

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PLAN ADOPTED FOR CONTROL OF GOATS AND SHEEP

Arthur Frederick, Virgin Islands National Park Superintendent, announced today the adoption of a *Sustained Reduction Plan for Non-native Goats and Sheep within Virgin Islands National Park*, a long-range plan for minimizing impacts from this feral, non-native animal species within the Park. That plan has been finalized and approved by the Southeast Regional Director of the National Park Service.

Completion of the plan culminates a 12-month public planning process and represents the third time in the Park's forty-seven year history that there has been a comprehensive approach to managing non-native animal impacts on natural and cultural resources in the Park.

Rafe Boulon, Chief of Resource Management at Virgin Islands National Park, explains. "Introduced species such as goats and sheep, pose a serious threat to the Park's natural resources, long-term management programs, and visitor health and safety. The program is termed a 'sustained reduction' because once the goat and sheep populations are reduced to low levels; the smaller populations will be held at or below that level. The proposed control program mirrors similar programs throughout the world and is needed to meet a variety of Federal and Territorial laws and National Park Service mandates."

VINP and Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture (VIDA) formed a partnership that allows VIDA to assist with goat and sheep capture. Both agencies will promote the VIDA Animal Registration and Impoundment Program, which requires livestock including goats, sheep, hogs and donkeys to be fenced, registered and visibly tagged. Funds from VINP may be available for St. John livestock ranchers to repair fences. Livestock ranchers are advised to remove their animals from NPS lands, maintain their enclosures to prevent future encroachments and register their livestock with VIDA.

The proposed sustained reduction program would be accomplished in three phases. In the first phase, administration, infrastructure acquisition, and possibly fencing in selected areas. In phase two, techniques such as baits, traps and shooters will be used to humanely reduce populations throughout the Park. Phase three will be to monitor for and remove remnant goats and sheep community outreach, information dissemination and fence maintenance.

Phase I will require approximately one year to complete once environmental compliance is complete. This year will be used to hire or contract with personnel, purchase supplies, construct traps, establish communications, and fence especially vulnerable long-term monitoring plots. NPS may also begin selective fencing near limited areas of the boundary where goats and sheep can easily reenter the Park (Herman Farm, L' Esperance and Catherineberg, Bordeaux Mountain, Hawksnest, Cinnamon, Ram Head and Lameshur). Funds will possibly be made available for island livestock ranchers to repair their fences.

An initial goat and sheep population reduction campaign is envisioned in Phase II. It will possibly take approximately 2 to 3 years. Baiting, single-capture and corral traps will be employed to collect animals. Areas of high goat (and to a much smaller degree sheep) concentrations that live in the Park and omits animals that graze the Park routinely, but live outside the Park, a situation that occurs at Bordeaux Mountain and the East End portion of the Park. Moreover, because of the dramatically increased herd size at Ram Head/Lameshur, and Brown Bay/Leinster, natural resource degradation would continue at an accelerated rate. In addition, perhaps the worst aspect is the new introductions at Lind Point and along the North Shore area, because goats could be impacting as much as 100% of the terrestrial Park, within a few years. Goat and sheep movements will determine where the collection efforts must then be focused. Biological data will be recorded from each animal.

Phase III will be an indefinite period of scheduled and systematic monitoring throughout NPS land for goat and sheep sign. Monitoring efforts for the presence or absence of goats and sheep is crucial to routinely locate and remove animals from the Park, and protect the sensitive natural and cultural resources. If goats, sheep or their foraging and trampling sign become evident in an area, NPS Law Enforcement or Resource Management personnel will trap or humanely collect the animals.

A public meeting was held at the Legislative Conference Room on August 12, 2003 in St. John that introduced the plan to control introduced animals within the Park. The well-attended meeting gained support for the program and a majority of participants favored the control actions.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Wildlife Services program will conduct the goat and sheep management program under contract with the NPS. Virgin Islands National Park is reducing the number of goats and sheep in this park directly by trapping and shooting. Meat will be distributed to local community members or to volunteers participating in the reduction program. Only qualified Federal employees would within a practical extent distribute goat and sheep meat as per NPS Regulations (NPS 77). For more information about meat donations or funds for fence repair, please contact Carrie Stengel at VINP (340) 693-8950 extension 240.

Wildlife Services provides federal leadership and expertise to resolve conflicts between people and wildlife. Wildlife Services works in all 50 states upon request to help balance the needs of both people and wildlife. In the last decade, their mission has expanded beyond agricultural damage management to include minimizing wildlife threats to public health and safety, resolving wildlife conflicts in rural areas, protecting private and industrial property, protecting threatened and endangered species, and preserving natural resources.

The decision to adopt the *Sustained Reduction Plan for Non-native Goats and Sheep within Virgin Islands National Park* is documented in a Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and National Park Service policy and guidelines. The FONSI is based upon a Draft Plan and Environmental Assessment (Plan/EA) released in December 2003 and comments of agencies and the public on the Draft Plan/EA.

Copies of the adopted Plan may be viewed at public libraries, the Park's Visitor Center in Cruz Bay, and National Park Headquarters at Christiansted, St. Croix, or can be downloaded from the

Internet at www.nps.gov/viis or www.friendsvinp.org. Printed or electronic copies of the Plan also be requested at Rafe_Boulon@nps.gov or by calling (340) 693-8950 extension 224.
