCA had been unsuccessful in developing systemic elements for its proposed system of parks and protected areas. This was due in part to the untimely death of Governor Cyril King, under whose administration planning for the concept was first carried out. His successor as governor, Juan Luis, did not place equal emphasis on development of a territorial park system, and focus shifted almost entirely to implementing the relatively new, federally sponsored and funded Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management Program. For those concerned that prospective marine park and protected area sites continued to be at risk, the CZM planning initiative appeared to offer potential hope through development of improved management strategies for selected “areas of particular concern” (APCs) and “special natural areas” (SNAs).

That expectation went mostly unrealized, as APC/SNA program *implementation* has not been carried out as expected. Between 1978 and 1980, none of the draft APC and SNA management plans developed were completed. *A decade would pass before the subject would again be approached.* In the meanwhile, the Territory’s fisheries, wetlands, beaches, historic sites, harbors and salt ponds would do without the policy guidance, management standards and protection tools normally associated with coastal resource management programs. Many of these are still not in place, even in draft or pilot form.

1980 – 1989

However, times and priorities do change. The collective impacts of continuing development, over-fishing, and sediment discharge from land- and marine-based pollution began to raise new management questions with respect to the marine environment. Among resource managers and some government leaders, there was a new focus on the need to protect some aspects of the coastal and marine resource base so that the remainder might prosper.

The decade of the 1980s saw the beginning of a change in perspective among some Virgin Islanders regarding the efficacy of natural area resource conservation. Some of the high points that led to more routine mechanisms of protection are listed below.

1981: Although no action had been taken on the 1972 Territorial Parks Act, a DCCA staff member, John Alexander, developed a preliminary policies and standards document for a Virgin Islands Park System. One noteworthy feature of this 90-page plan was that the marine areas of proposed parks—such as Magens Bay, St. Thomas’s Mangrove Lagoon and Salt River on St. Croix—were clearly included within official “park” boundaries. However, this park systems plan draft was never circulated widely, nor was it ever completed.

During this period, the Virgin Islands National Park came under more frequent and often harsh criticism from St. John’s residents. St. Johnians were disturbed by escalating land costs and by a seemingly pervasive number of National Park Service regulations limiting certain “traditional” natural resource uses (e.g., tying up private fishing craft to mangroves within the Park or using mangrove wood for fishpot construction and charcoal making). The VINP Superintendent, seeking opportunities to lessen the criticism, arranged in 1981 for the regional office of the NPS to contract with the Island Resources Foundation to undertake an economic impact assessment of the National Park on St. John. The EIA was designed to document the economic role played by the VINP, both in St. John and in the Virgin Islands Territory.

This study (B. Posner, E. Towle, *et al.*, *Economic Impact Analysis for the Virgin Islands National Park*, 1981) was carried out by a team of economists and planners who concluded that the direct and indirect benefits of the Park were ten times greater than the costs. (The study was later featured in a 1990 book from Island Press by John Dixon on the *Economics of Protected Areas*, pp. 154-161.) It is noteworthy that the marine component of the VINP contributed significantly to the economic productivity and service support functions of the tourism industry, the Territory’s major employment sector.

1983: DCCA circulated a much expanded and improved draft of “Proposed Rules and Regulations for Territorial Marine Parks and Reserves.” They were filed without action.

Also in 1983, following UNESCO's earlier selection of the National Park on St. John as a Biosphere Reserve, the U.S. Department of the Interior moved to fulfill its obligation to provide a detailed biophysical characterization of the Reserve (essentially the island of St. John) and its adjacent submerged lands, reefs and coastal waters. To accomplish this, \$500,000 was provided for the VINP to undertake this comprehensive study using a 13-member institutional collaboration that was eventually named the Virgin Islands Resource Management Cooperative (VIRMC).

Coordinated by Island Resources Foundation, from 1983-1988, 30 separate studies were completed, principally of St. John's marine and coastal ecosystems. The coastal inshore seabed was mapped in its entirety, watershed/reef linkages were explored, long-term monitoring sites were established, and management issues defined. A series of 30 separate VIRMC reports was published. They are still available and furnish a building block of information on the marine environment of the Virgin Islands. Furthermore, this five-year, half-a-million-dollar data assembly remains a model for interdisciplinary research and a reference point for any ongoing or proposed marine protected area research in the Territory.

1989: In September 1989 Hurricane Hugo inflicted severe damage on many coastal ecosystems and the Territory's fishing industry. The trauma of the storm had enormous impact and led to serious discussions about recovery and mitigation strategies as well as resource management options. Only two months after Hugo, the Division of Fish and Wildlife and the V.I. Senate's Natural Resources Committee discussed major changes in fisheries legislation and simultaneous closure of 9 reef and 13 sea grass areas to accelerate recovery. These discussions were carried over to the new decade.

