

Friends with Money: Private Support for a National Park in the US Virgin Islands

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Abstract: *With the decline of state-sponsored funding for protected areas, private support has become increasingly important, and, in some places, predominant. This article explores and analyses the implications of private support for the Virgin Islands National Park in St. John, US Virgin Islands. Specifically, it focuses on the emergence of an organisation called Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park. This organisation's support has become essential to the management of the park, which consistently experiences significant shortfalls in federal funding. While this support has been beneficial to the park, it has exacerbated the long-standing tensions between park management and local people, which have existed since the park was established with support from Laurence S. Rockefeller in 1956. At issue are the ways in which the Friends Group raises money, the park programmes it funds, the interpretation of historic sites, synergistic relationships between the group and certain island residents, and the group's political capital in national arenas. The paper highlights the inequitable structural relationships in which local people find themselves and their values disregarded. By way of conclusion, the article addresses the more general implications of these dynamics for private support of protected areas, particularly how private support can disenfranchise those outside of philanthropic partnerships.*

Keywords: privatisation, protected areas, Caribbean, philanthropy

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INTRODUCTION

A NATIONAL PARK on the small, 19 square-mile Caribbean island of St. John in the US Virgin Islands is the beneficiary of increasing amounts of private support, both from businesses and individuals. This support, which comes in the form of monetary donations, volunteer hours and in-kind gifts, makes its way into the Virgin Islands National Park (VINP) through one primary source: a non-profit park support group called Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park (Friends VINP)¹. The kind of support that Friends VINP channels to VINP is essential in an environment where government appropriations have not matched inflation and in some years declined in actual dollars.

Private support of parks has a long history in the US, where many parks have been established with private lands and/or financial donations, including the park under examination here. In the early 1950s, Laurance S. Rockefeller provided over a million dollars of his own money to purchase land to help establish VINP. Since the park's establishment, numerous other individuals have also donated land for the park. Private investment and philanthropy in support of parks continues to grow, particularly corporate and business sponsorship of the national park system. Private support of state-sponsored protected areas is also becoming more common worldwide, as well as the emergence of protected areas that are privately owned and managed (Langholz & Lassoie 2001; Kramer et al. 2002; Langholz 2003; Friends of the Earth International 2005; Sims-Castley et al. 2005; Igoe 2007).

While some hail this trend as beneficial and at times essential, others take a more cautious view (Arnberger et al. 2004; Wade 2005; see also Bernstein & Mitchell 2005). Such support generally results in an improvement in natural and cultural resource protection. However, it can also compromise the ability of protected area agencies to negotiate favourable relationships with local communities. It can also, as is argued here, create tensions between different user groups, particularly between local and non-local constituencies.

Many of St. John's residents (a year-round population of about 5000), especially St. Johnians, the island's main Afro-Caribbean population (of about 1500 people), view Friends VINP as asserting undue influence on the National Park Service (NPS). They feel the Group facilitates programmes, activities and volunteer opportunities in the park that its members and donors prefer rather than those that are of interest to the island's diverse population. One St. Johnian argues that the group represents "wealthy and white donors"; a few of the most skeptical argue that the group is a mouthpiece for the real estate industry (see also Stern 2006). While neither of these representations is completely accurate, there are aspects of the group's structure and operations that lead residents to ask fair questions about who benefits the most from the official partnership between Friends VINP and VINP. Does private support benefit certain "publics" over others? Do park agencies pay more attention to the voices associated with Friends Groups? Does private support limit an

agency's ability to foster positive relationships with the broader public it serves?

Although Friends VINP does fund programmes and projects of interest to many "publics", the group remains controversial among most of the island's residents. By tracing the flow of private support into the park on St. John via Friends VINP we will be able to see why this is the case. Similarly, we find NPS in a position from which negotiating is difficult: the agency is becoming increasingly beholden to private support while trying to foster better relations with the island's Afro-Caribbean community. This situation is made doubly difficult by the fact that the relationship between VINP and this community has been consistently poor, generally the result of poor communication and management on the part of NPS over the past fifty years (Olwig 1980, 1994; Fortwangler & Stern 2004; Fortwangler 2007), and an incompatibility over land management and use values (Olwig 2005). This case study also highlights how private support can effectively disenfranchise those outside of philanthropic partnerships despite the best intentions of public and private partners.

MONIED PARTNERS: NATIONAL PARK FRIENDS GROUPS

During the mid 1980s, park support groups began to spring up across the US. Most groups have been established during the past thirty years (Machlis & Medlin 1993; Fortwangler 1996), an indication that the growing need for private support of the parks motivated many to organise. In 2003, 42 per cent of US national park sites had what is known as a "Friends Group" (US GAO 2003). Today, the Park Service lists 177 Friends Groups on its partnership website². Friends Groups "fundraise, friend-raise, and advocate" (Cherng & Heaney 2005: 4). A few groups are affiliated with more than one unit of the park system, such as the Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park (Friends VINP), which supports both the national park and the Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument (CRNM), a marine protected area. Park superintendents often request funding (sometimes prioritised) from a group, which then decides what it wants to fund (sometimes it funds prioritised projects, sometimes not). At other times, groups also fund their own programmes to benefit the park.

It is difficult to determine how much these groups donate to NPS as the agency does not track such donations. A recent survey, however, estimates the amount at \$70 million for the fiscal years 1997–2001 (this is low though, as only two-thirds of Friends Groups participated; US GAO 2003). Another estimate puts the monetary donation (for operations and projects) of the top fifteen Friends Groups along with NPF in 1999 at about \$50 million (Rocky Mountain National Park Associates 1999). The relationships between Friends Groups and NPS are strong. Attend a group's annual meeting and you will likely find a top US government official giving a key note address. Participate

in a Park Service workshop on “civic engagement” or partnership building and you will find Friends leaders around the table.

Partnerships have become increasingly important over the past 25 years as money appropriated for national parks has not kept up with inflation. The result has been an under-funded and under-staffed NPS that now has a deferred maintenance backlog estimated at \$4.1 to \$6.8 billion (NPCA 2004). Individual park units face serious budget shortfalls and considerable maintenance backlogs. At some parks, private funds and support are critical to sustain even basic operating expenses. At VINP, for example, a 2001 business plan documented a \$2.6 million shortfall in the operational budget and a \$22.9 million investment backlog (NPS 2001a). These figures have increased in the past 6 years. VINP, like so many parks, needs support from its Friends Group in order to fulfil its mandate.

Park-Friends group relationships have enjoyed the National Park Foundation’s (the official private sector partner of NPS, created by Congress in 1967) support. Many groups follow a model close to NPF, the mission of which is “to strengthen the connection between the American people and their National Parks by raising private funds, making strategic grants, creating innovative partnerships and increasing public awareness.” NPF raises private contributions for NPS, awarding grants to individual park sites and agency-level programmes. In 1994, NPF launched the Park-Friends Initiative that evolved into the current National Park Friends Alliance (since 1998)³. The Alliance is a confederation of forty leading park philanthropy groups, including Friends VINP, which works “to engage the American public in philanthropy and volunteerism and help protect, enhance, and interpret park resources” (Buchholtz 2006)⁴.

Donations have more than doubled in recent years as NPF has pursued more corporate donations (e.g., donations in 1999 were \$18 million and \$41 million in 2003, US GAO 2004)⁵. Some park system supporters believe that corporations have a civic responsibility to help America’s national park sites (Buchholtz 2006). About 75 per cent of the donations to NPF now come from corporations (US GAO 2004:9). The total amount of corporate donations are likely to grow with the recently established *Centennial Initiative*. The Initiative, announced by the US Secretary of the Interior in August 2006, seeks to leverage \$1 billion dollars of federal funds (\$100 million per year for 10 years), with an equal amount or more of private donations to restore the national park system by its centennial year in 2016⁶. How such support can best be harnessed was one of the topics at the *Leadership Summit on Partnership and Philanthropy* held in October 2007. Many of the invitation-only attendees at the NPF organised event were representatives of corporations learning about beneficial relationships with national parks⁷.

