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Fifth Great Mangrove Cleanup Removes 4,450 Pounds of Trash from Vessup Bay Mangroves

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The University of the Virgin Islands announced Thursday that this month, 97 community volunteers between 8-70 years old participated in the fifth annual Great Mangrove Cleanup on St. Thomas. Together the volunteers cleaned 0.5 mile of mangrove shoreline in Vessup Bay, removing 4,450 pounds of lingering hurricane debris and other trash trapped in the mangrove roots. This is the most debris removed during a Great Mangrove Cleanup to date, UVI said.

By number, the top three items removed were beverage bottles (2,000; plastic, glass, and cans), plastic pieces (1,078) and plastic bottle caps (493), according to UVI. There were also quite a number of interesting finds, including 3 propane tanks, 3 dinghies, 3 tires, 219 flip-flops and other shoes, 10 toothbrushes, a weight belt, a dry suit, fish ID card, a flowerpot, a broom, an engine, and a lounge chair. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, most marine debris comes from land-based sources,

which means the community plays a critical role in reducing marine debris by recycling, re-using items, or making sure that items that must be thrown away end up in the proper waste receptacle, rather than the environment.

The mangrove cleanup was sponsored by the University the Virgin Islands, Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service, Virgin Islands EPSCoR, Waste Management, the National Science Foundation, SEAS Islands Alliance, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) Marine Debris, and Coral Reef Conservation Programs.

According to the release, the event builds on the success of previous Great Mangrove Cleanups that have occurred on St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix since 2018. Those events engaged more than 406 volunteers and removed 10,834 pounds of marine debris from territorial shorelines. With the 2022 St. Thomas Great Mangrove Cleanup, more than 500 community volunteers have now removed 7.6 tons of debris from mangrove shorelines across the territory since 2018.

“This was a tremendous effort by our dedicated volunteers. The amount of trash and debris removed from the mangroves is truly impressive and speaks to how much we can accomplish when we work together,” said project lead and UVI association professor of Watershed Ecology, Dr. Kristin Wilson Grimes.