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USVI to Receive Over \$14 Million for Coastal Resilience and Coral Reef Restoration

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Sunset under almond tree at Scott Beach, Caneel Bay, St. John. By. GETTY IMAGES

Over \$14 million in federal funds from the U.S. Department of Commerce is headed to the territory, according to an announcement from Vice President Kamala Harris.

The money, part of the Biden-Harris administration’s “Investing in America” agenda, will go towards projects in the U.S. Virgin Islands that will increase the resiliency of the territory’s coastlines.

The administration “is proud to recommend funding for projects that will restore and protect the U.S. Virgin Islands’ diverse system of coral reefs,” said Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo. “This historic investment is critical to supporting the ability for these reefs to withstand the effects

of climate [change, and] is essential to the Islands' ecological health and economic growth.”

The Climate-Ready Coasts initiative is administered by the national Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which falls under the Commerce Department. In the USVI, the money will go towards three projects.

According to the Commerce Department, \$6.9 million is available to be spent on multi-site coral reef restoration, with the Coral Restoration Foundation the local implementing agency. The project, according to the announcement from NOAA, “will help rebuild populations of five Endangered Species Act-listed corals at multiple sites, including reefs associated with ongoing NOAA efforts in these areas. Outreach and educational activities included in the project programming are expected to target young people and youth organizations, including the Girl Scouts, student interns, and others.

A separate project will “restore 90 acres of coral reef within the St. Croix East End Marine Park”, helping to recover marine species and contribute towards a healthier reef ecosystem. This project will focus on five coral species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, and will cost \$6.6 million to execute, with the Nature Conservancy as the implementing agency.

The final project identified for the USVI is a \$870,000 effort to address stormwater runoff and soil erosion issues on the properties of VI residents. The Department of Planning and Natural Resources, through the Virgin Islands Clean Coasts Program, will implement previously proposed recommendations to fix issues that were identified during prior property evaluations.

Combined, the three projects are expected to “accelerate efforts in the US Virgin Islands to prepare for and respond to climate change,” according to NOAA Administrator Dr. Rick Spinard.