

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Virgin Islands to Welcome First Artificial Reef Near St. Thomas This Summer

DPNR's initiative aims to protect coastal infrastructure and enhance resilience

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This summer, the territory's first artificial reef will be installed in waters near St. Thomas, the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources announced Wednesday.

The initiative, which is funded by DPNR's Division of Fish & Wildlife, is an attempt to protect coastal infrastructure and improve resilience after future storms. The project, said DPNR Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol, "will create a prototype that positions the Virgin Islands as a regional leader in developing critical habitats to help safeguard our local fish,

coral, and reef life from upcoming natural disasters."

The University of the Virgin Islands has been granted a sub-award of over \$760,000 to conceptualize, manufacture and deploy the artificial reef, which is expected to span 18' by 12' once constructed and resemble a petroglyph. The proposed location is awaiting final approvals, according to the announcement. "The goal is to provide enhanced habitat for corals struggling from climate change," said UVI Research Professor and project manager Marilyn Brandt. "We're hoping to learn a lot and inform any future work."

Meanwhile, UVI is already selecting and preparing the strongest of coral specimens currently in nurseries for ultimate propagation onto the artificial reef. Once the coral has been placed, the reef will be examined at regular intervals to gauge the settlement and growth of the life it supports. "We are excited to partner with the university on preventing widespread damage to our valuable undersea resources," said Mr. Oriol.

"We're hoping to learn a lot and inform any future work," Dr. Brandt continued. "This is the first of its kind project in the territory."