



Foundation Document Overview

Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve

U.S. Virgin Islands



Contact Information

For more information about the *Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve Foundation Document*, contact: sari_superintendent@nps.gov or (340) 773-1460 or write to:
Superintendent, Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve,
c/o Christiansted National Historic Site, 2100 Church Street #100, Christiansted, VI 00820

Purpose



SALT RIVER BAY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK AND ECOLOGICAL PRESERVE in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands preserves, protects, studies, and interprets internationally significant historical and cultural sites that encompass more than 2,000 years and human use of the diverse tropical, marine, and terrestrial ecosystems that comprise the Salt River watershed.



Significance

Significance statements express why Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The archeological resources at Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve span all major periods of human habitation in the U.S. Virgin Islands from the first Amerindian settlements through European contact and colonial periods, generating unparalleled opportunities for scholarly research into the complete history of the Caribbean.
- Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve protects an Amerindian village and the only known ceremonial stone-lined ballcourt/plaza in the Lesser Antilles providing opportunities for the interpretation of Caribbean life before and after the arrival of European explorers in 1493.
- Salt River Bay is a confirmed site where members of Columbus's second voyage (1493) landed on what is now U.S. territory, resulting in the earliest recorded armed resistance by Amerindians to European colonization.
- Guarding the inlet into Salt River Bay, Fort Salé was first constructed in 1641 and represents one of the earliest and few surviving European earthen fortifications in the New World.
- Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve contains an estuarine bay that flows into open marine conditions uniquely positioned on the edge of a world-class submarine canyon that empties into the 3-mile-deep basin, Virgin Islands Trough, to the north of St. Croix.
- From terrestrial uplands to an estuarine bay, along the tropical shoreline, out to the coral reef and into the submarine canyon, Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve protects a complete ridge-to-reef ecosystem that provides habitat and sustains rare, threatened, and endangered plant and wildlife species on the island of St. Croix.
- The co-management of Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve is a collaboration among the federal government, the Government of the Virgin Islands, and the wider U.S. Virgin Islands community providing stewardship, research, and understanding of the park's diverse resources.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Archeological and Historic Resources**
- **Amerindian Village Site and Ballcourt/Plaza**
- **Salt River Point / Columbus Landing**
- **Fort Salé**
- **Salt River Bay Watershed Complex**
- **Scenic Views and Vistas**
- **Recreational Opportunities**



Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Natural and Historic Anchorage / Hurricane Hole**
- **Teaching Landscape**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- More than 2,000 years of Saint Croix's human history is evident through the tangible Amerindian and Colonial remains and the surrounding landscape. The resources at Salt River Bay show the impacts and continued interactions between people and the places where they live.
- No matter how they arrived, diverse groups of people have influenced and continue to define life on the island of Saint Croix through a rich exchange of beliefs, customs, and cultures that continues today.
- Salt River Bay's terrestrial, estuarine, and marine ecosystems illustrate the complex and interrelated relationships of St. Croix's natural communities. Their protection fosters a conservation ethic for the composite balance of ecosystems stretching from the surrounding ridges to the extensive coral barrier reef systems.
- The Government of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service, through the dynamics of co-management, are committed to shared protection of park resources to provide opportunities for continued resource enjoyment and to educate the public about resource stewardship so future generations can experience and appreciate Salt River Bay.
- From 19th century archeological excavations to a 20th century submerged research station, Salt River Bay continues to attract scientists and scholars from around the world. These resources provide exemplary opportunities to study the relationships between people and the natural environment and St. Croix's history in a living landscape.



Description

Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve is on the north coast of the island of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. St. Croix is the largest of the four islands that comprise the U.S. Virgin Islands, which also include Water Island, St. John, and St. Thomas. The U.S. Virgin Islands are part of the Lesser Antilles and lie on the boundary between the Greater and Lesser Antilles island chain of the Caribbean, making this an important crossroad for the Amerindian and European colonial settlement of the New World. Salt River Bay, a rich and diverse natural estuarine ecosystem, has been the site of human habitation for thousands of years.

On February 24, 1992, Public Law 102-247 established Salt River Bay as a national park, designated as Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve. The enabling legislation for the park framed a co-management structure between the Government of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service. The park's legislated boundary protects 1,015 acres, which are the responsibility of the Government of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service. The legislated boundary encompasses lands along both sides of Salt River Bay, the bay itself, and extends into the open ocean to include coral reefs and portions of a submarine canyon. The complex mosaic of public and privately owned property, as well as waters under territorial jurisdiction found within the park's boundary, require collaborative management strategies and mutual support between the Government of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service. A conceptual Salt River Bay master plan was developed in 2012 to identify joint management objectives shared by the Government of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service.

As both a historical park and ecological preserve, Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve protects rich archeological evidence representing a mosaic of cultural groups potentially dating as far back as 2,000 years as well as dynamic coastal habitats representative of the diverse ecological setting on St. Croix. Here an upland watershed feeds into a bay fringed with mangrove forests and protected by coral reefs. These unique ecosystems have attracted and been dramatically influenced by human habitation for thousands of years. The park provides a unique opportunity to understand, explore, and appreciate the precolonial and colonial history of the U.S. Virgin Islands and dynamic relationship between the impacts of human settlement and the environment on the island of St. Croix

