



## 2017 SPRING GARDEN CAMPAIGN

With your help, the Trust for Virgin Islands Lands (TVIL) will move forward our vision to protect the Northwest Quarter of St. Croix for the benefit of all Virgin Islands residents. That vision includes a territorial park that not only saves important ecological land values and protects the integrity of offshore reefs, but also equally importantly protects a heritage resource of great importance.

### **Why does TVIL want to protect the Spring Garden property on St. Croix?**

St. Croix's rugged northwest corner has always held a special place in the heart of its residents; such sentiments are especially strong among members of the island's African Diaspora, those residents descended from the first enslaved Africans brought to these shores. The mountains of the northwest — covered with dense subtropical forests and deep guts — offered escaped slaves a place of refuge from slavers and, along with the area's offshore coral reefs, provided a natural bounty of food to freemen. Following emancipation in 1848, and continuing to this day, northwest St. Croix remains a revered place, hallowed ground representing in a very real sense freedom from slavery, man's struggles for liberty and the tireless pursuit of human dignity.

Under Danish colonial rule Spring Garden was an area of extensive plantations of cocoa, coffee, mangoes, oranges, vanilla and more. Today Spring Garden no longer harbors any agricultural ambitions; the land is slowly returning to scrub and subtropical dry and moist forest. The buildings of the estate contain the oldest remaining infirmary on St. Croix, several mill ruins and the original standing great house.

More importantly from a conservation perspective, Spring Garden also sits at the head of the Caledonia Valley watershed, one of only a handful of intermittently flowing guts on St. Croix. Apart from holding some of St. Croix's largest and most beautiful waterfalls, the gorge in Caledonia Valley is the last known refuge of the exceedingly rare Virgin Islands Screech Owl, the island's only native owl species, as well as the rare wild guava, endemic ferns and rare fresh water crabs. On Maroon Ridge, just to the north of the property, one can find the rare Christmas Orchid and bromeliads growing on rocks and in the forest canopy.

Studies carried out by The Nature Conservancy at the behest of the VI Government have identified the area as an At-Risk and Priority Conservation Area. In addition to the terrestrial environment, the health of several endangered corals just offshore largely depend on protection of the area's watersheds as a means to maintain sediment loading rates at natural levels. This concept — termed Ridges to Reefs — considers the protection of the entirety of a watershed as paramount in the conservation of both terrestrial and marine habitats.

The Trust for Virgin Island Lands is working for acquisition of the Spring Garden properties not only to protect the headwaters of the Caledonia Valley, but also to act as a catalyst for further efforts to preserve lands in the Maroon Ridge/Annaly Bay area. Buildings already on the properties are ideal and natural sites for information and education centers in a future northwest park, while the properties themselves are located very near to the center of the areas we want to protect. The acquisition of key parcels, such as the properties at Spring Garden, will play the vital role of keeping habitats unfragmented and ensure the integrity of a single contiguous park area.

With your support, we can protect Spring Garden. Please make a donation today.

Email [info@virginislandslandtrust.org](mailto:info@virginislandslandtrust.org) to donate.