

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DPNR Launches Annual Lionfish Derby in Bid to Protect Local Ecosystem

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The V.I. Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources announced Monday that in an effort to manage the growing population of invasive lionfish, it has partnered with the Caribbean Oceanic Restoration and Education Foundation to sponsor the annual Lionfish Derby.

Scheduled for Saturday, May 27th, the Lionfish Derby will allow participants to harvest lionfish from 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. across all of St. Croix's territorial waters, except for marine protected areas and Buck Island. Weigh stations for the harvested lionfish will be set up at Altona Lagoon, Molasses Dock, and the Frederiksted boat ramp, with final weigh-ins starting at 4 P.M.

The following day, Sunday, May 28th, the public is invited to the Leatherback Brewery in the St. Croix Industrial Park for lionfish preparation demonstrations and tastings, as well as the awards ceremony. The event will run from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Cash prizes worth over \$7,500 will be awarded to the teams that capture the largest and highest number of lionfish. The registration fee for the event is \$50, and participants can form teams of up to four people.

Lionfish, a species native to the Pacific, was first detected in the Virgin Islands in 2008. The species poses a significant threat to the local ecosystem as it consumes a wide variety of marine life, including lobsters, crabs, and up to 80 percent of fish communities on reefs. Lionfish reproduce quickly and outcompete native fish for resources. Recent studies suggest that the current fishing pressure on lionfish needs to increase significantly to manage the species effectively in the territory.

For further information about the Lionfish Derby or to learn more about lionfish, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife at 340-773-1082. To register for the event, visit the official derby website at <https://www.corevi.org/2023derby-609292.html>.