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FEMA Approves Massive Replacement Project of St. Croix's Entire Waste Water System With a Projected Cost of \$1.5 to \$2 Billion

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St. Croix's wastewater map. By. OFFICE OF DISASTER RECOVERY

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The V.I. Office of Disaster Recovery has announced that after three years of negotiations, voluminous documentation and numerous site visits, FEMA has provided official notification approving the replacement of the entire wastewater system on the island of St. Croix with a projected cost of \$1.5 to \$2 billion. Considering the condition, age and deterioration of wastewater facilities and components since the storms, as well as the necessary upgrades to meet industry requirements, FEMA has determined that all 14 sewersheds are eligible for replacement.

This notification acknowledges the indisputable impact of the last ten hurricanes, which has left the island's system in ominous disrepair and highly susceptible to future damage, said the O.D.R. The environmental costs of sewage overflows and recurring repairs place an overwhelming burden on the Authority and the territory.

"This is a huge win for St. Croix and the Territory. Prudent replacement will allow the Authority to rebuild its aging wastewater infrastructure in accordance with current industry standards and continue its mission of providing quality wastewater services," said Roger Merritt, executive director of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority. "Special thanks to the hardworking team at VIWMA and ODR, as well as other local and federal partners and consultants who worked tirelessly to ensure the funding for this massive project became a reality."

According to O.D.R., the first step comes as a tremendous accomplishment for the recovery and the Bryan administration's pledge to strengthen the island's infrastructure. Engineers from the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, Witt O' Brien's and FEMA personnel are working diligently to develop the scope of work for the project, stated the release.

Once the cost for the first sewer shed is approved, the scope will be used to create the remaining segments of the project. The next step in the process is the obligation of the funds needed to initiate the solicitation for a contractor to perform the work.

"Coming off the heels of the FEMA Summit held about a month ago, this approval is a result of coordination and collaboration by local and federal agencies," said Adrienne L. Williams-Octalien, O.D.R. director. "FEMA is making good on promises made to the Territory. The Office of Disaster Recovery recognizes and applauds the partnership and support from Governor Bryan, Delegate Plaskett, Witt O'Brien's and FEMA leadership. This determination comes at a critical time as the territory is planning and designing undergrounding and other critical infrastructure projects in both districts."

O.D.R. said this approval will be used as the blueprint for wastewater replacement requests for St. Thomas and St. John, as well as the potable water system replacement requests to FEMA. The Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority and the Office of Disaster Recovery will continue working jointly with FEMA to address wastewater system damage across the territory.