Since the NPF and the Friends Groups share a very close relationship it is not surprising that many groups welcome corporate donations (similar to international conservation groups, see Dowie 2005). Indeed, NPF began en-

couraging groups in this way beginning in the mid 1990s. A 1996 survey of a hundred Friends Groups showed that corporate contributions averaged about 7 per cent of total contributions (Fortwangler 1996). Today that percentage is likely to be higher⁸. Friends of Acadia, a group supporting Acadia National Park and its surrounding communities, for example, received a \$1 million donation from LL. Bean in 2002, increasing the group's grant giving by 40 per cent annually (Friends of Acadia 2002). In 2004, the group received a grant of \$25,000 from Ford Motor Company to plan for a park transportation centre (Olson 2005a). The money was earmarked for the group's propane-powered buses that serve visitors; LL. Bean's logo graced the sides of the buses. In another example, Washington's National Park Fund (the friends group for Mt. Rainier, North Cascades and Olympic National Parks) lists over sixty "corporate philanthropic partners" on its website⁹. These include corporations, matching gift companies, workplace giving companies and in-kind donors.

Consider also the Friends Group under study here: in 2005 thirty-three (mostly local) business contributions and in-kind gifts were made to the group (Kessler pers. comm.). These included contributions from a jewellery store, a dive shop, a villa management company and the use of a luxury island villa for a high-end fund-raiser. The Group has also received large corporate donations: in 1996 Georgia Pacific Corporation donated \$40,000 to rebuild a beach pavilion and in 1999 Canon, USA, Inc. (through the National Park Foundation) donated \$48,600 for a coral restoration project. In 2005, corporate contributions and in-kind gifts came from Disney Cruise Lines, Hawaiian Tropic and three resorts on the island. Although Friends VINP receives substantial donations from corporations and local businesses, individuals and foundations still provide the majority of funding.

While Park-Friends partnerships are publicly celebrated, there are a few cracks in the foundation. First, there is a concern over an increased reliance by the Park Service on private funding from Friends Groups and their corporate supporters. Critics argue that the government is abdicating its responsibility to properly fund the national park system (NPCA 2004; Arnberger 2005). Some Friends Groups' leaders and former and current Park Service employees argue that the government is relying on partners in the wrong way, asking (or encouraging) them to provide basic operating expenses or funding for jobs that are the responsibility of NPS (Arnberger 2005; Wade 2005; Buchholtz 2006). The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees (CNPSR) cautions against private philanthropy serving as a "substitute for the federal responsibility to ensure protection and operation of the (national) parks through adequate and sustained provision of public funding" (Arnberger et al 2004; CNPSR 2007).

These critics believe philanthropy's role is to add value (Mitchell & Olson 2000; Olson 2000; Moore 2005). This is often why Friends Groups were started in the first place. They also do not want to be taxed twice: once by the Internal Revenue Service and then in the form of the donation to cover the

loss of appropriations (Olson 2004, 2005b). David Rockefeller, Jr., a long time NPF board member, has called for a “bright line between the federal responsibility and the private opportunity” (Rockefeller 2004).

Second, there is concern about an increased and disproportionate influence by Friends Groups and their corporate contributors on the park system (Wade 2005; see also Dorsey 2005 on the influence of corporations among international conservation organisations). Funds from private sources may vary from year to year and partners often stipulate how donations can be used, which might differ from park priorities (US GAO 2004). For example, corporate gifts to the NPF are most often in-kind or cash earmarked for certain projects, leading critics to charge that less money is available for park priorities that do not match donor interests (US GAO 2004). Supporters of corporate giving, however, argue that Friends Groups and corporations can find projects of both great need to a park and of interest to the corporation. The not-for-profit group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), however, points out the “danger that special interests can demand customized projects that do not serve park needs in return for their donations” (PEER 2007a). In a statement about the *Centennial Initiative*, PEER argues:

Under the Initiative, the private “partners” play a large role in deciding what projects move forward. It is axiomatic that a “partner” expects something for their contribution. The Initiative vests in the “partner” too much control over priorities. Thus, the wishes of the special interest partner may drive both what is to be done and how it is to be done, as at Big Bend—a bicycle trail, designed to meet only the recreational specifications of mountain bikers. By this means, unnecessary projects make the cut of what is funded as a Centennial Initiative project. The parks could become a “partnership pinata (sic).” Over time, the character and resources of the parks may be transformed under the allure of monied partners. This is a potential pitfall of the Centennial Initiative (PEER 2007b).

However, not everyone is as cautionary. For example, a former superintendent at VINP, speaking at one of the Friends VINP annual meetings on St. John, argued that since it was unlikely that the Congress would fund the operational needs of VINP (VINP was facing a \$2.6 million budget shortfall, had a backlog of about \$23 million, and was under-staffed by about forty-two people), the park had to be creative in how to get the much-needed resources. He strongly encouraged increasing the Group’s volunteer and financial support of the park—a point echoed by the keynote speaker, the Director of NPS. Subsequent superintendents have also welcomed an increased role for Friends VINP. If they do hold some reservations about the group or corporate support for the park it has only been voiced in private conversations.

And, finally, there are concerns over the political influence that the Friends Groups have with policy makers. Even Friends Groups recognise the substantial weight their voices carry. A Friends' Group leader, offering his advice on successful groups in the lessons-learned section of the Park Service's partnership website, explains (Olson 2005b):

Your voice on policy matters carries special weight in Congress given your organization's private sector grants to the national park. You might be surprised how attentively you are listened to on a range of park issues because you are laying down money.

Friends Groups' voices count, sometimes considerably so, a point highlighted in the case study that follows. These voices provide strong support for the protection of the national park system but can edge out un- and under-represented local voices that may not share the same opinions, goals or cultural values. Sometimes this may be critical in securing the protection of park resources. However, it can also infuse tension into park-community relationships, especially if a Friends Group stands alone or finds acceptance among only a few in the community on park-related issues. This is exacerbated in situations like the one described below, where the Friends Group represents local and non-local interests (as national park supporters are local and extra-local) that are historically in conflict with many local residents.

Park-Friends Group partnerships in the US are well-established, well-heelled, and have high-levels of political support. They are "a vital part of the future of the Park Service" (Cherng & Heaney 2005: 4). Recent NPS Directors have emphasised public-private partnerships and pointed out the increasingly important role that Friends Groups play in supporting the national park system. On St. John, superintendents echo such sentiments when they arrive at VINP, emphasising the importance and value of the partnership in the superintendents' column of the Group's quarterly newsletter. Private support of the park on St. John, however, does not come without a political and social cost. The following case study on St. John highlights the complications that can arise when a public agency accepts private support from a partner who enjoys a limited local support base¹⁰.

TENSE FRIENDSHIPS

Friends VINP came into existence in the late 1980s some 30 years after VINP was established in 1956. The group is the official private sector partner to the park and is "dedicated to the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural resources of Virgin Islands National Park and promotes the responsible enjoyment of this unique national treasure." The partnership is built in part on an understanding that the Friends VINP "fosters positive public rela-

tions between the community and the park,” and “promotes community involvement in the activities of the park.”

A few residents organised the group to improve what they saw as a lack of communication between VINP and island residents. It was established primarily by white residents originally from the continental US (known locally as Continentals). Despite some recent changes, the group’s members, donors, volunteers and staff are primarily Continentals and tourists to the island. This plays a significant role in understanding how the Friends VINP is perceived by the island’s diverse population; it plays an even greater role in understanding why the flow of private resources into the group is viewed as problematic for many island residents.

