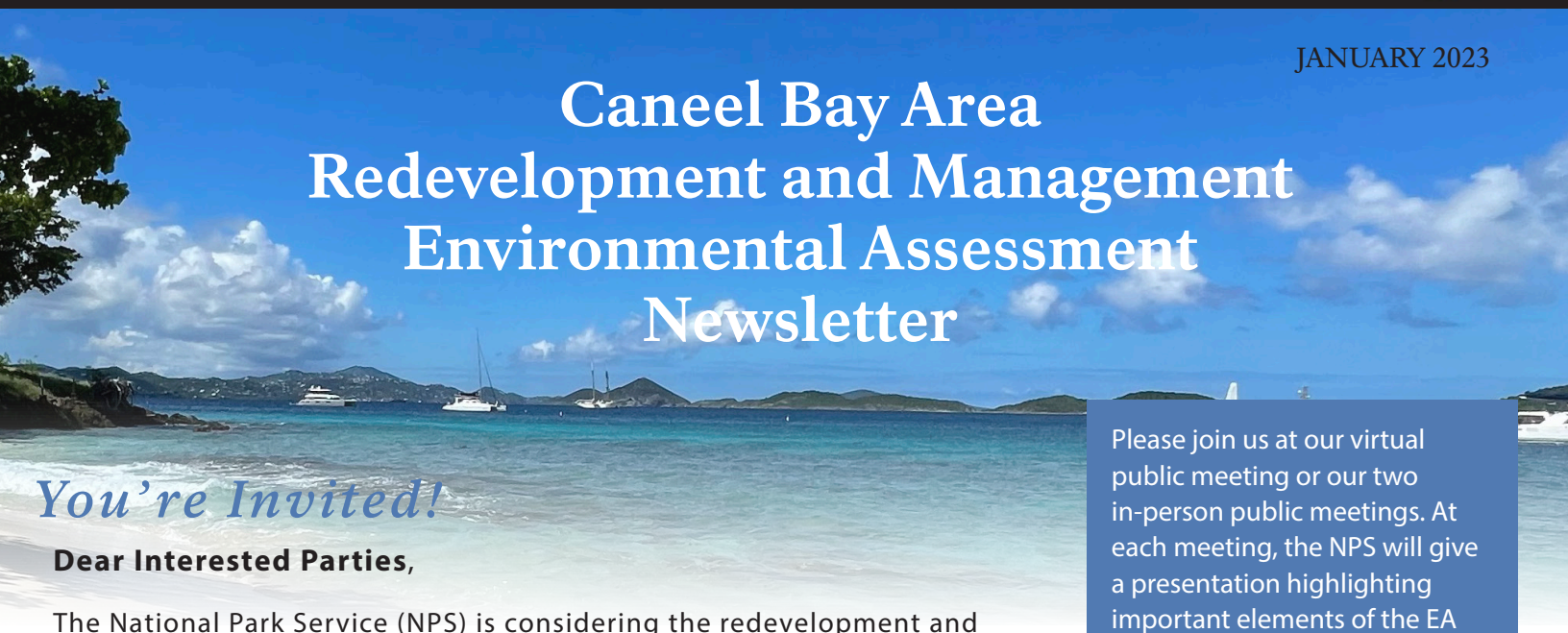
Virgin Islands National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



JANUARY 2023

Caneel Bay Area Redevelopment and Management Environmental Assessment Newsletter

You're Invited!

Dear Interested Parties,

The National Park Service (NPS) is considering the redevelopment and management of the Caneel Bay area at Virgin Islands National Park (Park or VINP). The NPS intends to establish a management strategy for the approximately 150-acre property currently operated under a Retained Use Estate (RUE) expiring on September 30, 2023. The NPS prepared the Caneel Bay Area Redevelopment and Management Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to analyze potential impacts of an alternative for redevelopment and an alternative for no redevelopment. This newsletter provides a concise summary of the EA. The EA can be found at the following web address: *http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayRedevelopment* under the 'Documents List' tab. The EA is available for a 30-day public review and the NPS will host a series of public meetings to share information about the future vision for the Caneel Bay area and hear your valuable feedback.

