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Agriculture Department Advances Landmark Land Purchase on Inner Brass Island

Aiming to protect 91 acres of forest on St. Thomas, the Department of Agriculture is working through the complex federal process to acquire land as part of the Forest Legacy Program, with plans to integrate it into the territorial park system

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Inner Brass Island, off the coast of St. Thomas.

The Department of Agriculture is pressing on with plans to purchase a large swath of land on Inner Brass Island off the coast of St. Thomas, Commissioner Louis Petersen told lawmakers during a meeting of the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture held earlier this month.

The acquisition, for which funding has already been secured, intends to “promote the conservation and protection in perpetuity of important forest areas of high environmental importance that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses in the USVI.” It forms part of the Department’s Forest Legacy Program.

The purchase of the 91-acre property has proved to be a “tedious process,” said Mr. Peterson. Notwithstanding, he was pleased to inform committee members that “this purchase of land will be the first Virgin Islands Forest Legacy Program purchase of land for St. Thomas.” The entire island will ultimately become part of the Virgin Islands’ [territorial park system](#). “The property is uniquely valued by St. Thomians for its historic, recreational and fisher use, as well as a scenic treasure,” beamed Mr. Petersen.

The Department of Agriculture is now gearing up for the long federal process to complete the purchase. Mathilde Wilson, responsible for the Forest Legacy Program, shared that while the purchase was funded in 2023, it was only one of many steps. The next step involves what is referred to as a yellow book appraisal. “Yellow Book appraisal is what the federal [government] needs to acquire land,” Ms. Wilson clarified. Other surveys, appraisals and reviews are imminent. “In the next months, we should see more activity regarding this acquisition,” said Ms. Wilson, after Senator Donna Frett-Gregory requested more details on the status of the project.