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Buck Island's West Beach Closes to Protect Nesting Terns

Community Center / **Published On May 13, 2023 06:48 AM /**

Staff Consortium **May 13, 2023**

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West Beach at Buck Island Reef National Monument on St. Croix is currently a no-go zone, according to the National Park Service. NPS says that is because a group of about 20 adult least terns have settled down on the site and established a nesting colony there.

Buck Island, NPS says, is one of fifteen known nesting sites on St. Croix for this species of migratory birds. The terns return to the Big Island annually between April and May, and lay small speckled, sand-colored eggs in shallow depressions on the open beach, according to the agency. Both parents take turns to sitting on the eggs while the other partner forages and protects the nest.

NPS says the birds are easily disturbed and fly towards any intruder that may approach, leaving the eggs to scorch in the heat and exposed to possible predation.

Of the fifteen known nesting sites on St. Croix, only this one on Buck Island provides safety from the threat of vehicles, dogs, and other non-native predators. To preserve this unique space for the terns, NPS has closed off the southeastern section of the beach to public access. The area from the sand spur point to the southern pier has been cordoned off with ropes, stakes and warning tape, and patrons have been asked not to walk near or towards the restricted area.

Dogs, not allowed on the beach or in the water at Buck Island National Monument in the first place, are said to pose particular danger to the success of the nesting colony, and as such NPS is once again reminding the public not to bring dogs to the park.

The agency says that while some activities on the beach have been allowed to continue, the NPS Superintendent will take steps to close the beach completely if human activity threatens the success of the terns' nesting colony.

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