

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DPNR Receives Over \$130,000 In Federal Funding For Coral Reef Protection

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ST. CROIX -- Department of Planning and Natural Resources Acting Commissioner Dawn L. Henry announced today via press release an award of \$131,088 from the United States Department of Interior through the Coral Reef Initiative (CRI) program, to support priorities for the protection and sustainable use of the territory's coral reefs.

The Division of Coastal Zone Management received funding for two projects. The first grant of \$58,575 was awarded to The Division of Environmental Enforcement (DEE) to develop a strategic plan for improvement and enforcement capacity, and to increase the effectiveness of natural resource management and follow through on strategic plan recommendations, according to the release.

The second award in the amount of \$72,513 was provided to DPNR to evaluate the connectivity of coral reef species between managed and unmanaged areas. It will also cover costs for measures of the connectivity and identify areas of particular management value.

This project satisfies multiple needs outlined in the Local Action Strategy (LAS), including providing baseline information for resource managers, evaluating the effectiveness of current Marine Protected Areas, and increasing public awareness of the value of coral reefs.

"This project is directly in line with the governments' Local Action Strategy and will build on NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program-funded efforts to address enforcement in the territory, which has been identified as an urgent need in the USVI capacity assessment," said Director Jean-Pierre Oriol of CZM.

The strategic plan developed for the DPNR DEE will have the short-term goal of addressing pressing needs within the enforcement division, and the long-term goal of making enforcement capacity sustainable.

"More specifically it will provide a quantifiable multi-species network assessment of protected and unprotected habitats of the U.S. Caribbean that can be used to plan for improved local resilience and regional persistence," Oriol added.

Critical coral reef areas will be identified and recommendations for future management will also be provided.