The Caneel Bay area is vital to the heritage, progress, and enjoyment of St. John and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The NPS wants to make certain the future of the Caneel Bay area reflects the voices of the communities, the many visitors to the site, and the Park. The interests and issues related to the future of the Caneel Bay area are broad and complex, and as such, the NPS values your comments. We thank you for your participation in this planning process up to this point. The public comments have assisted the planning team in refining alternatives and assessing potential impacts. We look forward to hearing from you as we strive to create a shared vision for the future redevelopment and management of the Caneel Bay area.

Sincerely,

Nigel Fields
Superintendent

Please join us at our virtual public meeting or our two in-person public meetings. At each meeting, the NPS will give a presentation highlighting important elements of the EA and you will have an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback.

Virtual Public Meeting

Thursday, January 26, 2023
For information on how to participate in the virtual public meeting, navigate to **http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayRedevelopment** and click on the '*Meeting Notices*' tab.

In-person Public Meetings

Thursday, February 2, 2023
5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. ACT

Saturday, February 4, 2023
10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. ACT

For information on in-person meeting locations, navigate to **http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayRedevelopment** and click on the 'Meeting Notices' tab.

CANEEL BAY BACKGROUND

In the mid-1950s, Laurance Rockefeller established the Caneel Bay Resort (resort) as an early model of ecotourist luxury accommodations to highlight the natural beauty of St. John. In 1983, Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., an organization established by Rockefeller, donated the roughly 150-acre property to the NPS for inclusion within the Park, subject to a RUE. The RUE allows the current operator to use the property as a resort until September 30, 2023. After that time, the NPS will be responsible for the future management of the Caneel Bay area and integrating the roughly 150 acres into VINP. The resort was operated continuously from the 1950s through 2017, when the resort closed due to damage from Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Prior to the hurricanes, the property was operating as a luxury resort with approximately 100 buildings and structures used for lodging (166 guest rooms), events, food services, recreation, maintenance, security, and utilities. Within the boundaries of the property there are culturally significant ruins and archeological sites, as well as elements of the resort property determined by the NPS to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as a historic district.

SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The EA is intended to be a planning level document using a programmatic approach. The term "programmatic" describes a broad or high level NEPA review and generally, this approach is used to assess the potential environmental impacts of proposed policies, plans, programs, or projects for which subsequent actions will be implemented. Another key consideration for the scope of this EA is the assessment of the proposed undertaking on cultural resources. The NPS is separately, but concurrently, preparing a Programmatic Agreement (PA) complying with the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), as amended (54 United States Code 306108), and its implementing regulations (36 Code of Federal Regulations 800). The draft PA is provided in Appendix A in the EA and is available for public comment.

Honeymoon Beach

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the EA is to identify a sustainable and resilient redevelopment strategy for the Caneel Bay area that (1) integrates the value and history of the community of St. John; (2) preserves and protects its significant cultural and natural resources; (3) provides a range of visitor experiences, including overnight and day-use opportunities; and (4) promotes economic activities.

The EA is needed to address ongoing cultural and natural resource impacts associated with the 2017 hurricanes (Irma and Maria) and to integrate the Caneel Bay area into the overall management of VINP. This integration includes making the area accessible and welcoming to the local community, overnight lodging guests, and Park visitors once the RUE expires in September 2023.

Storm damage from the 2017 hurricanes to the Caneel Bay Resort

AB FORCES NEWS COLLECTION / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Storm damage from the 2017 hurricanes at Scott Beach

AB FORCES NEWS COLLECTION / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

OBJECTIVES

Objectives are specific statements of purpose that provide an additional basis for comparing the effectiveness of alternatives to achieve the desired outcomes of the action. The NPS identified the following objectives for this EA:

- Establish a national park experience through the presence of on-site NPS personnel to provide interpretation, education, and continued resource protection, while making available a space for cultural expression.
- Offer welcoming and equitable opportunities that promote access, visitation, employment, and use of local businesses at the Caneel Bay area to a socially diverse range of users.
- Provide for economic opportunities in the Caneel Bay area through the establishment of commercial services.
- Ensure the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area preserves and protects terrestrial, cultural, and marine resources, while blending with the landscape as envisioned by Laurance Rockefeller.
- Integrate the current RUE footprint into VINP to maximize operational efficiencies and ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

ALTERNATIVE A – NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO REDEVELOPMENT)

Under the no-action alternative (or Alternative A), upon expiration of the RUE on September 30, 2023, the NPS would assume management responsibility of the Caneel Bay area and would not issue any permit, lease, or concession contract to reestablish overnight use or provide resort-style services. Any existing Commercial Use Authorizations (CUA) would be allowed to continue to operate at the Caneel Bay area until the expiration date noted on the existing permit. The NPS would minimally restore the site to allow for safe access by visitors through existing roads and trails, including safe access to beaches. The NPS would not provide visitor services, including overnight lodging at the Caneel Bay area under the no-action alternative.

