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U.S. Virgin Islands Among Several in Caribbean to Experience Drought From March Through May

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In 2015 the U.S. Virgin Islands experienced a monthslong drought that negatively impacted WAPA's transmission and distribution systems. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

The latest edition of the Caribbean Climate Outlook Newsletter says the U.S. Virgin Islands are among several in the Caribbean that will be experiencing short-term drought during the month of March and extending all the way into May.

“Short-term drought is evolving in the USVI and Sint Martin and may develop or continue in Barbados, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, Martinique, southwest Puerto Rico, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent,” said the newsletter which is publicly available on the Regional

Climate Outlook Forums, called RCOF, website.

Sponsored by the World Meteorological Organization, RCOFs are active in several parts of the world. These RCOFs are critical for the development and delivery of effective early warning systems, in that they provide real-time seasonal climate forecasts and interpretation across relevant time and spatial scales. The Caribbean Climate Outlook Forum (CariCOF) is one such RCOF that seeks to develop appropriate climate services, tailored to the Caribbean region to support the goals of climate variability, change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

The newsletter says that in the long-term or at the end of May, further drought condition is expected to affect the ABC Islands, Antigua, parts of Belize, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Sint-Martin, Saint Lucia, as well as the U.S. Virgin Islands, and might possibly develop or continue in the northern Bahamas, Barbados, western Cuba, the Dominican Republic, southern Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts, Trinidad, and Saint Vincent

During the month of February moderate (or worse) shorter-term drought had developed in western Cuba and across all areas east including the Dominican Republic, excluding the Guianas. Moderate to longer-term drought had developed in Belize, western Cuba, along the southern coastline of the Dominican Republic along with the Lesser Antilles excluding Trinidad and Tobago.

The Barbados-based CariCOF says that for the three-month period March to May, a persistent weak La Nina pattern is expected to transition to near-neutral conditions during the upcoming season, which may drive increasing uncertainty into the seasonal rainfall forecast.

La Nina refers to the periodic cooling of ocean surface temperatures in the central and east-central equatorial Pacific. Typically, La Nina events occur every three to five years or so but occasionally can occur over successive years.

Extreme wet spells for the region are not expected to feature prominently during the upcoming season. However, a small increase in wet spell frequency is expected for the eastern Caribbean which could lead to marginal flash flood and soil erosion potential in Belize and the islands through March.