

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Trump Initiative Changes Name Of V.I. National Park To 'Caribbean National Parks', Upsetting Local Leaders

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Update: See the National Park Service's response [here](#), which essential debunks claims made by Senate President Myron Jackson.

ST. JOHN -- Senate President Myron Jackson on Wednesday encouraged concerned residents to attend a public meeting to discuss the sudden reorganization and name change of the Virgin Islands National Park. The meeting, organized by the Virgin Islands Unity Day Group at 6 p.m. on Thursday at the Cleone H. Creque Legislative Conference Room in Cruz Bay, St. John, is expected to include representatives from the National Park Service to provide information on how the changes will affect the territory.

“The possible change of name of the Virgin Islands National Park to the Caribbean National Parks and news that superintendents will be located in Puerto Rico is unacceptable in this day and age,” Mr. Jackson said. “This centennial year should be about revisiting the Virgin Islands Park System in addressing the cultural resources, community values, heritage and land issues of the Virgin Islands. Why were we not consulted as a community? Why has the Governor or the Delegate not addressed the community on this drastic change?”

According to Lorelei Monsanto, a member of the Virgin Islands Unity Day group, the territory’s federally-protected land and water resources, the change occurred on July 11, 2017. It calls for what used to be known as the Virgin Islands National Park to now be referred to as the Caribbean National Parks, and for its administrative leadership to be transferred to neighboring Puerto Rico. The move is said to be the initiative of President Donald Trump.

The change brings up potential issues such as the lack of local control and oversight of the territory’s resources, lack of internal cultural resource management, and ambiguity surrounding the employment status of persons under the Virgin Islands National Park, he said.

The area in question consists of 7,259 acres of terrestrial habitat, which accounts for roughly 60 percent of St. John’s land mass, as well as 5,650 acres of adjacent submerged lands, along with ridge tops and reefs. The Park Service has historically been tasked with providing protection and preservation for tropical and migrating birds, fish, corals and other marine life, as well as some 800 species of plants. Holdings under the National Park Service in the territory include land on the Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument, land on Hassel Island, the Christiansted National Historic Site, Salt River National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve, and Buck Island.

“I am also requesting that Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett call public hearings in the Virgin Islands to address our concerns on this decision by federal officials,” Mr. Jackson, a historian and staunch proponent of Virgin Islands culture, said. “These are our islands and our home and we should be fully engaged as to how our resources and future are decided.”

The Virgin Islands Unity Day Group is an organization formed to promote unity, cooperation and togetherness among residents of the USVI by taking action to fight racism, social injustice, and community deterioration with informative educational activities and outreach programs which are positive and inclusive of all segments of the community, according to its Facebook page.

For more information about the meeting, call 776-6285.