The NPS would stabilize some historic buildings affected by the hurricane damage and subsequent deterioration to meet the NPS's responsibilities for historic preservation and visitor safety. The historic structures would be left in place where possible, and their forms and outlines would be maintained. Existing trails and viewing area(s) may be rehabilitated, and information on site hazards would be provided for public safety, education, and protection of the site. Existing roadways would be minimally maintained and provide hiking access only to viewing areas and beaches. Administrative use of the roads by NPS vehicles would be allowed.

Photo Left: Access to most of the Caneel Bay area has been restricted due to unsafe conditions following the 2017 hurricanes.

ALTERNATIVE B – PROPOSED ACTION/PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE (REDEVELOPMENT)

The NPS proposed action and the preferred alternative (or Alternative B) aims to balance enhanced public access, recreational opportunities, resource protection, and park operational efficiency while reestablishing an overnight experience on a portion of the original RUE that is consistent with the landscape as envisioned by Laurance Rockefeller. Alternative B also identifies two potential locations for future community spaces where residents, overnight guests, and Park visitors could more directly experience the local culture of St. John and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Photo Above: Caneel Bay area entrance (November 2021)

The NPS's redevelopment and management approach for the Caneel Bay area is presented in **Table 1**, which describes the management zones that correlate to the shaded areas in **Figure 1**. Management zones are designated areas that help with future planning and identify where specific desired conditions may be established and where appropriate uses may be defined.

Future transportation system planning, such as the review of existing transportation infrastructure, site circulation including site drop-off and pick-up areas, and parking would be conducted when additional site access is obtained and in coordination with more detailed site planning. Future site-specific compliance and public involvement would be conducted if these actions are pursued. As part of Park-wide planning efforts, the NPS could elect to require an amenity fee for enhanced services or parking fees to help manage visitation at various sites within VINP that are not specific to the Caneel Bay area.