Friends VINP has grown since its early days. It has a membership of about three thousand; two-thirds live in the US mainland and the other third lives part- or full-time in the Virgin Islands. Both sets identify primarily as white and are not originally from the Virgin Islands. The dominance of white members and staff echoes the scenario in most other Friends Groups (personal experience) and mainstream environmental organisations (ECO 1992; Taylor 2000; Stanton 2002). For much of its history, the group’s staff has been primarily white Continentals who relocate to the island for a job with the group or were on the island a short-time prior to starting the job. Staff diversity, however, has increased over time. For example, as of July 2007, of the four staff members one is St. Johnian, one Nevisian and two are Continentals. Off-island members are typically tourists who visit the island, fall in love with the park and join the group. Many of them are tourists who stay at the world-famous eco-resort, Maho Bay Campgrounds (guests donate their security deposit to Friends VINP)¹¹. Island membership reflects strong support for the park among the Continental population, many of whom move to the island because of the park and the conservation and the scenic protection or recreational opportunities it provides. Continentals have also primarily constituted the Board of Directors. Although St. Johnians have always been on the board, the officers have been white Continentals, with only a few exceptions. As of July 2007, the board better reflects the diversity of St. John—of the thirteen board members four are Virgin Islanders (three from St. John and one from St. Thomas). In addition, the vice-chairman and secretary are now St. Johnians.

For the fiscal year 2005–2006, Friends VINP supported VINP with over \$400,000 in programme and project funding. This currently represents about 10 per cent of the park’s annual budget. The group pursues fund-raising and friend-raising, and advocates locally and nationally on behalf of the park and its users. It funds projects in three areas: natural resource protection (e.g. installing boat moorings, coral reef restoration), cultural preservation (e.g. restoring historic ruins, theatre), and environmental education (e.g. children’s eco-camps and scholarships). The group also organises hundreds of volunteers who clean beaches, provide interpretation at historic sites, and remove vegeta-

tion from historic ruins and trails. In addition, the group sponsors an annual fund-raising seminar series on a variety of topics.

Friends VINP provide support to VINP through financial resources derived from membership dues, donations, grants, and the sale of the group's merchandise. Most contributions come from individuals (70 per cent of the budget), most of whom are Continentals and people who live in the mainland US. A few real estate brokers on the island donate personally or through their companies. Some donors are famous, including country music star Kenny Chesney, and some donations have been quite large, such as when a New York resident gave Friends VINP a parcel of land she owned on St. Thomas. The parcel sold for \$2 million, which was used to establish an endowment for the group. In another example, the initial seed money to implement a mooring system for the park was donated to the group by a wealthy man, who retains the rights to property at one of the most famous and exclusive beaches on the island¹².

Large donations are likely to continue as Friends VINP stands to gain considerably from the growing wealth on the island; the island is increasingly home to millionaires seeking luxury homes with scenic views in gated and secure environments. These wealthy residents are generally supportive of the park, which ensures the longevity of their investments and allows for the type of outdoor enjoyment they seek. Supporting the group is a logical choice for new, wealthy residents with substantial investments in island real estate.

Despite some support for Friends VINP, many residents do not believe the group operates in a "fair and honest way", including 96 per cent of "black" respondents (N=64) and 60 percent of "white" respondents (N=49) to a recent survey of island residents (Stern 2006: 223)¹³. St. Johnians, in particular, are critical of the group, some describing it as a "lily-white organization" unconcerned with issues of importance to St. Johnians and disrespectful of St. Johnians' unique and historical relationship with the island. They also note an overall lack of awareness and sensitivity of Friends VINP concerning St. John and its cultural history (Fortwangler & Stern 2004). They argue that the group does not focus on enough issues of interest to St. Johnians, particularly Afro-Caribbean history and culture. Some St. Johnians wish the group would "just go away". The friction that has developed over the past decade or so between Friends VINP and many in the St. Johnian community has taken on a life of its own. While St. Johnians are not entirely or always opposed to the group, some rarely waver from their opposition. They are tired of what they see as the hypocrisy of the group and the park of "preserving paradise" while accepting money from those directly or indirectly connected with the industries, namely real estate and tourism, which they see as most responsible for damaging the so-called paradise and environment (inside the park boundaries and outside).

One vocal critic is a retired St. Johnian Park Service employee. While still serving as Chief of Interpretation at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park in Alaska, he wrote an editorial to a local paper (Roberts 2000):

The Friends are now providing maybe twenty percent of the funds needed to run the park and they would like to provide half. Why? Is it in order to save taxpayers scarce dollars or perhaps to give the Friends more clout than the superintendent in running the park? If the Friends provides half of the park operating budget . . . will the superintendent have any power to make objective decisions for the park?

Roberts (2000) put to print what many St. Johnians and other island residents have long wondered. How much influence does the Friends VINP have in park affairs? Can the park superintendent make decisions on behalf of a diverse public if he is getting funds from a select group of Friends? Will private funding diminish NPS' ability to administer the park in the interests of the public rather than a selected few? These questions are addressed below as I trace the flow of private donations and volunteer hours into the park, the synergistic connections between the park and its friends, and the group's political influence.

Follow the Money

Fund-raising requires numerous strategies. One is to focus on projects that appeal to likely donors. A well-respected Park Friends' group leader underscored this at a gathering of park Friends Groups: "select (park) priorities that will appeal to donors. Government and philanthropic interests must intersect. New restrooms may top the (park) list, but they probably hold no interest for most donors" (Olson 2005b). Some detractors of Friends VINP argue that the group follows this strategy too closely by catering to individuals and businesses from which it receives a considerable amount of donations (e.g. Continentals and tourists with a stake in tourism and real estate).

More specifically, critics charge that rather than investing in projects and programmes that embrace and interpret the Afro-Caribbean historical and cultural aspects of VINP, the group focuses on natural resource and recreation orientation programmes, which hold greater interest for Continentals and tourists. Some residents also believe that the group is more concerned about "scratching the back of tourism and real estate people" so that they continue to support the group. Both industries have a large stake in VINP. For example, the most expensive neighbourhood on the island is surrounded by national park lands. For its part, for tourism, the park is the primary marketing ploy to attract visitors to the island. Arguably projects of great interest to these groups are those that focus the most on the natural and scenic aspects of the park.

When I presented these critiques to the president of Friends VINP, he was adamant that “funding follows the projects, not the other way around” (Kessler pers. comm.). He is aware that some residents argue that “the Friends runs the park” but notes that there is no recent evidence of this nor has he been presented with any concrete examples (with the exception of one situation many years ago, before his time). He offered explanations in support of his position. First, the group funds two types of projects: those requested by the park and those it designs. In the first case, Friends VINP receives a prioritised list from the park each year that ranks projects as high, medium and low priority. The board decides which projects it will fund by considering them in the context of the group’s mission. All but one requested project has been funded since 2001. Second, Friends VINP funds its own initiated activities, projects that were not put forward by the park. These have mostly been education projects, an area of great interest to a broad range of island residents. He also pointed to a balanced distribution of project funding. Total programme expenditures from September 2002 to September 2006 were as follows (excluding an on-going expensive natural resource project to install moorings in the park): 31 per cent for natural resource protection, 35 per cent for cultural preservation, 28 per cent for environmental education, and 6 per cent for miscellaneous projects¹⁴.

