



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DPNR RECEIVES \$2.1 MILLION AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL  
CHALLENGE GRANT**

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Commissioner Jean-Pierre L. Oriol of the Department of Planning & Natural Resources (DPNR) announces the receipt of a \$2.1 million AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL CHALLENGE 2023 grant to create St. Croix's first conservation corridor which will include new hiking trails and wildlife habitat. The project, **"Human and Nature Connections: U.S. Virgin Islands Territorial Parks, Waters, Trails, and Work Program,"** includes collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism, and the Virgin Islands Trail Alliance, runs until 2027, intending to employ a youth conservation corps to restore more than a quarter of wetlands on the island, establishing habitat corridors between Altona Lagoon and Great Pond, from the north to the south shores.

"We're honored to receive this major national award that will benefit our natural ecosystems through public-private partnerships," Nicole Angeli, Ph.D., Director of the Division of Fish & Wildlife, said. "The project will expand public access to natural areas while stemming erosion along 2.11 miles of beach and will use environmental engineering interventions and reforestation to restore a total of 260 acres or 27% of wetlands on St. Croix," Angeli concluded.

The initiative, managed by the new Territorial Parks System, is slated to increase public land protection from 5 to 12 percent, increasing opportunities for the public to connect with nature through activities such as hiking, biking, birding, fishing, and other wildlife experiences. The six-mile-long corridor will connect two critical coastal wetlands of rocky grasslands across public and private property. The project includes restoration of beach habitat at Altona Lagoon and Great Pond with access points; solar charging stations; a youth corps program, and public planning workshops. The Divisions of Fish & Wildlife, Territorial Parks & Protected Areas, Coastal Zone Management, and State Historic Preservation Office are all partners on the grant.

The award is funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation through money to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services from the White House's Investing in America agenda. For more information, call 340-773-1082.

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