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NPS Finalizes Caneel Bay Redevelopment Plan, Aims to Boost Local Economy

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Caneel Bay in St. John, before it was walloped by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.
By. GETTY IMAGES

The National Park Service announced Friday that it has finalized its Caneel Bay Redevelopment and Management Environmental Assessment (EA), revealing plans for restoring commercial overnight lodging at Caneel Bay within the Virgin Islands National Park.

The decision, marked by the signing of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) document by NPS Southeast Regional Director Mark Foust, follows three years of careful review and integration of public feedback. Foust said that the plan is aimed at promoting greater public access, protecting Caneel's unique resources, and strengthening the local economy.

The approved Alternative B outlines future use areas zoned for hotel lodging, public beach access, conservation, NPS interpretation, programming, and potential community spaces within the Caneel campus.

The EA process, according to Park Superintendent Nigel Fields, involved public meetings, multiple plan alternatives, over 3,000 correspondences, and collaboration with public agencies. The outcome is a resilient and sustainable plan, Fields noted, designed for equitable access, economic stimulus, and a unique visitor experience.

Although the Caneel Bay retained use estate (RUE) will remain valid until September 30, 2023, planning for the redevelopment began in 2021. The plan aims to preserve natural, cultural, and marine resources, stimulate economic growth through commercial services, maximize operational efficiencies, and ensure regulatory compliance.

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett stated her support for the redevelopment, highlighting Caneel Bay's crucial role in the region's competitiveness. She called for the future selection of a developer to be conducted transparently and with due regard to local voices.

"I am hopeful the Caneel Bay redevelopment can accommodate a world-class resort that satisfies the needs of the local workforce and economy. I have urged, and will continue to urge, the NPS to use a transparent, open process that comprehensively considers Virgin Islanders' voices," she said.