Despite these convincing arguments, some issues remain. For example, Friends VINP inadvertently influences what projects are submitted. Specifically, a few park employees have not submitted requests to Friends VINP because they do not think the group will fund them. One employee does not believe the group will prioritise projects on Afro-Caribbean histories in the park. Similarly, another employee felt that a project she wanted to pursue was not viewed as “sexy enough” for Friends VINP (e.g. it would not be attractive to donors). Another employee explained he felt the need to alter project proposals to “fit” what he believed Friends VINP will fund. Still others prefer to work internally within the agency or other organisations for support. Still another wants the group to provide funding for emergencies or unexpected immediate needs. Although Friends VINP has encouraged park employees to submit new projects in historical and cultural interpretation, for example, it has not received any. Explanations for this vary, including limited staff time to focus on grant-writing, disinterest in working with the group and little support from NPS to alter existing interpretive programmes.

In another example, negative perceptions about the group held by some NPS employees create a ripple effect in the community. Park employees, especially St. Johnians and Virgin Islanders, influence opinions among St. Johnians, who look to them as opinion leaders (Fortwangler & Stern 2004). Many residents view the park as predominantly foreign, formal and largely unapproachable, and therefore rely upon St. Johnian employees (and some long-time Continentals) for information about the park (Fortwangler & Stern 2004). If these employees do not feel comfortable working with Friends

VINP, it solidifies perceptions among many about the group's lack of genuine local involvement and cultural sensitivity.

The two main areas in which St. Johnians would like to see more programmes and projects pursued are education and cultural and historic interpretation¹⁵. In the first case, St. Johnians have consistently pointed out in interviews that they would like to see more Friends VINP (and park) funding applied to education. Only 6 per cent of the respondents to a recent survey found educational opportunities for kids in the park to be a positive influence on their satisfaction with the park (Stern 2006:197)¹⁶. One St. Johnian civic leader told me:

The Friends help educate millions of visitors but you don't see that filtering in to the public or private schools. Of all the money they give you would think they did more to shape the community in terms of education about the park. It is troubling that with so much money there is little that actually affects the community they are serving on this island. We need more environmental education and science programs in our schools – the Friends could help to bridge that gap.

Friends VINP is correct to point out that it funds a number of educational programmes, including eco-camps, school grants, transportation grants for students to travel to the park, an Earth Day fair, and university scholarships. However, with the exception of the eco-camps these programmes receive relatively little funding compared to other projects. Friends VINP might consider additional funding, for example, for large-scale and well-funded environmental and park-related education and activity programmes for each grade in the public and private school systems. The group could work closely with the newly created position of Educational Specialist at the park to enhance programmes available to students. Similarly, the group could substantially increase the funding it provides for park study grants to local school teachers, which at this time comprise only 2 per cent of the group's total annual project funding.

Student scholarships could also be increased. Currently, the group offers two college scholarships per year for Virgin Islanders to study marine biology or natural resource protection and management. A student receiving a scholarship would receive \$4000 for his or her studies. At any one time (assuming a 4 year degree), Friends VINP might be contributing \$8000 a year towards university scholarships. This comprises only about 2 per cent of the group's annual project funding (currently around \$400,000). When I raised this concern with the group, the president agreed that while more funds could be made available, he was unsure about whether those funds would be disbursed. He explained that the group has never disbursed all the money designated for school grants (not enough teachers apply) and in the 5 years that the scholarships have been available, both awards have been given only once. Last year

they did not have any applicants. While the group has made efforts to increase the applicant pool, they may need to offer a more substantial funding package and better target potential applicants. Friends VINP might also consider offering scholarships to study the cultural, historical and archaeological aspects of the park. A substantially increased scholarship programme would signal greater commitment to the secondary education of the island's youth.

Interviews with St. Johnians also consistently show that people would like the park and Friends VINP to increase support for the interpretation of Afro-Caribbean histories on the island (see also section titled 'Volunteer Friends'). For example, while St. Johnians appreciate the annual cultural folk-life festival organised primarily by St. Johnian park employees and funded by Friends VINP, they want it to be expanded (Fortwangler & Stern 2004: 154). The Festival, a 3 day affair during the Black History Month, showcases the island's traditional arts and crafts, herbal remedies, food, music, gardening, boat-making, storytelling and masquerading among other events. Hundreds of students from across the territory attend the celebration as do many Virgin Islanders. St. Johnians as well as other island residents would like to see this programme become a more regular part of the park's activities. The fact that it is held only once a year underscores, for St. Johnians, that NPS does not prioritise their relationships with sites now part of the park. This past year the event was downsized to only one day, raising further questions about commitments to the programme.

St. Johnians also want to see a more in-depth interpretation of the events of 1733–1734 (also known as the St. John Slave Revolt) in the park, when twelve enslaved Africans, primarily members of an Akan subgroup called the Akwamu, led about a hundred other enslaved Africans and took over the island for six months (Greene 1994). The sites in the park associated with these events are unmarked (see Adeyemi & Adeyemi 2003 for locations). A distressing issue for St. Johnians is that park documents and Friends' programmes barely mention these events (see Olwig 1999 and Emanuel 2003 for details on the growing importance of the "slave revolt" for St. Johnians). Friends VINP could play a pivotal role in insisting that the park gather independent scholarly analysis of this history, and have experts and other knowledgeable persons (along with park interpreters) decide how to interpret these events. The group could launch initiatives in cooperation with Virgin Islanders and others who study and interpret Afro-Caribbean histories on the island. More St. Johnians too could get actively involved in publicly interpreting their history outside of the park's boundaries and ensuring its prominence in the public arena¹⁷. A stronger public emphasis by St. Johnians may bolster the park and Friends' interest as well.

When we "follow the money" contributed to Friends VINP and analyse how it is disbursed, we find a relatively balanced allocation of programme funds amongst the group's primary areas of natural resource protection, cultural preservation and environmental education. However, the group has not

convinced most island residents that it prioritises a diverse range of programmes and activities. This might be done by funding a substantial programme on Afro-Caribbean historical and cultural connections to the park, offering generous scholarships to St. Johnians for college study or launching major campaigns to protect burial sites of enslaved Africans buried in the park. It also means locating donors for such projects and hiring someone who has the specific connections and knowledge to bring such projects to fruition. Friends VINP might follow the lead of the NPF, which established the African American Experience Fund in 2001 to “connect Americans to their National Parks by raising awareness of African American history and culture in the National Parks¹⁸.” They could establish a position focused explicitly on the park’s existing and past Afro-Caribbean history and culture.

Although Friends VINP supports a diverse group of programmes and projects within VINP, the group has not garnered the support of most island residents. While part of the explanation may be that many residents are not familiar with the details of the group’s work or may hold misconceptions about it (an argument the group has put forward in the past), there are other reasons why Friends VINP continues to face opposition in the community, some of which are explored below.

Volunteer Friends

Increased volunteer responsibilities in the national park system have included interpretation for visitors and improved maintenance of trails and structures. Budget cuts mean that visitors to park sites find enthusiastic volunteers there instead of the familiar grey and green rangers. In fact, it is unlikely that many of the parks could have achieved their mission without such volunteers. While volunteerism has a positive history and is much-appreciated by NPS, critics complain that the volunteers are not as well trained as park employees and are not bound by the same obligations (e.g. reliability can be an issue for volunteers only need to show up when they can). Others argue that volunteers are replacing Park Service employees. On St. John, a volunteer docent programme exacerbated tensions over park employment and raised questions about which aspects of history should be interpreted and how interpretive programmes should be created.

In 2002, two Friends’ volunteers, a retired couple who live on St. John part-time, started volunteering as interpreters at the park’s main cultural historic site, Annaberg Plantation. They saw a need to increase interpretation at the site because the park was under-funded and unable to provide full-time interpretative NPS staff. This past year, for example, a park employee was available at the site only for a few hours a day during the “high season” (usually between November and March)¹⁹. Further, if there are other pressing issues requiring the ranger’s attention, s/he is pulled from the site. This happens at least once a week, sometimes more often. In response to the need for addi-

tional interpreters at the site, Friends VINP initiated (with the support of the superintendent) the docent programme. It is made available by about a dozen volunteers during the island's busiest tourist season, January to March from 10 am–2 pm, which is also the time when most of the volunteers are on the island (many live on the island only part of the year). The docents are at times the only interpreters the visitors find at the site.

