



## VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK POTENTIAL LAND EXCHANGE



Virtual Civic Engagement Meeting

April 7, 2022

# St. John Land Exchange Task Force



## HOW TO COMMENT

Please visit:  
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/StJohnLandExchange>

The screenshots below are for the Caneel Bay project, but the same navigation applies to the Land Exchange project.



Step 1- Click 'Open for Comment'



Step 2- Click the newsletter



Step 3- Click 'Comment Now'



Step 4- Comment!



## Meeting With You Today

### Land Exchange Task Force and Support Staff

- [Nigel Fields](#) | NPS-VIIS | Superintendent
- [Elsa Alvear](#) | NPS-VIIS | Program Coordinator
- [Chaneel Callwood](#) | Department of Education | Architect-New Schools
- [Elizabeth Centeno](#) | Special Assistant to the Governor
- [Salman Elrubaie](#) | NPS-Region 2 | Supervisory Reality Specialist
- [Colette Monroe](#) | Governor's Office | Senior Policy Advisor
- [Dwayne Peterson](#) | DOI Office of Insular Affairs | Desk Officer
- [Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington](#) | GVI Dept of Education | Chief Operations Officer
- [Anthony D. Thomas](#) | GVI Commissioner of Dept of Property and Procurement
- [Mark Kinzer](#) | NPS-Region 2 | Env. Protection Specialist
- [Alexa Miles](#) | NPS-DSC | Project Manager



## Brief Context And History

- In November 2019, Governor Bryan offered the small island of Whistling Cay for consideration in an exchange, reenergizing negotiations, resulting in a **preliminary land exchange agreement on October 22, 2020.**
- For nearly three decades, the Territorial government of the US Virgin Islands on St. John and the US government have discussed approaches to expanding education on St. John.



## Public Education On St John: A Brief History

- Moravian Missions mid-late 1800's -- Annaberg School and East End School
- 1930's petition to federal government for schools the growing needs of families on St. John
- Earlier leaders in education: Guy Benjamin and Julius Ebenezer Sprauve
- 1970's to present VI governors fought for increased educational funding
- Steps toward siting of new school in 2013-2014
- Post-hurricanes Irma and Maria: purpose and focused vision today



## PROJECT INTRODUCTION

- NPS seeks input on a potential land exchange between Virgin Islands National Park and the Territorial Government of the US Virgin Islands (GVI) on St. John.



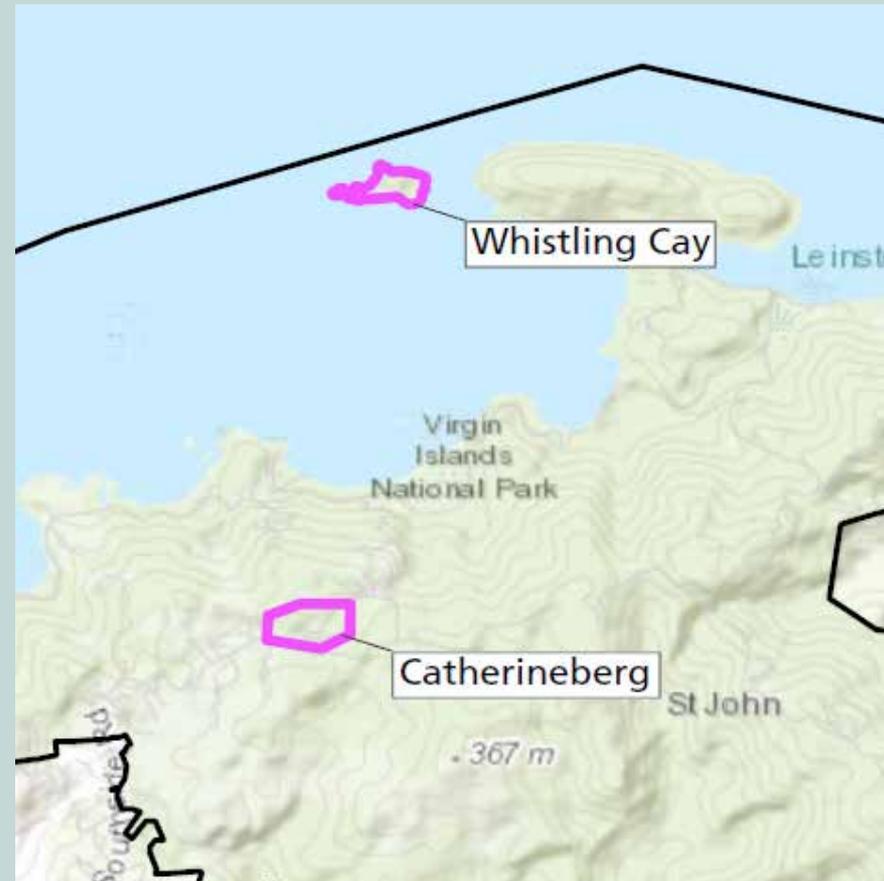
Catherineberg windmill from John Head Rd.

