

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK RELEASES DRAFT PLAN FOR
SUSTAINED REDUCTION OF NON-NATIVE GOATS AND SHEEP**

Arthur Frederick, Virgin Islands National Park Superintendent, announced today the beginning of a 60-day public review of the *Draft Sustained Reduction Plan for Non-native Goats and Sheep Within Virgin Islands National Park Environmental Assessment (EA)*, a long-range plan for minimizing impacts from feral, non-native animal species within the national park. The review period will be from December 15, 2003 to February 15, 2004.

The purpose of the Draft Environmental Assessment is to evaluate impacts from undertaking a control program for non-native domestic goats and sheep within Virgin Islands National Park. By reducing populations inside the Park, adverse impacts to visitors, residents, natural, cultural and aquatic resources will decrease. Collectively, goat and sheep populations pose a threat to the native natural resources, long-term resource management programs of the Park, cultural resources, and visitor health and safety.

Domestic goats and sheep are ungulate species native to South West Asia. The Park has experienced goat and sheep grazing since it was established in 1956. Goat and sheep populations would be expected to increase throughout the Park, if left unchecked. Goats and sheep have established non-native breeding populations in many areas and all habitat types of Virgin Islands National Park. The proposed action is intended to humanely reduce their populations within the Park and minimize new introductions.

The effects of goats and sheep on Park resources result from their movements, habitat utilization and food habits. Of greatest concern are the destructive effects goats and sheep have on natural ecosystems and native components of those ecosystems. Selective grazing produces changes in dominant plant species. Reduces native plant populations, increases invasive plant distribution through seed dispersal, and increases soil erosion that occurs near salt ponds and marine communities. Habitat destruction also impacts native animals, aesthetics, visitor and health, and reduces the stability of historical ruins. Their grazing and trampling detrimentally affect the aesthetic and wilderness values of the Park. Goats and sheep negatively affect the flora and fauna of the Park through habitat alteration and competition for food.

VINP and Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture (VIDA) formed a partnership authorizing 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 and maintain their enclosures to prevent future encroachments.

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. USDA Wildlife Services personnel will conduct wildlife reduction program with assistance from VINP staff. In addition, some meat will be donated to individuals for personal consumption.

Copies of the Draft Environmental Assessment are available for review at public libraries and the Park's Visitor Center in Cruz Bay, National Park Headquarters at Christiansted NHS, St. Croix or can be downloaded from the Internet at www.nps.gov/viis or www.friendsvinp.org. Copies can also be requested from [Rafe Boulon@nps.gov](mailto:Rafe_Boulon@nps.gov) or by calling (340) 693-8950 extension 224.

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