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## Reef Task Force group visits Botany Bay

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Daily News Photo by NICK SCHNEEMAN Botany Bay project manager Don Parris talks to Coral Reef Task Force participants atop the spit of land between Botany Bay and Sandy Bay, both of which are part of the Botany Bay development.

ST. THOMAS - Nearly 250 scientists and government officials heard about the condition of Virgin Islands coral reefs from within hotel ballrooms this week. On Thursday, some toured the site of a luxury resort being developed on a steep West End hillside to view the challenges involved in protecting the local reefs firsthand.

More than 30 participants in the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meeting, which wraps up Saturday at Marriott's Frenchman's Reef Beach Resort, visited the beginnings of The Preserve at Botany Bay - and heard about the ways in which its developers are required to maintain the near-pristine environment.

"Botany Bay has everything - environmental issues, archaeological issues, neighbors that were fiercely opposed to the original plans. And it's topographically challenging," Coastal Zone Management Assistant Director Bill Rohring said about his choice of site for Thursday's tour. "Everything a project would have to go through to be a good project, the developers went through."

Descending nearly 2 miles along roads that were newly paved in some portions but remained dirt or concrete-wheel tracks in others, meeting participants saw the road-cutting that contractors began several months ago in preparation for resort construction.

The St. Thomas Coastal Zone Management Committee voted unanimously in July to grant Botany Bay Partners a major permit to construct a \$200 million resort on 367 acres of ecologically sensitive land. But they attached more than 30 special conditions - including road repaving, erosion controls and special lighting for nesting sea turtles - to the project.

Botany Bay's resort structures will be spread out across the land rather than confined to a large, traditional hotel building. Nine buildings that are two stories tall will have 48 one-bedroom units and 18 suites. Farther inland on the property, 16 two-story buildings that will house 31 timesharing units are planned, along with a market, health club, clubhouse, swim-up bar, reception building, manager's residence and restaurant.