



## Virgin Islands National Park

### PRESS RELEASE

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## FRIENDS OF VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK RECEIVE GRANT FOR CORAL REEF RESTORATION PROJECT

John Garrison, president of Friends of Virgin Islands National Park, announced today that the group received a \$48,600 grant from Canon, USA, Inc., through the National Park Foundation as part of the Expedition into the Parks program.

The Friends will be partnering with the National Park Service and the Biological Resources Division of USGS in this exciting and very important project aimed at the restoration and conservation of the Park's most valuable natural resources, the coral reefs which surround the island.

Russell Berry, Superintendent of Virgin Islands National Park, said This project is of critical importance to the Park. Our coral reefs have declined alarmingly over the past decade, and this project will assist us in learning how to restore these marvelous treasures for the enjoyment of future generations.



**The Clean Earth  
Campaign**  
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Now in its third year, Expedition Into The Parks sends volunteers into the National Parks to perform hands-on conservation and restoration work under the direction of resource managers and scientists. Virgin Islands National Park is one of 63 National Parks that since 1995 have received Expedition funds from Canon USA, who has donated over \$4.5 million in cash and equipment to the NPS through the National Park Foundation. In 1999, Expedition is funding projects in 11 Parks with a donation of more than \$1 million in cash and equipment. Expedition Into The Parks is funded through Canon USA's Clean Earth Campaign, which guides the company's environmental initiatives. The National Park Foundation is the official nonprofit partner of the National Park Service. Created by Congress in 1967, the Foundation raises support

from corporations, foundations, and individuals to preserve and enhance America's national parks. Over the past five years, BPF has raised more than \$42 million in direct support for the National Parks.



Coral reefs in the Caribbean, including those in our national parks, have sustained damage from natural events (hurricanes, coral predators and diseases) and human activities (boat groundings, improper anchoring, overfishing, sedimentation from development, elevated nutrients, SCUBA diving and snorkeling). Recent studies have found little to no recovery of damaged reefs. Some scientists believe reintroduction of coral colonies to damaged reefs may initiate and speed up recovery. Little, however, is known regarding the feasibility of growing fragments of fast growing corals which could later be transplanted to a damaged site.

Fragments of three of the fastest growing coral species found in the Caribbean will be attached to degraded reefs at underwater trails in Virgin Islands National Park and Buck Island Reef National Monument; colony survival and growth rates will be documented. Two of the proposed species (elkhorn and staghorn coral) for transplantation have declined greatly throughout the Caribbean, including Virgin Islands National Park and Buck Island Reef National Monument. Underwater signs will interpret the project and the causes of damage to reefs; interpretive rangers will discuss the project and damage to reefs as part of a snorkel tour. A locally produced underwater video will be shown on local television, at Trunk Bay (St. John) and local schools. The project will be highlighted in two websites. Using photography, trained volunteers will monitor the survival of transplanted fragments and naturally occurring small colonies of elkhorn coral in three St. John bays and document the presence of disease and coral predators. Scientists and resource managers will photograph and measure colony size of transplanted corals every six months for two years at both the underwater trails and the three St. John bays. Feasibility of using the technique for accelerating recovery of damaged reefs will be evaluated.

Ginger Garrison, principal investigator for the project and a marine biologist with USGS, said Canon USA and the National Park Foundation have given the Virgin Islands community and Virgin Islands National Park a wonderful opportunity. We are confident that by bringing scientists and citizens together to work on this project, a way can be found to help restore our fragile coral reefs which have been damaged by human activities and nature.