



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Buck Island Reef National Monument  
[www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

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## Buck Island Reef National Monument News

Release Date: Immediate

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### Public Invited to Learn about and Comment on the Draft General Management Plan for Buck Island Reef National Monument

March 28 and 29, 2012 6:00-8:00 PM  
Christiansted Park Headquarters, Slave Market Building

**CHRISTIANSTED** – The National Park Service invites the public to learn about the four proposed management strategies developed for Buck Island Reef National Monument. These strategies were developed by National Park Service resource managers after carefully considering public comments from 2004 and 2005. We ask the public to comment on the proposed alternatives contained in the draft General Management Plan during the official comment period that runs through May 1, 2012. You may comment through a court reporter by attending one of our public meetings, via public letter (forms available on the web or at the Christiansted Park Headquarters), or the park's website: [www.nps.gov/buis](http://www.nps.gov/buis) (please follow the links regarding the GMP). The entire GMP document is available through either our website or at the Christiansted Park Headquarters.

Attached is a public notice of the public meetings and a ‘Question and Answer’ sheet answering some of the questions that we have received about the Draft General Management Plan.

If you have any questions please contact Superintendent Joel Tutein at 340-773-1460, ext. 222.

The National Park Service thanks all of our community members and friends for 50 years of support for Buck Island Reef NM and we look forward to an exciting year of events celebrating our unique resource.

[www.nps.gov/buis](http://www.nps.gov/buis)

*About the National Park Service. More than 20,000 National Park Service employees care for America's 395 national parks and work with communities across the nation to help preserve local history and create close-to-home recreational opportunities. Learn more at [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).*



# PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE

## March 28 & 29, 2012 - 6:00 p.m to 8:00 p.m.

### Buck Island Reef National Monument General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

The National Park Service is pleased to announce the release of our General Management Plan to guide the future of Buck Island Reef National Monument. The General Management Plan and accompanying Environmental Impact Statement will serve as the guide for the park's protection and management over the next 15-20 years. We invite you to attend public meetings March 28<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> during which we will present an overview of our planning efforts since 2004 and describe our proposed management alternatives, including the NPS Preferred Alternative. We look forward to seeing and hearing from you as we continue to chart the future course for Buck Island Reef National Monument.

*Joel A. Tutein, Superintendent*



### Meeting Agenda (Both Nights 3/28 & 3/29):

Open House.....	6:00 p.m. to 6:15 p.m.
Superintendent's Presentation.....	6:15 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Comments for Public Record.....	7:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Open House.....	7:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

### Location:

Christiansted National Historic Site  
Slave Market (Former Post Office Building)  
Christiansted, St. Croix



Please use the entrance on Company Street and Church Street. Free parking across the street at Fort Christiansvaern will be available for meeting attendees.

**Please come to the Park Headquarters-Old Slave Market building from 6:00-8:00 PM on March 28 or 29, 2012 to Comment on the Draft General Management Plan for Buck Island Reef National Monument**

**Synopsis of Park Expansion and Planning History:**

In 1998, in response to the deteriorating condition of America's coral reefs the Federal government established the Coral Reef Task Force (CRTF). Buck Island Reef National Monument (NM), one of ten National Parks with coral reef resources, was identified as 'severely at risk' due to the visible loss of once healthy coral reef. Upon review of Buck Island's marine resource data, including the coral reef and its fishery, the CRTF recommended more protection for these fragile resources. After extensive public scoping on all three Virgin Islands the Department of Interior recommended that Buck Island Reef NM boundaries expand to protect resources and aid in their recovery. In 2001 President Clinton issued Presidential Proclamation No. 7392 expanding Buck Island Reef NM's boundaries creating one of the first fully protected marine reserves in the National Park System. The Proclamation directed the Secretary of the Interior, via the National Park Service, to prepare a plan to manage 'any further specific actions necessary to protect' Buck Island Reef NM's resources, including vessel access and use.

Buck Island Reef NM's General Management Plan (GMP) is 25-years old. It does not address the boundary expansion, contemporary resource threats, or recreational activities near coral species that were listed as threatened in 2006. In 2004, NPS conducted public engagement meetings to gather input for the development of a new GMP, and presented preliminary management alternatives to the public in 2005. More than 400 comments were received from the public. The current Draft GMP addresses those comments (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 5).

During 2006, Elkhorn and Staghorn corals were listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The Draft GMP/EIS calls for specific management zones that accommodate different types of uses and access to Buck Island (e.g., boating, swimming, snorkeling, SCUBA, sunbathing, hiking) but still allow for recovery and regrowth of endangered and threatened species. The GMP is required to address current environmental threats (e.g., bleaching, disease, overfishing, pollution) and prepares for future problems (e.g., sea level rise, ocean acidification) facing the Virgin Islands' marine resources. Our reefs have never recovered from damage sustained during hurricane Hugo (a 100-year event) and other storms, and 'the 2005/2006 bleaching and disease event caused greater losses of coral cover than any other stressors in the history of Virgin Islands (Rogers et al. 2009<sup>1</sup>). The creation of management zones is critical to meeting the legal requirements of the Presidential Proclamation and monitoring the health of Buck Island NM. We are now presenting the Draft GMP/EIS for your review and comment.

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<sup>1</sup>Rogers, C.S., Muller, E., Spitzack, T., and J. Miller. 2009 Extensive Coral Mortality in the US Virgin Islands in 2005/2006: A Review of the Evidence of Synergy Among Thermal Stress, Coral Bleaching, and Disease. *Caribbean Journal of Science*, 45(2-3): 204-14.