The Annaberg docent programme has been made possible through a Memorandum of Understanding between Friends VINP and VINP. NPS management policies encourage non-NPS groups to assist with interpretation—as long as they do not replace or substitute a park's basic interpretive operation (Section 7.6, NPS 2001b)²⁰. To help interpret the site and discuss these topics, Friends VINP arranged for a well-qualified local historian to provide information about the site. They also approached the park service for guidance (but did not receive any). In addition, one of the docents compiled additional information into a guide for docents (Schoonover 2004).

Given the park's current financial situation, it benefits greatly from the Friends VINP volunteers at Annaberg. Some park employees appreciate the volunteers' contribution, pointing to their enthusiasm and willingness to learn about the island's history. Visitors too are appreciative of the volunteers' enthusiasm. But the programme also faces criticism. Specifically, some St. Johnians are displeased with the process by which the programme and the material made available to visitors came to fruition and want additional Afro-Caribbean histories included at the site. They also strongly want NPS to provide interpretation and greater ease of access at other historic sites in the park (there are dozens of historic plantation sites on the island). How to interpret such sites and who should do it is a topic of much debate (Horton 2000; Shackel 2003; see also Sutton 2001); a debate that is also situated within the broader discussion about the role of a private organisation in public interpretation of history.

One of the reasons that St. Johnians are dissatisfied with the docent programme as well as the information available at the site (e.g. on interpretive signs) is that it does not focus on the histories they would expect to be included, such as the ways in which people struggled every day using small acts of resistance; attempts to escape enslavement; the 1733–1734 St. John Slave Revolt; how people and their families suffered and overcame the challenges; family relationships; rituals and artistic expressions; exchange networks; and how the history of slavery continues to impact our societies today.

St. Johnians would like to see this additional interpretive focus available at Annaberg—both as part of the docent programme and also as part of a more substantial NPS interpretive programme at the site²¹. Presently at Annaberg interpretive signs focus on the process of making rum, growing cane sugar and historic structures, not on the violence, oppression and resistance (see also Farnsworth 2000)²². For example, the welcome sign to the site reads:

As you wander the ruins, picture the thriving 18th-19th century sugar factory: big rollers crushing the cane, juice pouring down to the boiling room, and everywhere the thick scent of rum and molasses. This was the Danish plantation era, when sugar dominated the island for 150 years.

Other signs at the site provide little information about the history of enslaved peoples (with the exception of the type of building in which they lived). The information provided by the docents and park staff fills the gap to an extent (at least during those few hours they are at the site). Three sections of the docent's guide pertain specifically to enslaved Africans and their descendants: "slave labor force", "living and working conditions of enslaved Africans", and "the origin of the slaves and the language spoken" (Schoonover 2004).

These sections and the information offered by the docents, while important and accurate, do not draw on the wide literature available from a range of academic disciplines regarding the enslavement of African peoples and their descendants in the Virgin Islands and the broader Caribbean, which would improve on the current interpretation. Although expertise has been sought (particularly from a local historian, see Knight 2001), the docent guide and the tours they offer are not a fully-developed, professional interpretive programme that matches that of other similar NPS sites (nor should it be expected as the latter is responsible for these programmes). Moreover, the docent guide, like the interpretive park signs, does not cover the additional material that St. Johnians would like to see, material that would provide a deeper understanding of Afro-Caribbean experiences at the site.

The docents have worked hard to include as much information as possible and are interested in incorporating more. NPS should provide full assistance in preparing an expanded interpretive programme; the vast resources of NPS are necessary to achieve agency standards. Despite interest among some NPS employees, the continued budget shortfalls and backlogs hinder their ability to pursue this. Here the agency has relied on private support to prepare a programme that requires expertise beyond that of the docents. In the process it has contributed to the tension about how the site should be interpreted and who should be doing it.

Another important issue for St. Johnians is the process that established the interpretive programme. Specifically, the programme was created without the input of the African-descending St. Johnian communities, whose histories are rooted in the landscape and structures at Annaberg (as well as other similar sites across the island). At Annaberg, St. Johnians are not speaking for themselves about their history. Instead, a self-selected group of mostly part-time and white residents are telling these histories. St. Johnians are careful to note that the problem is not with the individuals involved or that they are white or part-time residents. The problem is that they are the only voices at the site, the only ones interpreting this history; they want Virgin Islanders involved as

well. A St. Johnian active in civic issues on the island recently told me: “It isn’t about whether you are black or white. It is about respect. We should have been properly consulted about the interpretation of our history. Asking retirees to volunteer at the site is not enough.” A statement in the introduction to an edited volume on African resistance on the island captures similar local sentiments: “while others can make important contributions to our efforts at documenting and interpreting our past, ultimately, it is us, the descendents of the once enslaved Africans who must write the final chapter” (Adeyemi 2003: 2).

At issue here for both Friends VINP and St. Johnians is who is responsible for ensuring that St. Johnian and Virgin Islander voices are incorporated into the interpretation of the site. Although some St. Johnians were at one point approached by Friends VINP to participate as volunteers in the docent programme²³, their participation has not materialised. Few of them want to be involved in the programme as it is currently designed. Some do not want to work with Friends VINP and others are not interested in interpreting the site (e.g. they do not want to engage tourists in this context; see Peers 1999 for a related example concerning issues faced by Native American interpreters at historic sites). Some find it ironic that NPS and Friends VINP want them to volunteer their time (rather than be paid) when St. Johnian and other park employees have been removed from the site; they would prefer the park re-staff the site with “native Virgin Islanders”. Still others do not have the time or energy to participate.

Some St. Johnians have tried to emphasise histories of oppression and resistance at historic sites in the park. For example, St. Johnian NPS employees tried to do so at Annaberg but with limited success. A former St. Johnian park employee explained:

Did you know that I submitted a proposal to our regional office in the early seventies to interpret slavery and the revolution (i.e., the events of 1733-1734) and was turned down? Instead, they approved interpretation of the subsistence period and that is why the demonstrations today at Annaberg cover the subsistence period, you know bread making.

Ultimately NPS, and Friends VINP as its official partner, have a responsibility to “actively consult traditionally associated peoples and other cultural and community groups in the planning, development, presentation, and operation of park interpretive programs and media relating to their cultures and histories” (Section 7.5.5, NPS 2001b). Annaberg is a site of considerable historic significance and its interpretation should be approached with sensitivity. Interpreting the “the history of slavery and its role in the formation of the American experience is one of the most sensitive and difficult subjects to present in a public setting” (Horton 2000). It is difficult to readily discuss the history and details of enslavement (see Sutton 2001). At Annaberg, NPS

could establish a formal working group on the interpretation of the site. It could include St. Johnians and a diverse group of scholars, park staff and Friends VINP; one that would recognise and incorporate perspectives that have not to date been embraced or prioritised, particularly histories of resistance and revolution (Peers 1999).

While St. Johnians respect Friends VINP and its docents' interest in island history and appreciate their dedication to the site, they find the current situation unsatisfactory. Here NPS could be a stronger force in helping the community better understand this area of interpretation. Indeed, it should be leading the way as the public agency responsible for the interpretation of history at this site. But without the resources to provide funding and staff for the site, the collective expertise of NPS remains in the background.

