

Park Service moves to save Buck Island's native plants

By AESHA DUVAL
Daily News Staff

ST. CROIX — The National Park Service is working to eradicate non-native and invasive plants on Buck Island to preserve native plant species and provide a suitable habitat for the park's endangered and rare animal species.

On Wednesday, a team from Earth Balance, a contracted Florida-based company, sprayed herbicides on several targeted plant species including guinea grass, tantan, wild pineapple and aloe.

Park Superintendent Joel Tutein said the group has been spraying the island since Jan. 21, when Phase 1 of the project began. Phase 2 will begin next month. So far, he said, 65 of Buck Island's 176 acres have been sprayed.

"This gives the native species a chance to recover," Tutein said. "One of the missions of the National Park Service is to restore Buck Island to its original form as much as possible."

He said the purpose of the project is to maintain and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the Buck Island National Reef Monument and to make sure the weeds do not return and interfere with the

native species.

"Once the project is complete, it's going to be great for Buck Island," Tutein said. "You will see the return of all sorts of native species and plants."

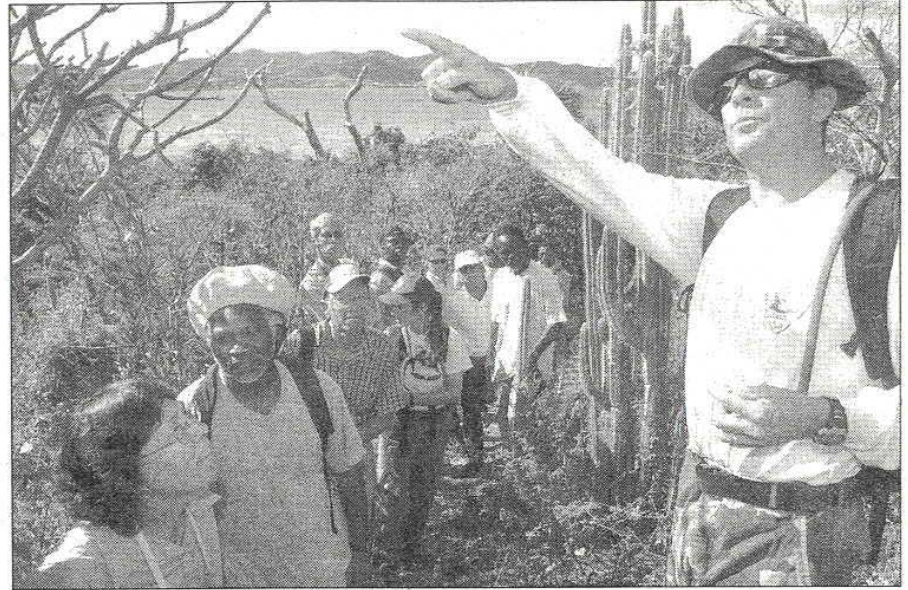
He said the plant species on the island constantly compete for food, water and sunlight.

"Because of the aggressiveness of those non-native species, the native plants have become stunted and have not spread out as fast," Tutein said.

Nineteen of the 228 plant species identified on Buck Island are not native. Three species on the island that are showing invasive characteristics are genip, haiti-haiti or seaside maho, and painkiller or noni. The Park Service also will take measures to manage and control the tamarind tree species on the island.

Of the 19 exotic species found on Buck Island, only 10 have shown invasive characteristics throughout regions in the southeastern United States and the Caribbean and are an immediate concern for the Park Service. Tutein said their potential to disrupt the natural processes of Buck Island's tropical dry forest is high.

The group will complete the first phase of the program Saturday.



Park Service exotic plant specialist Dan Clark, above, leads a tour of non-native plants on Buck Island.



At left, Earth Balance employee Antonio Ortiz uses a herbicide to help control the plants.

Daily News Photos
by CRISTIAN SIMESCU

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