

The Virgin Islands Consortium

National Park Service to Modernize Anchoring Permit Process for Buck Island; Invites Public Input on Proposed Fee Structure

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Buck Island on St. Croix.

This story was last updated on Wednesday, August 2, 2023 to correct mooring permits costs based on information provided by the National Park Service.

The National Park Service is seeking public feedback on a proposed revamp of its anchoring permit system for the Buck Island Reef National Monument, including the introduction of a permit fee.

In an effort to modernize the application process, the NPS intends to move permit applications online. As a result, visitors can look forward to a more streamlined experience, where they can apply and receive their permits via email, as opposed to the current in-person system available only during business hours.

The proposed changes are anticipated to enhance the accessibility of permits, with revenues earmarked for improving the conservation efforts at the Buck Island Reef National Monument. The additional funding will augment programs such as the sea-turtle nesting initiative, the treatment of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, and monitoring of various terrestrial and marine species.

This transformation is not just procedural; it is also an investment in the visitor experience. The NPS is planning to use the permit fees to enrich amenities, including overnight anchoring, redevelopment of park-led tours, maintenance of safety and navigation buoys, upkeep of existing comfort stations and grills, and improved signage.

The proposed fee structure is based on the vessel's length, with weekly and annual rates for anchoring and mooring permits ranging from \$130-\$585 depending on vessel length. An overnight anchoring permit, limited to 14 consecutive nights per year, has a proposed rate of \$120 per night.

The National Park Service emphasized the significance of public participation in this decision-making process. From July 19, 2023, to August 26, 2023, members of the public are invited to share their thoughts on the proposed changes.

Comments can be submitted via email to chri_comments@nps.gov, by mail to 2100 Church St #100, Christiansted, VI 00820, or by phone at 340-277-6782 on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:30AM and 11:30AM.

The NPS assures that every comment can make a difference and could potentially shape alternative approaches to achieving the NPS's goals. Public feedback will also help the NPS to consider the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the proposed changes and to identify potential projects that might be affected by this project.