Monied Connections

It has been difficult for many St. Johnians to welcome Friends VINP, particularly as they are wary of supporting a group that supports an institution (VINP) with which they have had long-standing problems and often comes through as colonial and imperial²⁴. They find aspects of the partnership that enhance relations between Continentals, the real estate and tourism industries²⁵, and the federal government (a form of governance in which Virgin Islanders have limited representation) problematic. Although the partnership provides some benefits for the St. Johnian community, it does not facilitate the same type of synergistic benefits for them as it does for the Continental community. They see layers of synergy between the park and Friends VINP and its supporters from which they feel excluded and marginalised.

Some residents are also concerned about what the leaders and donors of Friends VINP do for a living, and whether the group and park are helping them accomplish their personal goals. For example, at any given time there have been real estate brokers on the board of Friends VINP. Real estate brokers are often the ire of many residents as they see them responsible for much of the island's current state of affairs (e.g. skyrocketing real estate prices).

While the board members pursue a range of professions, there has been a slight leaning towards members connected to tourism and real estate industries, or related areas. Donor lists show considerable sums given to the group by these professionals. Such real estate-Friends connections are suspect for many St. Johnians, particularly as those in the real-estate industry often sell the most expensive and luxurious homes by linking them to VINP. For example, one company makes this suggestion to potential buyers: "if you enjoy the quiet of the National Park surroundings, there are a few in-holdings that garner prices well above \$1,000,000, and for the prestigious north shore location at Peter Bay a half acre hillside lot will start at about \$1,500,000²⁶." In another example, the St. John Real Estate Board provides this introduction to St. John. It reads:

St. John is unique among the Virgin Islands in that two thirds of the island is national park land. Much of this is attributed to Laurance Rockefeller who dedicated over five thousand acres to the U.S. government to establish the Virgin Islands National Park. . . . From the minute you step ashore on St. John, you'll fall in love with its quaint island flavor. Here, a premium is placed on hospitality, friendliness and respect for cultural traditions. With only 4,500 permanent residents St. John is a close knit community²⁷.

The close relationships between the group and the real-estate industry are occasionally questioned, such as when a real estate broker-cum-Board Member touted a Friends' designer license-plate (a fund-raiser for the group) that read: BUY STJ. Although the Friends' leadership at the time asked the board member to change the plate (and she did), the license plate episode reinforced for many island residents what they already believed—that Friends VINP and realtors share much in common. This incident does not reflect on the quality or commitment of other board members or the organisation in general, as the Friends' president recently pointed out to me, however, it does highlight how fragile the relationship between Friends VINP and many island residents can be. In spite of the excellent intentions of the group, it also highlights that the organisation is centrally situated in a network of interests that are commodifying St. John in ways that local people view as inimical to their interests.

This can also be seen in the “Park Friends Affinity Program” and “Friendly Links” sections of Friends VINP website. Through the affinity programme, local businesses offer benefits to attract new members and give existing members perks for their support. According to the group, it sent a written invitation to all businesses listed on the park's ‘Incidental Business Permit List’, a list of businesses who can conduct business within the park. The vast majority of these businesses are not owned by St. Johnians (the one exception being individual taxi driving permits). The twenty-one business partners are overwhelmingly owned and operated by Continentals, two of whom are board members. The “Friendly Links” section of the group's website links web-visitors to thirty-six local businesses and organisations. Friends VINP asks you to support its sponsors and advertisers so that it can carry out its mission. Like the “Affinity Program”, the majority of “Friendly Links” business partners also consists of white Continental-owned and operated entities (only three are connected to St. Johnians, one of them barely). The “Affinity Program” and “Friendly Links” weave Continental tourism and real estate businesses, Friends VINP, and the park into a web of interactions from which St. Johnians are primarily absent. Friends' members, tourists, and potential home buyers are not hyper-linked to their businesses.

The group could add a broader base of businesses to its Affinity Program, specifically those owned by people of African descent, including St. Johnians, Virgin Islanders, and people from other islands. To solicit such participation

Friends VINP will likely need to make personal visits. A formal letter sent by mail will receive little response, if any. Friends VINP and the administration of VINP will need to make a dedicated effort at this point.

Some of the Friends' fundraising events and strategies also reinforce critics' opinions about the group operating with an elite circle of island residents and tourists. For example, a few of the events have been held in exclusive areas that the vast majority of St. Johnians, people from other Caribbean islands and numerous Continentals would rarely if ever visit. Such a fund-raiser was recently held for the Friends' Laurance S. Rockefeller Memorial Fund, which funds natural resource protection projects in the park. It was held at a \$14 million villa, owned by wealthy part-time residents and rented as a villa, in an area known for expensive homes owned by white Continentals. At the event, Friends' president said: "(Creating the park) is what we are most indebted to Mr. Rockefeller for as residents of the Virgin Islands. It has had a profound impact on this island and all of the Virgin Islands."

For some St. John residents this rings true. The words also ring true for many St. Johnians but in a strikingly different way. Some see Rockefeller's actions as part of the broader development of a rich man's island where people like himself could come to enjoy. The irony of holding the Friends' main event at a villa that rents for \$25,000 a week during the high season is not lost on St. Johnians. The villa has five bedrooms and six bathrooms, a 17' x 37' pool, and a plasma TV. It has two on-location caretakers and maid service. The size is problematic, but more so what it represents. A number of people see this development at the root of the island's problems, something to challenge not celebrate in connection to the park.

Friends VINP points out that other organisations on the island also hold major fund-raisers at exclusive locales. They too though are criticised for such events (e.g. some teachers complain they cannot afford to attend fund-raisers at high-end resorts to raise money for their own school). The group also notes that it has a variety of fund-raising events to accommodate different levels of giving among island residents, including a sporting event, fish-fries, and seminar series. These other events, however, have not been well-attended by St. Johnians with perhaps the exception of the fish-fries. The latter, however, are no longer held as the attendance was low and there were "net losses" (Kessler pers. comm.).

Despite efforts to diversify its fund-raising events, most St. Johnians continue to see the group as associated with high-end island residents, Continentals and tourists. Many St. Johnians see Friends VINP, the park, real estate and tourism as interconnected, feeding off of one another for the own betterment. A middle-aged St. Johnian man put it like this: "When it comes to the park and real estate—nothing has changed. The names have changed but it has always run hand in hand. This is the problem with the Friends." For him and many others, Friends VINP is part of a breeze blowing them off the island; some St. Johnians (and less wealthy Continentals and other island residents)

can no longer afford to live on the island. They see the villas, Friends VINP and even the park as wrecking balls, clearing space on the island for those with money and power²⁸.

Political Friends

Although Friends VINP is a locally based group, its scope and influence transcends the shores of the small island from which it operates. When discussing their frustration that the group is not attentive to local needs and expectations vis-à-vis the park, many St. Johnians point first to the group's non-local membership. Friends VINP members who live on the US mainland have more political power in areas of national concern than island residents. As territorial residents, St. Johnian (and Virgin Islander) representation in Congress is limited to one delegate to the House of Representatives who cannot vote on the main floor²⁹. Consequently, the group has more influence than island residents vis-à-vis NPS as the majority of its members can influence their respective congressional representatives on issues pertaining to VINP. Moreover, because it is the "official partner" of the park, the group's voice is particularly welcomed by NPS and the US Department of the Interior.

The relative power of Friends VINP was especially apparent leading up to the establishment of the Virgin Islands CRNM. At the end of his term, President Clinton proclaimed eight national monuments under the Antiquities Act of 1906³⁰. In January 2001, CRNM was established to protect a marine ecosystem lying within a 3 mile area off St. John (12,709 acres). Anchoring and extractive uses, such as fishing, were prohibited, with two exceptions: bait fishing and blue runner line fishing in certain areas.