- NPS is preparing to conduct an environmental analysis of the proposed land exchange and requests your assistance to identify issues, concerns, and opportunities.



## PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

- The purpose of this NPS project is for the NPS to respond to the request from the GVI to exchange a parcel of NPS-owned land, known as the Catherineberg Estate (Tract No. 01-137A), with the GVI as a possible location to support the island's local educational needs.
- In exchange, the GVI has offered the island of Whistling Cay (Tract No. 02-101) for consideration.





## NEED FOR THE PROJECT

- The government of the Virgin Islands has determined that public education on St. John is lacking and is currently only available through the eighth grade.
- In order to complete a public high school education, students must commute by boat each day or relocate to St. Thomas during the school year.
- For nearly three decades, the GVI and the US government have discussed approaches to expanding education on St. John.



## NEED FOR THE PROJECT

- This potential exchange provides the opportunity for local officials to achieve their long-standing effort to construct the first K-12 public school on the island of St. John.



Early renderings of what kind of educational facilities could be constructed at Catherineberg, with the windmill tower in the background.



## CATHERINEBERG



Existing Conditions

Land Transfer Parcel Boundary

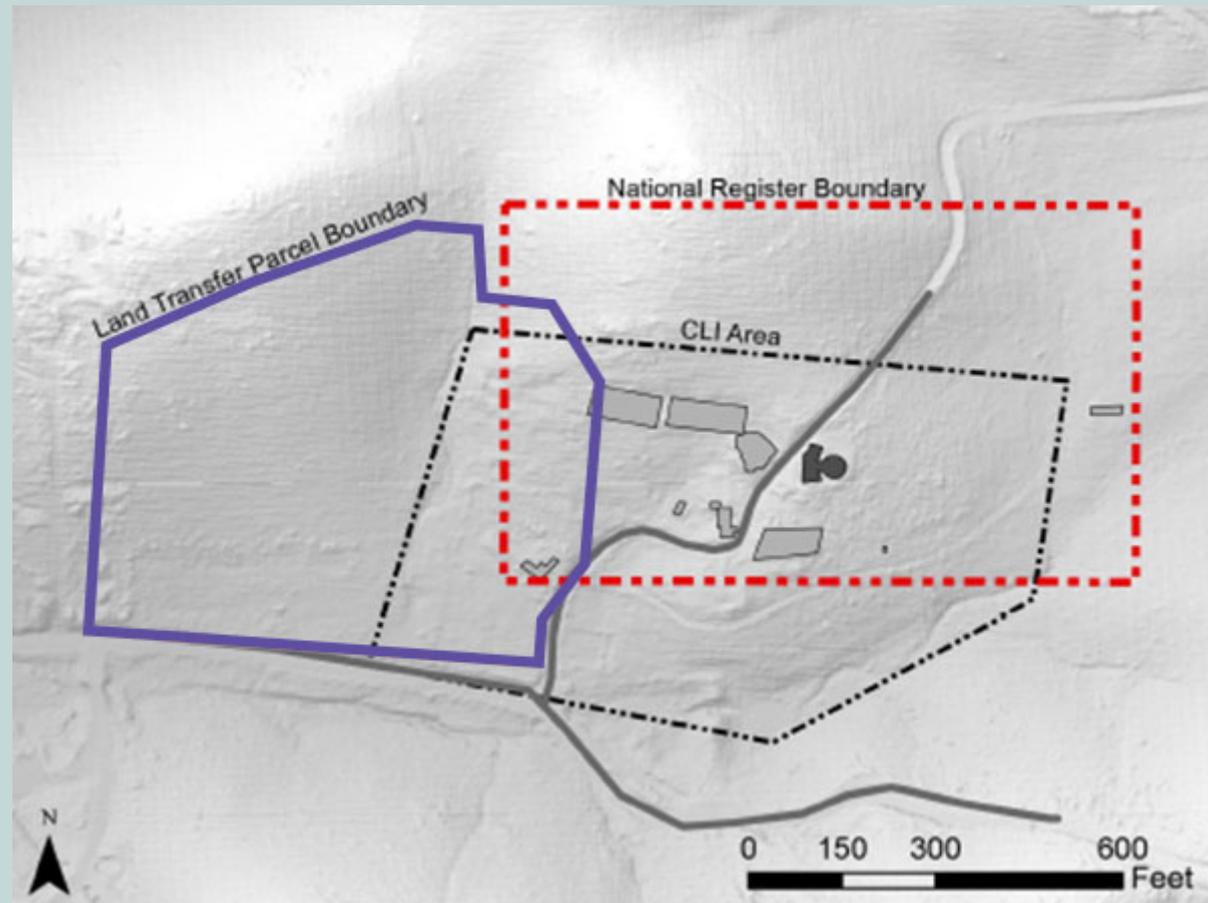
John Head Rd

Centerline Rd



## CATHERINEBERG

- Portions of the parcel being considered for transfer overlap with historic resources
- Archeological surveys (Phase I and II) completed on the exchange parcel
- NPS is completing a Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) to inform the evaluation of potential impacts from the transfer





## CATHERINEBERG HISTORY

- Indigenous people's use of the Virgin Islands extends to approximately 1000 BC
- Catherineberg (and associated estates) produce sugar 1718-1896



A period drawing showing the process of boiling, skimming, and cooling of sugar in a factory (St. Croix Landmarks Society).



## CATHERINEBERG HISTORY

- 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings and structures to support sugar production include an animal mill, oxpounds/animal pens, factory and cure house, rum still, and a village for enslaved laborers
- Windmill at Catherineberg constructed between 1800 and 1826



Stone foundation remnants in the enslaved laborers' village (Quinn Evans 2021).



## CATHERINEBERG HISTORY

- Slavery abolished in Danish West Indies in 1848 led to a decline in sugar production, increase in subsistence farming and bay rum leaf harvesting
- Cholera epidemic on St. John in 1853-54
- Cattle introduced at Catherineberg by 1870
- Last sugar cane crop at Catherineberg in 1896

