

U.S. House of Representative
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

11/9/09

Dear Subcommittee on National Parks, Forest and Public lands:

It is with great enthusiasm to testify on Bill# 3726- Castle Nugent National Historic Site Establishment Act of 2009. The bill in front of you will designate Castle Nugent Farm as a National Historic Site and incorporate it within the National Park System and I support without reservation. The estate was one of 264 cotton and sugar plantations formed on the island of St. Croix after 1733, when the Danish West Indies Company first purchased the island from the French. It was first farmed as early as 1738. Over the centuries, the farm has had many owners, one of them being Christopher Nugent, who bought the farm in 1774 and gave the estate its name.

Castle Nugent Farms is one of the largest parcels of privately held land in the Virgin Islands and has been an operating cattle ranch for more than fifty years. Caroline Gasperi who is the present owner of the property says, "Our old estate has a unique, rich history as one of the longest ongoing cattle ranches in the West Indies." The Gasperi families have raised Senepol cattle, a unique breed developed in the island in the early 1900's, now owned and managed by the University of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Experiment Station Scientists and technicians.

I have known Caroline Gasperi and family for many years. The late Dr. Martin B. Adjei and I have conducted experimental research plots on the property to control undesired range plant species. The natural resources on the property you about to considering for National Park status include natural resources such a Caribbean dry forest ecosystem, the largest barrier reef system in the Virgin Islands and perhaps the largest in the Caribbean. The coral reefs in this area are critical to regional fisheries.

The cultural resources are also another component of Castle Nugent Estate. This includes pre-Columbian sites and a large historic 17th Century Danish estate great house with other historic plantation buildings and ruins. In fact, the overseer house or great house is now listed on the National Register of Historical Places. The historical landscape of the property is another attraction and remains intact with its rolling hills, and open grassy shrub plains dropping to the Caribbean Sea. During the spring and fall seasons, the Castle Nugent Estate blanketed with Ginger Thomas (*Tecoma stans*) blossoms, the Virgin Islands official flowers and the landscape is alive with butterflies

I have taken thousands of school children on the property hiking, especially along the pristine coastal environment. They have learned about the natural, cultural, historical,

archaeological, and marine resources of the areas such as the endangered species Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), Green (*Chelonia mydas*), and Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) sea turtles. They have learned to appreciate's the property natural and cultural history, aiding their education in Virgin Islands colonial and American history.

I have also introduced hundreds of locals and visitors to Castle Nugent Farm. Caroline Gasperi is a generous member of our community. She wanted young people, fellow Americans and visitors from around the world to enjoy the land that she loved and grew up on. She strongly believes that the land should be protected under the Auspices of the National Park in order to preserve the natural beauty of the area. She believed that Castle Nugent will benefit the island's economy as a tourist attraction.

The people of the Virgin Islands, especially the residents on the island of St. Croix are in support of the Castle Nugent Farm becoming part of the National Park system with the understanding that the park benefits the people and the economy of the Virgin Islands.

This is not the first time land in the Virgin Islands was incorporated into the National Park system. On February 24, 1992, the United States Congress signed Bill P.L. 102-247, establishing the 912 acre Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve. As an regularly columnist for the Virgin Islands Daily News, I wrote an article titled **America's Treasure: Our Parkland**" where I mentioned in 1954 establishment of the Virgin Islands National Park on St. John.

Today, millions of people worldwide, especially Americans visit the Virgin Islands National Park. Since then, the park has been a major contributor to the Virgin Islands economy. The island of St. John has some of the best beaches in the United States and in the world. The colonial history of the island is rich and diverse with its historical buildings still standing since the 1700's. Congress in it wisdom made the right decision on the preservation and protection of establishing the first National Park in the Virgin Islands by protecting the natural and cultural resources for us all.

I know Congress will make the right decision again in establishing a park on the island of St. Croix as America' greatest treasures are truly its National Parks. Therefore, I include the article as part of my testimony to urgent Congress to designate Castle Nugent Historic Site as part of the National park system.

Over the years, I have written many articles educating the Virgin Islands public as to why we should support the designation of Castle Nugent Farms being part of the National Park system. The Virgin Islands people have spoken. Now, we are waiting for Congress to honor the people of the Virgin Islands' wishes by making Castle Nugent Farms the next park of the United States and the Virgin Islands.

I would like to thank Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress Donna Christensen, the U.S. House of Representative and the Committee on Natural Resources for the opportunity to

testify in support of Castle Nugent Historic Site becoming part of the National Park system. I look forward for any questions that you might have regarding my testimony.

Sincerely,

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