1990 – 2001

The shock effect of hurricane Hugo (September 17-18, 1989) and sundry storms and hurricanes that followed during the decade of the 1990s (especially hurricane Marilyn in 1995) has not yet dissipated among the survivors, the social order and the environments of the several Virgin Islands. The subtleties of the impacts still lurk everywhere. Therefore, any future planning for protected areas in the Territory is more than ever fraught with risk and needs to be done both with caution and "an eye to windward", along with a mantra that is built upon the "cautionary principle" and grounded solidly in the historical record.

1990: In August, new Rules and Regulations for a Virgin Islands Marine Reserve System were circulated by the Territory's Division of Fish and Wildlife. The protected sites were mostly coastal inshore areas drawn only from St. Thomas. In retrospect, the exclusion of the rest of the Virgin Islands in the proposed system was a tactical error. The recovery scheme and proposed reserve system were not approved, and the idea was dropped.

1990: [*Survey #10—Survey of Hurricane Hugo-damaged priority coastal sites*]: Just three-and-a-half months after Hugo, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) requested funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to undertake a field-level coastal damage assessment of the Territory. In June of 1990 the Government of the Virgin Islands entered into a professional services contract with Island Resources Foundation to manage an interdisciplinary post-Hugo Damage Assessment and Environmental Recovery Planning Strategy. An additional task was included in the project, one which was somewhat removed from hurricane disaster recovery—namely, “to manage a Feasibility Study for Development of a Virgin Island Territorial Park System”.

The project seemed like a grand case of serendipity. To utilize the recovery effort as a launching vehicle for a long-delayed territorial park system seemed to make good sense. But, in retrospect, there was an element of wishful, even naive thinking in this apparent stroke of good fortune, given the extent of Hugo damage to landscapes, seascapes, institutions and budgets.

The exercise was launched with a community-based open charette, led by Governor Alexander Farrelly and Onaje Jackson from DPNR. By this method, 35 reportedly damaged sites were nominated and ranked. An open voting arrangement was employed, using the Delphi strategy for ranking. The broad listing (which excluded Federal property and sites) included 11 APC sites, 26 SNA sites, and 17 Coastal Barrier sites.

Project implementation was carried out by several interdisciplinary teams who generated a flow of up-to-date damage assessments, vegetation and risk mapping, intervention options, remedial action plans, and triage-like data sorting, all leading to site profiles and a detailed 35-site data base [*survey #10*].

A comprehensive nine-page matrix was designed and populated, including aerial, underwater and land-based photography, documentation, and water quality station index numbers. Damages were mapped with key word indexing and narrative summaries. The matrix also tracked the source and dates of prior site nominations for protected area status by type and ranking. The final reporting incorporated surveys of available and/or desirable adjacent land, mapped by parcel and showing parcel numbers and appraised costs for park acquisition.

All documentation and final reporting data were submitted to DPNR in 1990, but all files, documents, and data sets were apparently lost when DPNR facilities were struck by Hurricane Marilyn in 1995. One complete and one partial set survive in Island Resources Foundation’s document library, which is now housed at Coral World, St. Thomas.

The recommendations for territorial park site selection and an implementation strategy, as contained within this extensive post-Hugo resource assessment, have essentially been ignored in the intervening decade.

1992: The U.S. Omnibus Territories Act of 1992 created the Salt River Bay (St. Croix) National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve *and* a Virgin Islands Territorial Park Commission with a mandate to “see that all park management, development and interpretation activities should be guided by a single management plan”. The Act also provided training funds for the Territory. The plan is not yet completed.

1997: Sponsored by the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council (CFMC) in San Juan, a Fisheries Reserve—part of a Marine Conservation District—was proposed for the Territory as a fisheries management mechanism. The area identified for the Reserve was located off the southwesterly coast of St. John. Dr. Michael Downs, representing Impact Assessment, Inc., a California-based consulting firm, carried out a very detailed socio-economic evaluation for the proposed District (a “no-take” zone). Opposition by local fishers and lack of aggressive Virgin Islands Government support resulted in the plan being a non-starter, and it was dropped by CFMC after a public hearing.

1999: The USGS Biological Resources Division studied alternatives for improved protection of local fisheries and coral reef resources in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The result was a recommendation for creation of a *Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Park and Replenishment Areas* in a report authored by Ginger Garrison for the Virgin Islands National Park.

1991-2001: One of the more promising aspects of the Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management Program has been the prospect that APC management plans would provide needed conservation guidelines and site protection strategies for valuable resource features within each of the 18 identified APCs, all sited within the coastal zone. Unfortunately, it has been a discouraging story of delay, delay, and more delay.

