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\$2.1 Million Grant Awarded to Create First Conservation Corridor in St. Croix

Major national award to boost St. Croix's natural ecosystems

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The V.I. Department of Planning & Natural Resources on Friday announced a significant step forward in environmental conservation with the receipt of a \$2.1 million America the Beautiful Challenge 2023 grant.

This funding is set to create St. Croix's first conservation corridor, which will feature new hiking trails and wildlife habitats.

The project, titled "Human and Nature Connections: U.S. Virgin Islands Territorial Parks, Waters, Trails, and Work Program," is a collaborative effort involving The Nature Conservancy, Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism, and the Virgin Islands Trail Alliance.

Scheduled to run until 2027, the initiative aims to employ a youth conservation corps to restore over a quarter of the wetlands on the island. This will establish habitat corridors between Altona Lagoon and Great Pond, stretching from the north to the south shores of the island.

Nicole Angeli, director of the Division of Fish & Wildlife, expressed gratitude for the grant, noting, “We’re honored to receive this major national award that will benefit our natural ecosystems through public-private partnerships.” The project will not only expand public access to natural areas but also address environmental concerns such as erosion along 2.11 miles of beach. Angeli added, “The project will use environmental engineering interventions and reforestation to restore a total of 260 acres or 27% of wetlands on St. Croix.”

Managed by the new Territorial Parks System, the initiative aims to increase public land protection from 5 to 12 percent, according to DPNR. This enhancement will provide the public with more opportunities to engage with nature, offering activities such as hiking, biking, birding, fishing, and other wildlife experiences.

The project will span a six-mile-long corridor, connecting two critical coastal wetlands of rocky grasslands across both public and private properties. It includes the restoration of beach habitat at Altona Lagoon and Great Pond, with plans for access points, solar charging stations, a youth corps program, and public planning workshops. Various divisions, including Fish & Wildlife, Territorial Parks & Protected Areas, Coastal Zone Management, and the State Historic Preservation Office, are partners in the grant.

The funding for this award comes from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, as part of the White House’s Investing in America agenda. For further information, interested parties can contact 340-773-1082.