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Law Enforcement, Including Coast Guard to Start Patrolling Buck Island Waters for Inspections; Park Service to Enforce Rules, Regulations

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Buck Island on St. Croix

ST. CROIX — Buck Island Reef National Monument is announcing the implementation of boater safety inspections and operations, the National Park Service (NPS) announced Thursday.

July the 4th is just around the corner, and traditionally Buck Island Reef National Monument is a holiday designation for the local boating community. "Many local and visiting boaters are unaware that all of Buck Island Reef National Monument is managed according to national park standards and it is our responsibility to do our part to protect life, property and park resources within the monument, a Marine Protected Area" said Greg Camacho, Park Superintendent. "We

are asking boaters to assist us by acting in a safe and responsible manner while they enjoy their visit to Buck Island Reef National Monument."

To help make everyone's visit to Buck Island Reef NM safe and enjoyable this summer, NPS will be participating with local marine authorities in a unified command to conduct safety boating inspections. National Park Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, and the Virgin Island Police Department will be on the water conducting safety inspections, BUI (Boating Under the Influence) stops, and checking for NPS Buck Island Reef authorized anchoring permits. According to U.S. Coast Guard Regulations (including 33 CFR 151; 33 CFR 155; 33 CFR 175.61; 36 CFR 83; 36 CFR 175; 46 CFR 25; 46 CFR 58, among many others) all boats must be equipped with the following safety equipment, at all times:

- Life jackets
- Fire extinguishers
- Horns or whistles
- Navigational lights for night boat operations

Vessels without these items will be turned around and prevented from entering the monument, NPS said.

"Unfortunately, in the last few months there has been an increase in the number of boat groundings in the monument. Law enforcement officers will be providing information on marine hazards coral reef shallows, speed limits, and redirecting boaters away from shallow coral reef areas to prevent damage to protected coral reefs and the marine life they support," said NPS. "It is strongly urged for boaters to review navigational charts, navigational aids, any marine hazards prior to entering monument waters. Know your destination."

NPS said anchoring in the monument is restricted to the West Beach Anchoring Area, and an annual anchoring permit is required for all vessels. Vessels entering the lagoon to access the underwater trail moorings or to SCUBA dive moorings must obtain an anchoring permit. There is no overnight anchoring at Buck Island; anchoring area is day use only, according to the park service.

To get a Buck Island Reef National Monument anchoring permit with a map of the mandatory anchorage area, and additional information regarding safety rules and regulations email chri_permits@nps.gov, or visit our website [this](#) website.

"When you visit Buck Island Reef National Monument please maintain awareness of your surroundings at all times, whether motoring or at anchor," NPS advised. "While underway maintain slow controlled speed at all times, and be aware of swimmers, snorkelers, and SCUBA divers in the area, especially in anchoring and mooring areas.

"Pay attention to navigational buoys: park yellow boundary buoys mark the start of the no-fishing area; white informational buoys provide the location of the anchoring area, when to slow down, no wake areas, and information about mooring area at underwater trail. Red Nun and Green Can buoys are located at the lagoon entrance. Remember: Red Right Returning."

NPS also reminded visitors that consuming alcohol at Buck Island, whether on land or in the water, is not allowed.

The following rules apply to Buck Island Reef National Monument:

- Anchoring permits are required
- Special use and business permits are not being issued
- Comfort stations are open for use at two picnic areas
- 10-person maximum per boat, including captain (no multiple drop offs)
- Parties and gatherings larger than 20 people are prohibited
- All guided hikes and public and educational programs remain cancelled
- Pack it in, pack it out! NO Trash collection; Bring garbage bags so you can take your trash off island with you.
- Maintain social distancing of at least six (6) feet
- No rafting of vessels; maintain distance at least 12 feet between vessels
- Fishing is not allowed within monument waters; no fishing gear allowed on boats
- Dogs, other pets, and other non-native animals are not allowed in the waters or on land at the Monument
- Buck Island Reef is a natural area with many sensitive resources and provides a special visitor experience; vessels with external speakers broadcasting loud music may be cited and the audio equipment may be confiscated

"Over the past six months there have been violations of park rules and regulations including but not limited to grounded vessels, anchoring in the no-anchor zone, speeding through no-wake zones, playing of loud music, dogs on the beach, and the use of jet skis," NPS said. "Not only are many of these activities unsafe and potentially dangerous to other visitors, they also impact our sensitive, and in some cases, endangered plants, animals, and fish. We ask that our visitors follow the rules so everyone can have a safe, enjoyable experience."

The park service said Buck Island Reef hosts several visitors throughout the year. As of March 2020, a group of over 70 adult Least Terns have arrived and have been attempting to nest on the beach. To ensure protection for the colony, eggs, and chicks the southeastern section of beach from the sand spur point to the pier (south) has been temporarily closed. The area is marked with signs, ropes/stakes, and warning tape. "We ask that visitors to avoid the closure and not walk toward or around the closed area," NPS said. "This least tern nesting area at Buck Island is unique to the Virgin Islands. It is the only area where the birds have no threat from vehicles, dogs, and other non-native predators. The only danger to the terns nesting success seems to be from human disturbance and dogs and other non-native animals illegally on the island."

NPS encouraged people who choose to visit Buck Island Reef National Monument during the coronavirus pandemic to continue to adhere to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and territorial and local public health authorities to protect visitors and employees.

As services are limited, the NPS also urged visitors to continue to practice "Leave No Trace" principles, including pack-in and pack-out, to keep outdoor spaces safe and healthy.

"Please maintain social distancing of at least six (6) feet while on beaches and trail and on boats," the NPS said. "If you are sick, or have symptoms of COVID-19, please stay home. The park is open March through September 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and October through February 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m."

"We thank everyone for their understanding and patience during this period of uncertainty, and we appreciate your cooperation," the park service concluded.

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