## **Frequently Asked Questions About the Draft GMP/EIS:**

Because of some misconceptions about what the GMP/EIS means to the community and access to the monument, we offer the following answers to some common questions. They will also be addressed in the Final GMP/EIS.

1. People have asked, 'Is the NPS closing Buck Island?' The answer is, 'Absolutely not!' The GMP is simply a document for park operations to guide the protection, preservation, and enjoyment of Buck Island Reef National Monument for the next 20 years.
2. 'If the National Park Service is offering four alternatives, why is "Alternative B" the preferred one?' The NPS compared the relative merits of each alternative in a process known as 'Choosing by Advantages.' We examined resource data, species sensitivities, visitor experiences, and considered the previous public comments. The recommendation that resulted was that Alternative B best protects resources and maintains visitor access with the phased elimination of anchoring replaced by moorings. It also provides greater advantages with regard to provision for safe visits and park operations. This recommendation adheres to the 2001 Presidential Proclamation and other laws.
3. We hear our community asking, 'Why is the National Park Service so restrictive in the plan?' Our preferred alternative and the management zones it creates are based on how people have used Buck Island over the past 30 years with consideration to the resources we are mandated to protect for future generations. The GMP management zones were developed from past and current use of Buck Island. Some reproductions of our maps in the media have overstated the loss of snorkeling or bathing areas. Our actual maps are clear: swimming/bathing is permitted in all zones of the monument; snorkeling, and other boating (kayak, paddleboarding, etc...) are appropriate in areas where people perform these activities now.
4. Some recreational boaters have asked, 'What will happen to bow and stern anchoring?' At present bow and stern anchoring occurs along West Beach. Bow and stern anchoring will no longer be appropriate when the final GMP is implemented.
5. Boaters have asked, 'How many moorings will be provided at West Beach?' We propose, based on past and potential shoreline change, the current 22-acre anchoring area, and 30 years of usage data, that 40-45 moorings will be phased in over 10-15 years. Before moorings would be installed, the NPS must prepare a Vessel Management Plan to include a mooring plan and environmental assessment. ANY future mooring plan will require public scoping and seek community input. We continue to lose Buck Island's precious white coral sand due to the loss of the organisms whose skeletons it comes from. This problem, regardless of the perception of 'deep sands', together with sea level rise, makes off shore moorings the best practice to preserve West Beach. People can continue to land at the beach or at the pier to pick up and drop off visitors, gear, etc..., as they do now.
6. There are members of the kite boarding community on St. Croix that ask, 'Can we kite board at Buck Island?' The National Park Service has mapped the coral reef and species of concern in the areas where kite boarders have expressed an interest in this recreational pursuit. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the threatened and endangered species present in the monument, the difficulty of enforcing impact avoidance associated with such use, and potential safety concerns, the National Park Service does not agree that kite boarding in the Buck Island Reef NM is appropriate or compatible with mandates to protect and preserve park resources.

7. Some community members want to know, 'Can we resume fishing and other resource extractive uses at the park?' All extractive use, fishing, conch, lobster, coral removal, plant collection, etc..., is prohibited at Buck Island Reef NM. Ensuring the health of the reef necessitates that its plants and animals regenerate freely, keeping the ecosystem alive and unimpaired. The interim rules, established after the 2001 Presidential Proclamation, remain in place.
8. Many people are asking 'Why does this process take so long?' We understand that people can be frustrated by a planning process that takes years to complete. We are currently in the public review phase of the Draft GMP as we develop a new comprehensive plan for the park. We invite you to the public meetings to learn more about the plan on **March 28 and 29 from 6:00-8:00 PM** at the Christiansted National Historic Park Headquarters, Old Slave Market Building. You will learn from the park staff about the plan. These meetings provide an opportunity to make comments in person. No final decisions about the plan will be made, nor will any formal debate be held. You may give us comments, whether in person, in writing, or through our web-based system, to help us to evaluate the plans (A, B, C, D). All comments are considered carefully and equally. Individuals or groups who are unable to attend any of these meetings should be assured their written or web-based comments are welcome and carefully considered. We will accept public comments on the Draft GMP through May 1, 2012.

When writing your comments, please consider the issues or alternatives raised in the GMP document or in the presentations made at the public meetings. We welcome the public to present reasonable alternate options that are not presented in the current Draft GMP.

9. Finally, the users of Buck Island Reef NM want to know 'What will happen after the public comment period?' After consideration of comments, the NPS will prepare a Final GMP/EIS that will be released to the public. After a minimum of 30 days from the release of the Final GMP/EIS, the NPS will issue a Record of Decision. This Record of Decision documents final approval of the plan, selects the alternative and any changes to be implemented, and sets forth requirements for implementation. It will be signed by the Regional Director of the National Park Service's Southeast Regional Office and will be enforceable by the local Superintendent of the Buck Island Reef NM.

We are listening to the community, and appreciate your continued support of the monument. Please attend either of our public meetings. We ask that you write your comments and concerns during the two month comment period that ends May 1, 2012. You can participate by commenting directly at the meetings, where a court recorder will be on hand to take your comments, or through our park GMP portal where you can: access the full GMP; download a mail-in comment form; or comment directly on the park planning website: [www.nps.gov/buis/parknews/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/buis/parknews/index.htm). **Please come to the Park Headquarters-Old Slave Market building from 6:00-8:00 PM on March 28 or 29, 2012.** We hope to see you there.