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## **\$599,970 Awarded to U.S. Virgin Islands for Coral and Watershed Protection Initiatives**

**Funding will support efforts to manage coral disturbances and restore the Salt River Bay Watershed, part of a broader \$2.6 million initiative across U.S. territories**

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The U.S. Virgin Islands has received funding from the U.S. Department of the Interior to protect its coral reefs and natural resources. Announced on Monday by Assistant Secretary for Insular and International Affairs Carmen G. Cantor, a total of \$599,970 has been awarded to the territory as part of the Department's Coral Reef and Natural Resources (CRNR) Initiative for FY 2024.

The funding, allocated through the Office of Insular Affairs, is intended to bolster efforts in managing coral reef disturbances and restoring crucial watersheds in the Virgin Islands. Specifically, \$300,000 will go to the Division of Coastal Zone Management to manage coral

disturbances in the territory. Another \$299,970 will support the Center for Watershed Protection, Inc., focusing on the development of nature-based solutions to restore the Salt River Bay Watershed in St. Croix.

The U.S. Virgin Islands was one of several insular areas to benefit from the CRNR Initiative, which disbursed a total of \$2.6 million across territories and freely associated states in the Pacific and the Caribbean. Other recipients included American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), with funds supporting a variety of environmental and conservation projects, ranging from invasive species control to coral reef restoration.

The OIA also highlighted its role in managing federal assistance programs for U.S. territories and freely associated states, working in coordination with local governments to promote sustainable resource management and environmental conservation. These grants are part of a competitive application process, with discretionary funds made available annually for projects that meet the criteria of environmental protection and resource conservation.

The CRNR Initiative is crucial in assisting the U.S. territories in safeguarding their natural resources, ensuring that future generations can benefit from a healthy and vibrant ecosystem. For the U.S. Virgin Islands, the funds come as a timely boost, given the ongoing challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation.

More information on the CRNR Initiative and other grant programs can be found at the Office of Insular Affairs website, with new applications opening each October through Grants.gov.

#### Key Points

- \$599,970 awarded to the U.S. Virgin Islands for coral reef and watershed protection
- \$300,000 directed to coral disturbance management, \$299,970 for Salt River Bay Watershed restoration
- The funds are part of the Department of the Interior's broader \$2.6 million Coral Reef and Natural Resources Initiative