TABLE 1. MANAGEMENT ZONE DESCRIPTIONS

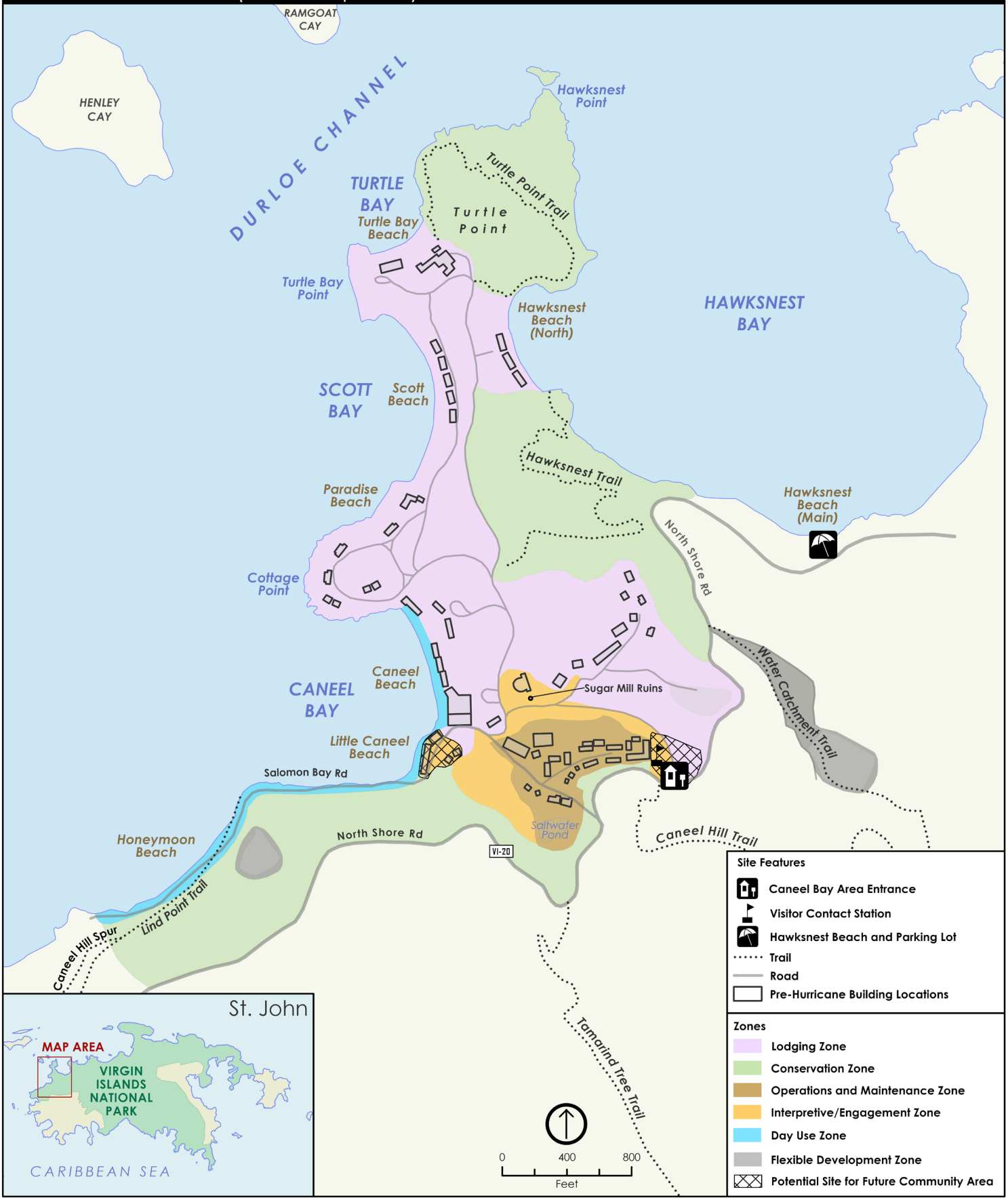
ZONE (ACREAGE)	DESCRIPTION (DESIRED CONDITION)	FACILITIES/ACTIVITIES
Lodging Zone (67 acres)	Visitors would be provided an overnight experience commensurate to Laurance Rockefeller's vision and site history for Caneel Bay. The overnight experience would be that of a twenty-first century eco-resort. In this zone, the overnight lodging and amenities would be an eco-destination and model of sustainable management practices that participate in a circular island economy. This zone would be managed through a lease(s) and/or concession contract(s). This zone would include visitor amenities, such as dining, gift shops, and pools, to support the overnight guests. The operator(s) would be responsible for sustainable operations. Areas with evidence of past disturbance such as the tennis court area would be a focus of any new development because these areas would have low natural and archeological resource potential.	• Overnight use and amenities such as lodging, dining, gift shops, beach access, employee housing, and associated infrastructure. • The redevelopment would attempt to reuse existing structures and infrastructure where possible. However, the integrity of the structures is unknown, and the NPS cannot predict what can be reused or repurposed at this time. • Ongoing maintenance activities would occur, such as landscaping, mowing, and general upkeep of the ground, and include trash removal and cleaning of facilities. • Public access of day-use areas and facilities via roads and trails in this zone would be a condition of any lease(s) or concession contract(s) and coordinated with the larger Caneel Bay area redevelopment. • Utility corridors and pipelines would exist to support facilities.
Day-use Zone (5 acres)	Visitors, including residents of St. John, would be provided access to several beaches within the Caneel Bay area for day-use recreational activities. In the day-use zone, visitors would be provided amenities to enhance the visitor experience. Management by the NPS within this zone would be consistent with the other public beaches at the Park, and concessions contracts would be used to provide visitor services.	• Public bathrooms/shower facilities • Picnic areas/tables • Food services by concessioner • Equipment rentals (i.e., watersport rentals) • Swimming, snorkeling, and other water activities
Conservation Zone (78 acres)	All Park visitors would be able to connect with the natural areas of the Park through pedestrian access on some existing roads and trails throughout the Caneel Bay area. The conservation zone would be managed by the NPS. The desired condition in this zone is a natural and undeveloped landscape. The undeveloped nature of this zone would aid in the protection of areas with high archeological and historical resource potential.	• Reestablish the Turtle Point and Hawksnest Trails • Some limited expansion of pedestrian trails to support connectivity throughout the site • No new development for overnight lodging or amenities
Interpretive/ Engagement Zone (11 acres)	Park visitors would have an opportunity to have a national park experience by engaging with the NPS onsite, including an NPS visitor contact station. Visitors would be encouraged to learn about the site's history through interpretation of cultural sites, including the archaic, colonial, and post-emancipation era sites. Resources and infrastructure in this area would be managed and maintained by the NPS. All of the archeological sites previously determined eligible for the NRHP, including the plantation sugar factory complex, are within this zone and will be subject to active NPS preservation.	• NPS Entrance/Contact Station • Restoration or rehabilitation and upkeep of historic structures and sites by the NPS • Interpretive program to tell the story of the Caneel Bay area, including interpretive sites and signage
Operations/ Maintenance Zone (7 acres)	This zone would support all operations and maintenance activities within the Caneel Bay area by the NPS and future operator(s). This area would be visibly shielded from visitors, and access would be restricted to authorized personnel only. This zone contains historic buildings and landscape features that would be preserved and adaptively reused, as practicable.	• Maintenance buildings • Staff parking lots • Administrative offices • Infrastructure facilities (e.g., septic systems, utility distribution facilities, etc.) • Maintenance equipment and vehicle storage for overnight lodging operations • Water treatment facility • Utility corridors and pipelines
Flexible Development Zone (7 acres)	This zone includes lands that were previously disturbed (e.g., landfill, water catchment area) and would be available for future developer/operators to utilize as part of their operations.	• Use to be determined in consultation with future developers/ operators, but could include storage and parking, among other uses.

