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Conference on Climate Resilience in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Set for April 19-20

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Nature Conservancy are celebrating Earth Day by offering a two-day virtual conference promoting climate resilience and equity in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands.

The free two-day conference will take place April 19-20 and is open to the general public. Nearly 80 speakers and moderators working with climate change issues in the islands will share their perspectives in plenary talks and breakout sessions and dialog with the public, according to the release.

“As those of you who live in these beautiful islands know better than most, our climate is in crisis, and the time is now to take action. You are bearing the brunt of an increasingly extreme and unpredictable global climate and many island communities are on the frontlines of the climate emergency,” said Lisa F. Garcia, EPA regional administrator. “Scientists also tell us there is still a brief window of time to avoid the very worst consequences of climate change. We must act now and the Biden-Harris Administration is committed to doing just that – taking historic action to tackle the climate crisis -- and EPA is at the center of achieving the president’s ambitious goals.”

“Connecting science, policies, programs, and people to share climate change knowledge and opportunities can help promote equity and build climate resilience. Collaborative actions are essential, as climate change impacts of drought, wildfire, hurricanes, and sea level rise cross many boundaries,” said William A. Gould, director of the USDA Caribbean Climate Hub.

According to the release, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have unique historical, geographic, ecological, social, and cultural dynamics. They face climate challenges that require science-based, locally-driven, and culturally-informed solutions. This conference will gather leaders in government, business, society, and nonprofits to share insights, support, experiences, and solutions to the immediate and urgent challenges posed to island communities by climate change.

Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources Acting Secretary, Anais Rodríguez Vega said, “Humanity is at a crossroads, the planet is facing global warming. Starting in 1960, the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere began to rise unstopably due to the increase in the emission of greenhouse gases caused by humans.

“Puerto Rico has already joined the chorus of international voices and actions that seek to stop it through the enactment of resilience initiatives, reduction of fossil fuel emissions, energy and climate change public policy laws, and various tax incentives for the development of a sustainable green economy, among others. As an agency that regulates the environment and protects natural resources, the DNER maintains an active role in environmental conservation, as we are aware that this is an important way to curbing climate change.”

According to the release, speakers will address the shared priorities to save lives, protect economies and the environment, and sustain livable communities, as well as measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build back better in a more sustainable, healthy, equitable, and resilient way.

“It is vital for conservation organizations, academia, government and communities to work together as we collectively face climate change threats,” said Alberto Mercado Vargas, Puerto Rico Program Manager of The Nature Conservancy. “Through innovative conservation, sound science, effective policy, and community input, we can advance a holistic approach to climate change. At The Nature Conservancy, we are working in the Caribbean and across the globe to help vulnerable communities become more resilient through actions that prioritize nature, like restoring coastal habitats that protect people and support livelihoods.”

A wide range of speakers from government, universities, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector will gather at this event to provide a showcase of new projects and discuss needed public policies.

“Humans are responsible for our warming world and humans have the capacity to solve this problem,” said Ko Barrett, NOAA Senior Advisor for Climate Change. “NOAA is committed to working with the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to forecast, adapt and mitigate climate

change impacts that are already taking a heavy toll on these vulnerable island communities. This conference can help strengthen the cooperation needed to build a Climate Ready Nation to both adapt to climate impacts and to address the cause of climate change – greenhouse gas pollution.”

“The team at the Office of Insular Affairs is pleased to see this interagency collaborative effort among our federal partners in support of climate resilience, equity and improved collaboration in the Caribbean to address climate change challenges specific to Caribbean Island communities,” said Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary for Insular and International Affairs Betsy Hildebrandt at DOI. “We look forward to a successful conference focused on the Caribbean and commit to working together going forward as we explore strategies to support the successful implementation of projects supported by President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in the U.S. Territories, and especially for the U.S. Virgin Islands.”

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