

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Removal Of Displaced Vessels In Salt River And Long Reef Begins; More Than 400 Identified Territory-Wide

Community Center / **Published On November 05, 2017 12:27 PM /**

Staff **November 05, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- The Department of Planning and Natural Resources (D.P.N.R.) announced recently that salvage operations for vessels displaced by Hurricanes Irma and Maria began on Thursday in the areas of Salt River Bay and Long Reef on St. Croix.

"DPNR prioritized these areas because the displaced vessels and hazardous materials aboard are impacting these environmentally sensitive areas," D.P.N.R. Commissioner Dawn Henry said.

Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve is a unit of the National Park Service (N.P.S.), and is jointly managed by D.P.N.R. and N.P.S. The park

preserves upland watersheds, mangrove forests, coral reefs, estuarine, and marine environments that support threatened and endangered species, according to the release.

D.P.N.R. said it has taken the lead with the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (E.P.A.) in conjunction with the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and N.P.S., to begin a long process of removing hazardous materials and vessels from the USVI ports, waterways and shorelines in the aftermath of recent hurricanes.

The U.S. Coast Guard the E.P.A. assessment teams have identified more than 400 displaced vessels among the islands of St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas. The Coast Guard hired the National Response Corporation to remove fuel, oil and other hazardous materials from the vessels, while Resolve Marine Group will oversee the salvage and movement of vessels to intermediate holding areas. Both companies have decades of experience, D.P.N.R. said.

Due to environmental sensitivity in Salt River Bay and Long Reef, these removals are conducted at no cost to the vessel owners. Some of the vessels salvaged will be moved to intermediate holding areas in Salt River Bay. These areas were chosen as locations with sand, gravel, and mud bottom to temporarily moor vessels while D.P.N.R. and the U.S. Coast Guard work with owners to determine the final disposition of the vessels.

Due to safety concerns, D.P.N.R. strongly encouraged all commercial and recreational operations within the bay to cease during these salvage operations. D.P.N.R. and the U.S. Coast Guard asked for the communities' patience and understanding as they "work hard to protect the environment and help restore the beauty of the islands," according to the release.

Prior to removal of any displaced vessel within the boundaries of the Caribbean National Parks, vessel owners must contact the National Park Service via email at caribbean_recovery@nps.gov or D.P.N.R. at USVIDPNR@gmail.com.

For questions or concerns, call the Coast Guard ESF-10 Public Information Officer at 340-423-6688.