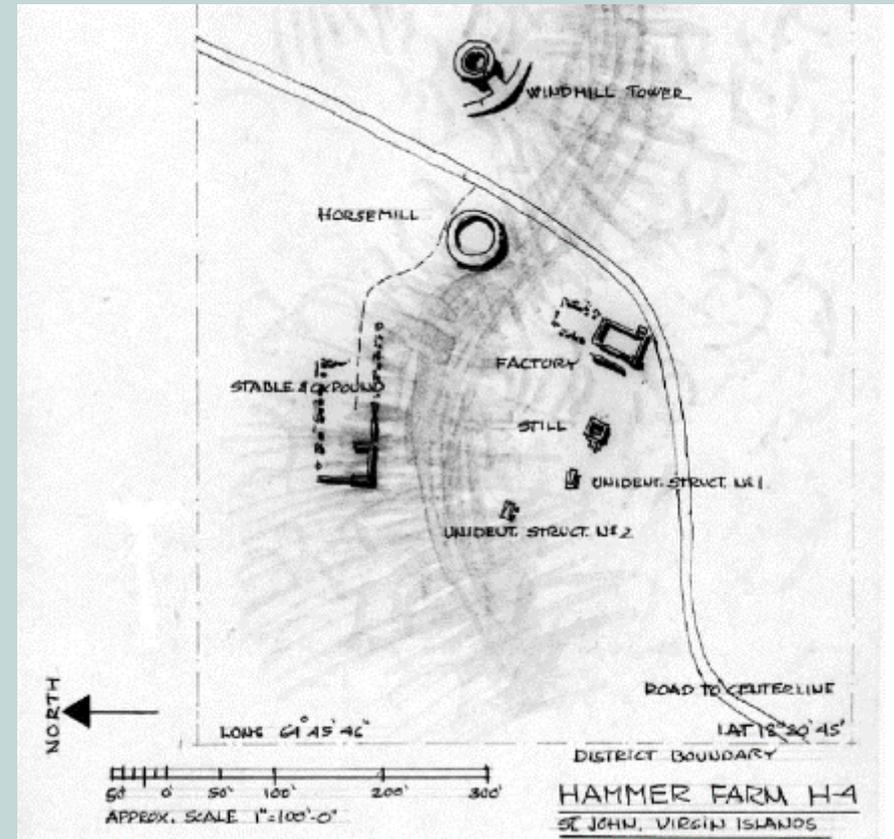


Watercolor painted by Frederik Von Scholten, 1838, zoomed in to show Catherineberg (VIIS Archives).



## CATHERINEBERG HISTORY

- Bishop family purchased Catherineberg in 1945
- The Bishops converted the animal mill to a cistern for hydroponic farming
- Property transferred to NPS in 1968
- Portion of Catherineberg listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978



Map of the Catherineberg Historic District National Register Nomination (Gjessing 1978).



## CATHERINEBERG TODAY

- Dense forest representative of post-agricultural succession
- Approximately 1 acre of wetland along an intermittent drainage channel
- Multiple cultural resources within and adjacent to the parcel
  - Historic buildings/structures
  - Archeological sites





## WHISTLING CAY

- Lies just west of Mary Point Peninsula in Maho Bay Quarter.
- Primarily undeveloped tropical forest
- One historic structure on the island, a guardhouse (also known as the Custom House), recorded in a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS VI-87)
- No formalized access





## Preliminary Land Exchange Agreement (October 2020)

- Department of Property and Procurement's role
- Purpose of the Preliminary Agreement
- Catherineberg parcel intended for public educational purposes by GVI
- Whistling Cay intended for undeveloped recreation and preservation by NPS
- Reversionary clauses apply



## PROPERTY APPRAISALS

- Fair market value must be achieved to protect the public trust.
- Appraisal and Valuation Services Office (AVSO) is delegated authority from the Secretary to determine fair market value.
- AVSO performs an appraisal review to ensure that all appraisal results are supported and compliant with applicable appraisal standards.



## VALUATION OF THE PROPERTIES

- Catherineberg Parcel: \$1.23 million
- Whistling Cay: \$1.44 million





## NPS Proposed Action

- NPS environmental analysis will consider potential impacts of construction of educational facilities at Catherineberg parcel.
  - Early preliminary designs will inform the type and scale of facilities that may be constructed. For example:
    - Buildings up to two stories high
    - Athletic fields
    - Parking lots
  - Detailed design will be subject to separate environmental review.
- No changes in use or management strategy at Whistling Cay.



## No Action vs. Proposed Action

### NO ACTION

- No land exchange
- Catherineberg remains under NPS ownership
- Whistling Cay remains under GVI ownership

### PROPOSED ACTION

- Land exchange moves ahead per agreement (subject to revisions)
- Catherineberg parcel transferred to GVI
- Whistling Cay transferred to NPS



## RESOURCE CONCERNS

- Cultural Resources
  - Cultural Landscape
  - Historic Buildings/Structures
  - Archeology
- Adjacent Communities
- Visitor Use and Experience



## PLANNING PROCESS

Milestone	Targeted Schedule
Civic Engagement 	Early 2022
Environmental Analysis	Spring 2022
Public Review	Summer 2022
Decision Document	Late 2022



## HOW TO COMMENT

Comments can be submitted two ways:

1. Submit comments electronically at:  
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/StJohnLandExchange>

-- OR --

2. Mail or hand-deliver written comments to park headquarters:

Superintendent  
RE: Potential Land Transfer  
Virgin Islands National Seashore  
1300 Cruz Bay Creek  
St. John, VI 00830

Please  
provide  
comments by  
April 27