

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Interior Announces Nearly \$1M for Coral Reef Initiatives In VI, Other U.S. Territories

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Interior Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Kia'aina on Tuesday announced \$926,328 in grant assistance for fiscal year 2015, under the Office of Insular Affairs' Coral Reef Initiative Program to a variety of projects and initiatives designed to improve the health and management of coral reefs in the American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the freely associated states of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, according to an Office of Insular Affairs press release.

“These projects range from restoration of threatened coral species in the Caribbean to protecting Micronesian mangrove forests, and curating one of the largest collections of Pacific coral specimens,” said Kia’aina. “I trust they will help build capacity, promote healthy coastal ecosystems, and help inform management of coral reefs in the jurisdictions.”

The 2015 projects to be funded include:

Guam Museum Foundation, Inc. (Guam) - \$73,150 to support a graduate-level internship program to curate the Richard Randall Coral Collection. This rare collection, consisting of more than 30,000 specimens of corals from around the Pacific, will be digitized into a database for future scientific use and study. Richard Randall, a retired Professor Emeritus of Marine Biology from the University of Guam, has been studying corals for 50 years and is recognized as the coral expert for the tropical Pacific. This unique collection is currently housed at the Guam Museum Foundation.

Guam Bureau of Statistics and Planning (Guam) - \$131,800 to promote conservation awareness through education and outreach on the importance of Guam’s reefs to the island’s culture; to establish a Coral Reef Resilience Coordinator; to conduct a hydrological study of the Toguan Watershed to develop strategies for its management; and to support participation in the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meetings.

U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) The Nature Conservancy (St. Croix, USVI) - \$50,000 for coral reef restoration within the St. Croix East End Marine Park by transplanting elkhorn and staghorn coral colonies, grown in The Nature Conservancy’s coral nursery, to sites characterized as high-value for restoration and recovery of these two threatened species of Caribbean coral.

U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (U.S. Virgin Islands) - \$131,088 to develop a strategic plan to improve the enforcement capacity and effectiveness of the Division of Environmental Enforcement; and to evaluate the connectivity of coral reef species between managed and unmanaged areas to strengthen local management of the 43 Marine Protected Areas in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Palau International Coral Reef Center (Republic of Palau) - \$110,000 to characterize and manage the recovery of Palauan coral reefs following recent catastrophic damage from super-typhoons Bopha and Haiyan.

Micronesia Conservation Trust (Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia)- \$150,000 to work with local governments, non-governmental organizations, and communities to conduct a vulnerability assessment on Pohnpei’s 5,500 hectares of mangrove forest to identify threats and specific adaptation actions; assess the feasibility of funding habitat conservation by marketing carbon credits; and share project results to catalyze similar projects throughout Micronesia and help achieve the goals of the Micronesia Challenge.

College of the Marshall Islands (Republic of the Marshall Islands) - \$121,572 to establish a national, publicly-accessible, spatial analytics facility on the campus of the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI); to build capacity in participatory Geographic

Information System (GIS) management by training CMI and government staff on building a national geospatial clearinghouse; to compile and augment the conservation database; and to conduct a short-course on GIS for use in sustainable coastal management.

American Samoa Department of Commerce (American Samoa) - \$138,718 for a pilot project at Utulei Beach, a popular spot for swimming and snorkeling on Tutuila Island, to identify, and ultimately eliminate, outflows of litter into the Fagaloa Tourism Priority Zone. This project complements other initiatives such as the Utelei Beach Recovery project and redevelopment of the old Rainmaker Hotel property.

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) - \$20,000 to support the Garapan Field Surveillance Project that seeks to reduce littering and illegal dumping in the Garapan area by using volunteers to assist with reporting and enforcement.