

The Virgin Islands Consortium

These Are The Seven Virgin Islands Endangered Coral Species

VIC News / **Published On August 28, 2014 11:35 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **August 28, 2014**



After years of research, the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Fishers Service has revealed the coral species found in the Virgin Islands that are considered endangered.

They are:

1. Rough Cactus Coral (*Mycetophyllia ferox*)
2. Pillar Coral (*Dendrogyra cylindrus*)
3. *Orbicella annularis*
4. *Orbicella faveolata*

5. *Orbicella franksi*
6. *Acropora cervicornis* (Staghorn coral)
7. *Acropora palmate* (Elkhorn coral)

The last two on the above list were already on the endangered list, so only five more found in the Virgin Islands were upgraded to "seriously at risk of extinction".

In all, 20 species were listed as threatened in the agency's report, fifteen of which were found in the Indo-Pacific and five in the Caribbean.

"Coral reefs are one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems on Earth, providing habitat for many marine species. Protecting and conserving these biologically rich ecosystems is essential, and the Endangered Species Act gives us the tools to conserve and recover those corals ?most in need of protection," said Eileen Sobeck, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA Fisheries. "The final decision is a result of the most extensive rulemaking ever undertaken by NOAA. The amount of scientific information sought, obtained and analyzed was unprecedented."

The NOAA said in a recent [release on its website](#) that the announcement is a significant change from the proposed rule in November 2012, as many new scientific papers on climate change and coral habitat, distribution and abundance were published, helping it achieve more accurate findings by incorporating their information with what's already available.

"We want to thank our stakeholders and partners for their strong participation at each step of this process, and we look forward to working with the states, territories, commonwealths, local governments and all our stakeholders and partners to conserve these coral species and ensure they remain for future generations to enjoy," Sobeck added.

The NOAA says it will continue to work with partners on mitigation measures and recovery plans for the newly listed corals. These will likely include approaches that have shown success elsewhere, such as watershed management, to address land-based sediment pollution in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Hawaii, and restoration efforts in the Southeast where NOAA and partners are transplanting corals grown in nurseries to help recover degraded reefs.

The latest information has also improved the NOAA's understanding of coral habitat diversity, abundance, distribution and species-specific exposure to threats and their relative vulnerability or resilience.