

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Coral World Seeks Expansion, Holds Public Meeting Today

VIC News / **Published On September 25, 2014 11:07 AM /**

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A public meeting will be held today on St. Thomas to hear comments concerning the permit application by Coral World, Inc. to construct a nearshore dolphin exhibit enclosure and landside support, as well as a visitor education center at Coral World Ocean Park at Water Bay.

The meeting is being hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District and will take place at the Charles W. Turnbull Regional Library, 4607 Tutu Park Mall, beginning at 6 p.m.

"In response to our Public Notice on the proposed project, and again when we publicized our recent Regulatory Open House in St. Thomas, we received many requests to meet specifically on this project," said Donnie Kinard, chief of the Regulatory Division. "In making its decision, the Army Corps of Engineers considers the value of the aquatic ecosystems involved, the views of federal, state and local agencies and interest groups, and 21 public interest factors."

Kinard said the Corps "is neither a proponent or an opponent of any project," adding that a permit will be granted to Coral World "unless its issuance is found to be contrary to the public interest."

A decision on whether or not to issue a permit is based on information received through the Corps's Public Notice and consideration of the impact of the proposed project on the community. The applicant's "avoidance and minimization efforts and compensatory mitigation" will also be analyzed as part of the decision-making process, according to Kinard.

"Public input is a critical part of our permitting process, and we are being responsive in holding this meeting and devoting the time needed to hear from all interested parties," he explained.

The Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, which provided for the protection and maintenance of the nation's navigable waterways, authorized the regulatory responsibilities of the Army Corps of Engineers. Under the Clean Water Act of 1972, the Corps is responsible for regulating dredge and fill operations in United States' waters, including many wetlands.

Additional information on the Coral World project application is available in the Corps' Public Notice, which is open for public review and comment through Sept. 30 at <http://1.usa.gov/1AQRJ2U>.