FIGURE 1

Virgin Islands National Park

Caneel Bay Area – Alternative B: Proposed Action/ Preferred Alternative (Redevelopment)

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT SUMMARY

Impact topics are resources that may be affected either beneficially or adversely by the range of alternatives analyzed in a NEPA document. For the EA, four impact topics were retained for detailed analysis including the Historic District, Floodplains, Socioeconomics, and Visitor Use and Experience. Other environmental resources were considered and are described in Appendix B in the EA with a detailed rationale why they were either not central to the decision making process or why the environmental impacts did not rise to a level of concern for a more thorough analysis. The following summarizes the EA evaluation of effects to impact topics that would result from each of the alternatives.

HISTORIC DISTRICT

Alternative A –
No Action (No Redevelopment)

- Alternative A could result in an adverse impact to the historic district because of the loss of integrity of the landscape and contributing built resources that would need to be selectively demolished, as well as the change in the setting, feeling, design, and association with the original 1950s era eco-resort concept.
- The NPS would manage the site to allow the historic district to retain its integrity to the extent resources are available. Hazards would be removed and existing trails and viewing areas rehabilitated.

Alternative B –
NPS Proposed Action (Redevelopment)

- Alternative B would have a net beneficial impact on the historic district as the NPS would stabilize, rehabilitate, preserve and/or adaptively reuse, where possible, existing structures, according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.
- The actions under Alternative B are not expected to change the NRHP eligibility for the historic district.
- An adverse effect under Section 106 of the NHPA could occur from the replacement or demolition of buildings to address safety issues or from relocating a building to a more resilient area.
- With sufficient effort given to stabilization and ongoing maintenance, surviving historic properties could maintain their integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to the extent that those aspects of integrity currently remain.

Photo Above: Overgrown vegetation surrounding the ruins associated with the Caneel Bay Plantation

Photo Above: The Hawksnest Beach (North) cabins are located in the regulatory floodplain.

FLOODPLAINS

Alternative A –
No Action (No Redevelopment)

- Under Alternative A, floodplains would continue to be impacted by the presence of structures and impervious surfaces. The existing remains of the damaged structures would largely be left in place, which would have a small adverse impact on flood flow in the context of the size of the floodplain.
- The NPS would stabilize buildings for safety and resource protection and if deemed important to preserve as a contributing feature to the historic district. Maintaining the structures in the floodplain would affect to a small degree floodplain storage and flows.

