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UVI Receives \$100k in Funding from NOAA's Marine Debris Program to Clean Territory's Mangrove Shorelines

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UVI's Center for Marine and Environmental Studies recently received a \$100,000 award from the Marine Debris Program to reduce hurricane-deposited marine debris from mangrove shorelines across the territory over the next two years, the institution of higher learning has announced. The award also provides support to develop a territorial Marine Debris Action Plan, a first for the U.S. Virgin Islands and all U.S. insular areas.

"This is a significant award that will help us address lingering impacts of the 2017 storms on a critical coastal habitat", said Dr. Kristin Wilson Grimes, research assistant professor at UVI and project leader. "Mangroves provide shelter for birds and fish, prevent erosion

of our shorelines, improve coastal water quality, and provide safe harbor to boaters during storm events.”

Substantial amounts of marine debris were produced by Hurricanes Irma and Maria when they struck the territory in September 2017. Much of that debris collected in mangrove shorelines where it remains to this day. This award will target removal of marine debris from mangrove shorelines on St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. It builds on the very successful Great Mangrove Clean-Up events that have occurred in April on St. Thomas for the past two years. These events have engaged more than 240 community members aged 9–70, in removing more than 4,800 pounds of marine debris from the St. Thomas East End Reserves, a protected area on the east end of St. Thomas. The new award will continue this event and add new locations in Coral Bay, St. John and Salt River, St. Croix.

“It’s important that we help these ecosystems to recover and the continued involvement of the community in Great Mangrove Clean-Up events is key to this recovery and cultivation of a stewardship ethic,” said, Dr. Grimes. “New Marine Debris Action Plan is also an important step in coordinating marine debris activities across the territory, that will increase the collective impact of these activities, including enhanced data-driven decision making by the legislature and proposed management actions by territorial agencies.”

The award will also develop a Marine Debris Action Plan, which is critical to the coordination and prioritization of future marine debris removal, research, and prevention activities in the Territory, including policy decisions made by the USVI legislature and future management actions made by territorial agencies like the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority.

Key partners on the award include the Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service, Virgin Islands Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (VI-EPSCoR), and the Virgin Islands Department of Planning & Natural Resources, Division of Coastal Zone Management