St. Johnians overwhelmingly opposed the declaration and a system that allowed the federal government to make sweeping changes to local resource use³¹. People pointed to the exclusionary top-down process and questioned no-take management proposals for the area. A Virgin Islands Senator, quoted in the local press was resolute: "We had property that was taken by an act of imperialism." Local educators, public officials and historians noted that closing areas to fishing could end a way of life that St. Johnians have known for generations. Arguably that way was already in decline. St. Johnians, however, did not want the federal government unilaterally dictating the terms of this transformation. Some also emphasised that the designation would criminalise traditional livelihoods: overnight they would become poachers instead of artisan and small-scale fishers. Others pointed to the class and race implications of the designation, specifically that diving operations and scientific observation would not be curtailed but most traditional and commercial fishing operations would be. People were dissatisfied with the regulations that limited how and where they caught fish. They did not want another federal protected area making life difficult for them. As so much land and water on St. John is already managed by the federal government and the remaining area is being de-

veloped at an accelerating pace, the monument is “hard to swallow” for most St. Johnians. The designation exacerbates the feeling of being pushed off an island fast becoming one of the rich and famous.

The designation was of such concern that the entire Virgin Islands government came together in opposition. The legislature, the governor, and the delegate to Congress argued that the submerged lands were territorial, or at least that it was possible. The legislature unanimously passed a bill opposing the federal designation and, at the same time, the Delegate requested an opinion from the US General Accounting Office (GAO). The request delayed implementation of a management plan for the monument. In November 2002 GAO ruled that the submerged lands were federal and the monument legal. Interim rules were issued in May 2003; final rules will take effect when the NPS management plan is finalised, probably in 2008.

In addition to their frustration towards the federal government, St. Johnians did not approve of the stance Friends VINP took in support of the monument. The organisation thought the monument would protect the dwindling marine resources around the island (see Drayton 2005) and were less impressed with the territorial challenge to its legality. In fact, the group protested the action as politics impeding the protection of marine resources.

In addition to its public support for the monument, Friends VINP played an active role in securing the designation. Friends’ leadership was involved for many years in promoting the idea of a no-take fishing area. One leader was privy to a circle of relations that included an influential US Senator as well as the president of a national park group, who himself was a close associate of President Clinton. The group also organised its members to lobby the administration and their congressional representatives to support the monument. Soon after the designation, Friends VINP launched a campaign to press the Park Service to move forward immediately with implementing management policies. The group did not want to wait for the GAO ruling. An email dated 18 March 2002 to members read: “Friends of the Park is urging all of our members to write to NPS Director Fran Mainella to express your support of the Monument and your disgust for the delay in implementing the regulations.” St. Johnians were irritated by this, arguing that the group could at least respect the request made by the delegate for a GAO ruling.

Many St. Johnians were frustrated by the way Friends VINP shaped the debate. They felt the group took a position against fishermen. Some asked: what about real estate developers and the silt they let slide down the hills and into the reefs? What about tourists who drop anchors on the reef? A well-known St. Johnian and former NPS employee (introduced above) made these points in a poignant editorial to the local paper (Roberts 2000):

Maybe what (the Friends’ president) should push to prevent is the amount of major constructions which cause run-off, push to prevent pollution caused by petroleum products and prop wash from those

floating apartment complexes called recreational boats, and push to prevent all the oils from sunbathers being washed off among the corals. That of course is unrealistic; it would stop the massive flow of dollars into the economy.

Even though Friends VINP was concerned about such problems, the group did not make strong statements about the need to protect the resources from all parties. For many St. Johnians, the Friends' support reinforced beliefs that the group's interests lie with Continentals, the group that St. Johnians argued would benefit the most from the designation (e.g. more water area protected as they would like, increased opportunities for recreation) and who would shoulder the least cost (e.g. few Continentals depend on fishing for their livelihood).

Here the political influence of Friends VINP disenfranchised local residents, especially the island's Afro-Caribbean population, which was overwhelmingly opposed to the monument. Conversely the group provided a local voice for a national constituency, highlighting the struggles over whose voice counts the most in resource decision-making. Here we find tension between national and local user groups, a fairly common issue in protected area debates.

While remaining true to its mission, Friends VINP could make an extra effort to throw its political weight behind issues in which it finds itself in agreement with St. Johnians. Unfortunately, this is not always easy. Take for example a recent proposal to build a public school complex on 10 acres of land in the national park. The land would be leased to the territorial government to build a much-needed school complex on the island (high school students currently have to commute to neighbouring St. Thomas). The vast majority of island residents, St. Johnians and many Continentals, strongly support the proposal, which recently cleared the US House of Representatives as H.R. 53. It easily passed the House and will soon be debated in the Senate. Friends VINP, however, while in support of a school prefers that the NPS swap the land for a comparable territorial-owned parcel. The group is arguing for a swap because it believes a lease arrangement would "result in a net loss of VI National Park resources and will establish a precedent that could, in turn, threaten national parks throughout the country" (Kessler 2007).

Here again many residents see Friends VINP on the other side of an island cause célèbre. Friends emphasises that the group is in support of a school, but insists that the land should not be leased but swapped for a territorial-owned property. However, some island residents effectively see this as not supporting the school proposal because, as they argue, a swap will never take place. Still others, including the island's administrator, strongly believe the park should do even more: it should donate land for the school (Wesselhoft 2007). The administrator wrote an editorial to a local paper that captures the sentiments of numerous island residents, particularly St. Johnians:

‘ . . . Nor do I believe that trading our offshore cays is an ideal scenario, as (Friends) proposes. . . As a result of rising land prices and property taxes, our families are being broken apart; our culture and our traditions lost. Some change is inevitable, but it is time we took some significant steps toward supporting the families and children of St. John. The most significant step we could take and, the only real remedy at this point, is for the Park to transfer some land back to the people. When Laurence (sic) Rockefeller developed (the park) he said that it was never to create a hardship for the people of St. John. Well today it has created a hardship in terms of lack of developable land for the infrastructure needed to support our populace. The Park owns almost two-thirds of St. John - more than 7,000 acres, as well as 13,000 acres of submerged land. I propose that the Interior Department undertake a feasibility study in regard to returning a small portion of land to the people of St. John in order to alleviate this hardship. . . ’

Sentiments about land-use and park ownership on the island run deep—much beyond the school proposal. In the midst of this, Friends VINP (along with the US Department of Interior) is a lonely voice in favour of the swap, something most residents say will not happen as it has been on the table for years without success. The group could draw on the backing of park support groups based in the US to oppose the lease when it reaches the floor of the Senate and call on its members to lobby their senators. Or they may, if they want to make better island friends, not challenge the school lease in the senate (and there are indications this may be the case).

CONCLUSION

Private support of publicly held resources can improve the protection of natural and cultural resources. But as we have seen it can also cause friction between those providing that support and other user and resident groups. We have also seen the layers of synergy that operate within the circle of friendship from which many residents, especially people of Afro-Caribbean descent, often feel excluded. The argument here is not that private support of protected areas should be abandoned only that it should be carefully monitored and finessed so that it does not cause more harm than good. There are many ways for this to happen on St. John, some of which have been suggested in the preceding sections.

Is it realistic though to expect the Park-Friends partnership and Friends-community relationships to change in fundamental ways? Rural sociologist Patrick C. West put forward a similar question some years ago when he asked if the “conservation culture” of major non-governmental organisations can “truly represent the interests of indigenous peoples” (West 1999: 220). Anthropologist Barbara Rose Johnston, who conducted dissertation research in

the Virgin Islands in the 1980s, argues that, on St. John Friends, VINP is an institution through which white, often wealthy, residents can shape a political realm dominated by Afro-Caribbean St. Johnians and Virgin Islanders (Johnston, pers. comm.), making it unlikely that the group will embrace changes that would significantly remedy tensions.