Alternative B –
NPS Proposed Action (Redevelopment)

- Alternative B (i.e., rehabilitation or replacement of the Scott Beach and Hawksnest Beach North cottages) would adversely impact the floodplain by continuing to include structures and impervious surfaces within the floodplain.
- The NPS would require that any developer/operator include a warning and evacuation plan for the floodplain area further reducing potential threats to human safety within the floodplain.
- The Park would maintain an active hurricane evacuation plan that would detail responsibilities of individual Park employees for advanced preparedness measures at the onset of the hurricane season.
- The opportunity to incorporate practices to capture and treat stormwater would have a beneficial impact on water quality flowing from the site into the floodplain.
- There could be a long-term benefit to the floodplain by including temporary and removable structures, or elevating structures above the flood elevation. The NPS would follow the most up to date guidance on mitigation and minimization measures for structures in floodplains that were not included in the design of the resort historically.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

SOCIOECONOMICS

Alternative A –
No Action (No Redevelopment)

- Under Alternative A, the NPS would increase public access to the site and provide for use of the beaches within the 150-acre project site but without visitor services provided by a commercial services agreement. This could result in increased visitation to the island with more beaches available to the public, resulting in a small and limited beneficial impact on the socioeconomics of the island.
- Not redeveloping the site may result in adverse impacts to socioeconomics through lost opportunities to support the local economy, create new jobs, and provide opportunities for local businesses.

Alternative B –
NPS Proposed Action (Redevelopment)

- Alternative B would enhance public access, recreational opportunities, and resource protection, while reestablishing an overnight experience at the Caneel Bay area.
- The overall effect on socioeconomics, as compared to post-hurricane conditions, would be long-term and beneficial as redevelopment would return jobs and local business opportunities similar to pre-hurricane conditions.
- The reestablishment of an overnight guest experience with up to 166 guest rooms with supporting amenities, would bring back to the region the benefit to the local economy of the resort which existed prior to the 2017 hurricanes.
- Alternative B would provide economic benefits to the local community through increased visitation to the island, increased access for employment at the site, and opportunities for local businesses to contribute to the operation of the Caneel Bay area.
- Alternative B also would provide—through a partnership—community spaces to jointly operate a community center, heritage center, or amphitheater for cultural events, educational programs, and other activities.

Photo Above: Caneel Bay is a popular destination for sailors in St. John.

Photo Above: Visitors using Honeymoon Beach (November 2021)

VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE

Alternative A –
No Action (No Redevelopment)

- Under Alternative A, the NPS would minimally restore the site to allow for safe access by visitors through existing roads and trails, including access to beaches. Additional study would be needed to determine the conditions of the roads and the ability to provide safe access including the degree to which parking can be made available.
- The NPS may install some wayfinding signage to aid in access to beaches.
- The benefit or impact of Alternative A would depend on the visitor's desired experience at the Caneel Bay area. It is likely there is a high potential for overcrowding at the Caneel Bay area, due to the site's proximity to Cruz Bay, which would strain the limited facilities and potentially impact natural and cultural resources.

Alternative B –
NPS Proposed Action (Redevelopment)

- Alternative B would enhance public access, recreational opportunities, and resource protection while reestablishing an overnight experience at the Caneel Bay area, which has been closed to the public since the 2017 hurricanes, and before that, to non-resort guests.
- Alternative B zoning would help accommodate different visitor uses and experiences such as overnight lodging, day use at beaches, interpretive opportunities, and outdoor recreational experiences. Alternative B also would improve access to all users and would make areas more welcoming by establishing a NPS presence onsite, including a visitor contact station near the entrance.
- Alternative B would result in an overall long-term benefit by offering a variety of the visitor uses and experience that are currently not offered at the site. Alternative B also would provide greater opportunities for visitors and guests to learn about St. John's local history.

Photo Above: The Environmental Assessment also prescribes mitigation measures to help with natural and cultural resource protection for sensitive species, such as the federally threatened green sea turtle.

How to Comment

THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO COMMENT

1 Provide comments at the two in-person public meetings to be held in February 2023.

2 Submit comments electronically at:
http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayRedevelopment

3 Mail or hand-deliver written comments to the Park headquarters:

Caneel Bay Area Redevelopment and Management EA
Superintendent
1300 Cruz Bay Creek
St. John, VI 00830

The Environmental Assessment is available for public review from January 20, 2023 - February 20, 2023, with an additional 15 days available upon request. Your feedback is essential as the NPS considers how the Caneel Bay area will be managed into the future. Please note that the park has many other ongoing projects, such as the USA-GVA Preliminary Land Exchange and the EE/CA at Caneel Bay. For this comment period, please focus your comments on the Caneel Bay Area Redevelopment and Management Environmental Assessment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
To learn more about past activities and stay current on the redevelopment of the Caneel Bay area, please visit:
http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayRedevelopment

Comment forms are available at the Park Headquarters. Comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.