Although part of the Virgin Islands CZM Program, APC planning was initially shunted aside (except for a half-dozen good-intentioned, draft plans developed by Robert Teytaud, first under the direction of DCCA and later DPNR, in the 1980s). Nothing else was done until 1991 when Island Resources Foundation was contracted by DPNR to research and produce all 18 APC management plans in draft form in less than 24 months. Each draft plan was reviewed in a series of public meetings and then accepted by DPNR. A disagreement over the scope of the documents followed, and the detailed IRF-generated documents have since been redefined as background documents. Subsequent contractors, including the University of the Virgin Islands, continued to struggle with completion of official management plans for the 18 APC sites, each of which, under CZM legislation, must be approved by the V.I. Legislature prior to plan implementation. Thus far, the APC planning initiative has emerged as a convoluted, generally disappointing planning exercise.

Management Policy Implications of Historical Initiatives

As demonstrated in the chronology above, the concept of a Virgin Islands territorial system of parks and protected areas is not a new one. On the other hand, there is little evidence that a territorial park system has ever been a popular notion amongst the resident citizenry. Perhaps this arises as a cultural residual from the colonial estate system of land ownership where historically very little land was in public hands. This made it more difficult to convert unique natural landscape features and wildlife habitat into protected areas of one kind or another. Furthermore, most land in the Virgin Islands has been privately owned, and many land-owning Virgin Islanders (including traditional resource users with presumed proprietary rights) have been uniformly skeptical about any prospective constraint to private development that would diminish appreciating land values or restrict free access.

Many residents, especially on the larger islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix, have in recent decades remained passively neutral about a territorial park system, while a smaller minority has become increasingly outspoken about its concern over the cumulative impacts of accelerating development on the environment and landscape. For this latter group, in the best tradition of sound land use planning, the continuing need to select, set aside and protect the very best from among the special natural scenic areas and historic sites seems obvious. Of particular concern have been those coastal areas with unique or remarkable aesthetic, educational and recreational value.

Over the past forty years or so there have been at least ten attempts in the Territory to identify, list, publicize and gain public approval for setting aside “valuable,” ecologically important or otherwise remarkable landscape, and later seascape, and even submerged land features as high priority candidates for inclusion in a territorial system of parks, recreation areas or reserves of one kind or another. Most have more or less failed to get much beyond the list state.

Well-intended resource inventories, plans and conservation initiatives—some by U.S. government agencies, some by units of the local V.I. government, some by private environmental organizations—have too often been perceived by the political leadership and the electorate as naive and hardly a workable and fundable agenda. In fact, for over forty years this has been a nearly uniform failed facet of the Virgin Islands’ otherwise extraordinary record of growth since the 1950s. Why is this the case?

In part, the problem arises from the real or perceived anti-development stance taken by many early advocates of protected areas. Their concerns about the adverse impacts of rapid growth and urban sprawl, and their hostility towards many marginal, hastily concocted and environmentally risky development projects, were seen as unrealistic. Anti-development environmentalism was often perceived as obstructionist, elitist and insensitive to the real interests of Virgin Islanders, landowners, and the needs of the poor and marginalized in the community. Working people with memories of long periods of unemployment and underemployment, often accompanied by genuine hardship, were not likely to embrace the arguments of those who appeared to favor no

growth and who might impose a host of new regulations closing off traditional access to *de facto* “common property” landscape features.

It is noteworthy that the first two protected areas of any significance in the Virgin Islands were conceived and created by wealthy outsiders who purchased the properties in question and then donated them to government, both federal and territorial. They were, first, Arthur Fairchild’s gift of Magens Bay in 1947 and, a decade later, Laurance Rockefeller’s gift of the land that created the Virgin Islands National Park in St. John in 1956.

But, in retrospect, it should be noted that these philanthropic precedents—especially that of Laurance Rockefeller in purchasing over half the land area of St. John in the early 1950s—actually had an unanticipated negative effect within the territory. The size of the area and the scale of the gift provided an excuse to those in and out of government who thereafter saw little need for setting aside any additional “park” land. Worse still, Rockefeller’s windfall generosity gave false encouragement to those who were hesitant about investing public funds in land protection schemes, preferring thereafter to wait for other private sector, philanthropist donors to appear, checkbook in hand.

Over the years, a few donors did, in fact, come along to donate land to the Virgin Islands Government which was to be maintained as open space or used for the public good. The community is indebted to Fairleigh Dickinson for the large parcel north of Isaac Bay on St. Croix’s East End and to David Vialet for his gift of Cass Cay at the False Entrance to the St. Thomas Mangrove Lagoon. There were a few others like Henry Reichold who twice gave land for educational use and Warren Coming at Botany Bay who cared about sea bird nesting sites. And on St. Thomas, the Paiwonsky family was later to donate most of Hassel Island for inclusion in the Virgin Island National Park.

But such special purpose private sector gifts of land came only on a very *ad hoc* basis and mostly in bits and pieces. They seldom addressed what was comprehensively needed for the protection of unique natural systems and features in the Territory or the provision of adequate recreational space. Finally, some observers have correctly noted that there might have been many more donations *if* the Virgin Islands Government had put even the semblance of a formal park management system in place.