Ultimately, St. Johnians may be better served by starting their own organisation to partner with the park. This has happened at other national park sites. For example, the “Isle Royale Families and Friends Association” was established in partnership with the Park Service to promote “the preservation of the history, heritage and culture of the families of Isle Royale” who now live in the midst of the Isle Royale National Park³². Another option is to address park issues through existing St. Johnian-led organisations. For example, the St. John Association for Equal Rights and Justice, a group set to “unify and fight against the unjust behaviour of some fellow citizens, government officials and illegal transactions that have taken place on the island of St. John”, has publicly listed “serious issues with the National Park” and “Black local businesses squeezed out” as among the issues “sparked by underlining racism and economical disparities” that St. Johnians face (Anthony 2005). Others have joined with Continentals to establish a single-interest group, One Campus, which focuses on securing a long-term lease on park land for the school complex.

Most recently, a group of St. Johnians is pursuing a strategy that may secure a stronger political position for St. Johnians relative to the park and Friends VINP. This group is mobilising to become recognised by NPS as a Traditionally Associated Peoples (TAPS), a status bestowed on communities that have unique and long-term (at least 40 years) histories of resource use in areas now protected; the relation must exist prior to the establishment of the park (NPS 2001b). As TAPS, St. Johnians would be entitled to additional consultation regarding management actions that affect the cultural resources of the park and monument and could have special privileges regarding input into NPS initiatives. NPS would have to consult with St. Johnians before taking action that would impact their traditional use of a natural or cultural resource. St. Johnians would not have to approach the park; the park would have to approach them.

Friends VINP has made genuine efforts to secure better relations with island residents, but its success has been limited as many St. Johnians and some Continentals are not interested in supporting the group. Private support of the park has enhanced some relationships between the Park Service, Friends VINP, and local residents but frustrated others. As NPS is responsible to the public at large, it must take this into account and negotiate better relations between the park, Friends VINP, and communities on the island. The question is how to do this while continuing to partner with, and benefit from, the Friends VINP.

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Notes

1. I was an intern for Friends VINP in 1996 and have volunteered with the park on many projects. In addition, I worked for the National Park Foundation (NPF) for a year in 1995–1996 and as an intern for the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) for four months in 1995.
2. Available at: http://home.nps.gov/applications/partnerships/friends_groups_directory.cfm; accessed 10/18/07. The type of group listed ranges from associations and foundations to the more typical Friends Group (the type described in this paper).
3. Other groups focus on park advocacy and serve as watchdogs (e.g. to keep the park in line with its mandate if it should stray). They follow a mission more closely related to NPCA, a non-profit NPS park watchdog and advocacy organisation that has taken public stances against park policies it believes are contrary to the mission of NPS. In 2001, the organisation put together a coalition of partners known as “Americans for National Parks” to encourage Congress and the administration to “address the full needs of the National Park System,” including a demand that Congress meet the annual funding needs of NPS. About twenty Friends Groups are part of the campaign coalition, including Friends of VINP.
4. <http://republicans.resourcescommittee.house.gov/archives/ii00/archives/109/testimony/2006/curtbuchholtz.htm>; accessed: 10/18/07.
5. In 2001, NPF started the “Proud Partners of the Initiative.” American Airlines, Discovery Channel, Ford, Kodak, and *Time* donate \$5 million or more a year.
6. This is in addition to a federal commitment of \$1 billion in appropriations over 10 years for park operations and improvements.
7. Ford Company and International Paper were platinum sponsors with Alcoa Foundation and Unilever as gold ones. Hertz Corporation and UPS Foundation were among a handful of silver sponsors.
8. Although a survey of current corporate contributions to Friends Groups is not available, we can project that it is higher with a brief review of annual reports and newsletters.
9. <http://work.wnpf.org/index.php?page=partners>; accessed: 11/04/07
10. The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork, including over 100 interviews with island residents, tourists and NPS employees, conducted between August 2001 and February 2003, supplemented by summer visits in 1997–2000 and 2004–2006.
11. About 30–40 per cent of guests leave their deposit to Friends VINP. The group estimates the contribution from Maho guests at \$20,000–\$30,000 a year plus about another \$5,000–\$10,000 from Concordia guests (another eco-lodge on St. John under the same ownership).
12. Since then, numerous other donors have provided support for the mooring project, including National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Ocean Trust, Chesney Foundation, an anonymous foundation, and a number of private individuals and businesses.

13. The study included responses from 115 island residents: Fifty-five were randomly selected and sixty selectively targeted (Stern 2006: 186–187). Stern (2006) argues that negative perceptions about the Friends stem from: (1) the mostly white make-up of the Friends' membership, (2) the predominance of realtors on the board, (3) an unclear understanding of the group, (4) the unpopular park initiatives the Friends supports, and (5) the perceived preferential treatment of Friends' members by the park.
14. Total yearly expenditures for "cultural preservation" projects, however, have been below "natural resource protection" (*Friends Tidings*, Winter editions 2002 through 2006) because a major natural resource protection project (a mooring system) has received funding over for the past few years.
15. To be clear, St. Johnians also support many of the natural resource protection efforts as well. They want though to see an increase in the cultural preservation and educational areas.
16. Again, the study included responses from 115 island residents: Fifty-five were randomly selected and sixty selectively targeted (Stern 2006: 186–187).
17. This would be in addition to existing efforts, such as observation of November 23 as "Virgin Islands Freedom Fighters Day" (an annual trek to the site where the resistance was launched), and memorials to strengthen local (and global) understanding and appreciation of the resistance.
18. <http://www.aaxperience.org/>; accessed 11/06/07.
19. There are also "cultural bearers" at Annaberg who demonstrate bread and basket-making (in the past these were St. Johnians but today they include people from other islands) during the high season for a few hours a day. They are not, however, trained interpreters.
20. Although one could argue that volunteers have replaced park employees who are no longer at the site, at least one park employee is often at the site (during the main tourist season) as well.
21. Although most St. Johnians I interviewed about this are interested in a broader interpretive programme, a few are hesitant about discussing, for example, the events of 1733–1734. An older St. Johnian explained: "Some St. Johnians think that discussing the slave revolution is dishonourable. I try to tell them that they should be proud that their people were the first in the new world to object to tyranny and slavery. The idea of objecting to a wrong is not dishonourable." As is to be expected, people have different opinions about how to recount one's history. The participants in such a discussion could be part of a task force on interpreting the site (see discussion further below).
22. Although recently some park employees and consultants are studying the evidence of the events of 1733–1734 at park sites, the overall interpretation remains limited. A few park reports note the violence and resistance of the time, but the information is understudied and underreported.
23. Friends VINP made a formal request at a meeting of retirees and a St. Johnian board member approached some other St. Johnians.
24. Stern also found that many St. Johnians view the Park Service as "a foreign, neo-colonialist regime that threatened the rights and culture of the local citizenry" (Stern 2006: 180).
25. An important exception is the transportation industry, which is owned primarily by "native Virgin Islanders" (a locally used phrase). However, the partnership does not foster positive relationships with this industry.
26. <http://www.cruzbayrealty.com/pdf/LivingSTJ.pdf>; accessed 10/18/07.
27. http://www.stjohnrealtorsvi.com/about_st_john.html/; accessed 10/18/07.
28. Olwig (2005:14) provides support for this as well, noting that St. Johnians often feel they have "lost the island to rich white Americans developing the island for their own purposes."
29. The delegate serves and votes on House Committees, including the National Parks Subcommittee (under the Committee on Resources) but does not have a vote on the House floor.
30. The Act does not require Congressional approval and is not subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an act that ensures public participation in major environ-

mental actions. The public does benefit to some extent from NEPA when management decisions for protected areas are made. Even so NEPA does not guarantee that the government incorporates public comments or suggestions.

31. Barbara Rose Johnston (1992) discussed “environmental alienation” in the Virgin Islands over a decade ago.
32. <http://www.isleroyalefamilies.org/>; accessed 11/06/07.

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