



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet

Virgin Islands 2025



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2024 Final
Community Forests and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$56,000
Forest Legacy	\$75,000
Forest Stewardship	\$102,372
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$0
State Fire Assistance	\$110,000
Urban and Community Forestry	\$301,005
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$0
Total	\$644,377

NOTE: This funding is for all entities within the state, not just the State Forester's office.

The United States Virgin Islands (USVI) consists of three major islands, St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas, which includes nearby Water Island and many smaller islands and cays. Each island has its own unique ecological, historical, and cultural heritage reflected in the present state of each island's forest resources. St. Croix is traditionally the agricultural island of the US Virgin Islands; it is the largest island at 84 square miles and possesses most of the flat land in the US VI. St. Thomas, at 32 square miles, is traditionally the trading center of the U.S. Virgin Islands, as it has a deep-water port; tourism is the largest employer on this island. St. John, at 20 square miles, is the eco- tourism island, with nearly two-thirds of St. John's area preserved inside the boundaries of the Virgin Islands National Park.

Many of the issues and challenges facing the USVI are similar to those facing other Caribbean islands and nations. There is an increasing demand for development of seemingly "vacant" land, with a concurrent need for economic growth and creation of jobs (USVI, 2006). Development in the form of hotels, golf courses, condominiums, and other "improvements" puts stress on the remaining forested land. Loss of forested landscapes to development, the stress this places on watersheds is a critical problem on all small islands in the Caribbean, and the USVI is no exception. The forested slopes provide areas for water infiltration and help prevent soil erosion. Development on steep slopes leads to soil erosion, causing damage to the watershed, and to offshore coral reefs and the local fisheries they support, as well as to tourism (Beller et al., 1990).

Program Goals

- **CONTIGUOUS FOREST CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT**
The largest tracts of contiguous forest areas in the US Virgin Islands have been identified as areas of focus for the goal of contiguous forest management.
- **URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT**
Urban and community forests account for a large percentage of the US Virgin Islands' forests. Urban forests play a unique role in the health and well being of humans in the urban environment by absorbing pollutants, cooling the air, dampening noise pollution and reducing erosion. Urban forests also provide an opportunity for people living in an urban environment to form connections with and an appreciation of nature, an essential component for any conservation program.
- **COASTAL FOREST ECOSYSTEMS PROTECTION**
Tropical islands rely on coastal forest ecosystems for many important ecosystem services. Mangroves are the backbone of coastal forest ecosystems and their contributions are well studied. They provide essential habitat for a wide range of wildlife, including nursery habitat for economically important juvenile fish. Many birds nest in the branches of the mangroves and rely on the fish and invertebrates in the surrounding water for food.

Key Issues

- Contiguous Forest Loss
- Loss of Transitional Forests to Development
- Urban Forest Sustainability
- Hazard Mitigation
- Water Management
- Degradation of Coastal Forest Ecosystems
- Invasive Species
- Wildfire

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2024 Accomplishments	Value
Population	87,146	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	298
Acres of Forest Land	46,967	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	20
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	54,990	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	0
Number of NIPF Landowners	565	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	0
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	7,500	State Fire Communities Assisted	0
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	13,824	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	0
Number of Rural Fire Departments	1	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	0
Cities and Towns	3	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	17
Forest Based Employment	125	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	79,380
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	5	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	144
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	180,500		

Program Highlights

Cooperative Fire Protection

The make-up of the US Virgin Islands is unique in that the Territory consists of three major islands and a smaller inhabited island, each of which requires its own fire stations. The Virgin Islands Fire Service is divided into two districts: the St. Thomas/St. John/Water Island district and the St. Croix district. There are seven fire stations in the St. Thomas/St. John/Water Island district and four in the St. Croix district. All stations are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The agency has three main areas of operations: Emergency Operations (Suppression), Arson Investigation and Prevention (Prevention), and Administration. There are seven fire stations in the St. Thomas/St. John/Water Island district and four in the St. Croix district. The VI Fire Service (VIFS) provides service to over 108,000 year-round residents and additional seasonal vacationers of 10,000 to 15,000. During Fiscal Year 2024, the wildland firefighters responded to 47 wildland fires that affected over 218 acres of land throughout the territory. The USVI Fire Department acquired two portable floating pumps to increase capability to have water available for wildland fire suppression in areas where no regular pumps are available. The Prevention Unit of the Fire Service conducted yearlong fire education workshops, performed fire extinguisher training and fire drills. This Unit conducted a series of educational activities that reached 28,206 students. The goal of the Prevention Unit is to safeguard the community from fires and other related hazards through programs which will educate the public and enhance observance to fire regulations. The Administration Unit, through management of the available financial resources, provides the support for efficient operations of these two units. USDA Forest Service grant funds were used to purchase firefighting gears, firefighting supplies, educational supplies, and other items educational tools that were distributed to the students during Prevention Week.

Forest Stewardship

In 2024, US Virgin Islands Forest Stewardship Program Coordinator increased program capacity through several grants and activities:

- Assistance for Private Forest Landowners in the US Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture (VIDA) for a duration of four years (2024-2028). The approved funds (\$500,000) will be used to increase the delivery of forestry programs to Private Forest Landowners throughout the US Virgin Islands. This project will increase number of trees planted through identifying, sourcing, propagating, maintaining, and planting of fruit trees for reforestation.
- Tree Nurseries grant to support sustaining a high level of native tree seedlings and distribution of trees to landowners. The main goal for is to produce thousands of healthy seedlings in preparation for distribution. (\$225,000)
- Landscape Scale Restoration Cost Share Payment Programs for Private Forest Landowners, is a competitive grant to the VIDA--Forest Stewardship Program. This \$3 million project will establish the US Virgin Islands Resilient Forest Practices Incentive Program, a Cost Share Payment Program to support non-industrial forest landowners in implementing Forest Management Practices that support healthy forests and healthy lands.
- Nursery Technical Assistance: The US Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture hosted the visit of US Forest Service Tropical Nursery Specialist, Emily Senegal, who is providing technical assistance to tropical nurseries. The visit serve as an introduction with local nurseries and provided insight into the needs and challenges of US Virgin Islands nurseries.
- Forest Management Plan Preparers Training: The US Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the USDA Forest Service hosted a training for local contractors on the preparation of Forest Stewardship Plans. The training was provided by Felix Rivera from Puerto Rico Forestal, Inc and ForMAP Contractor Josh Baldwin. This training is part of VIDA's capacity building efforts.

Urban and Community Forestry

The Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture (VIDA) Urban and Community Forestry Department (UCFD) made significant strides in implementing its outreach plan. UCFD conducted 11 visits to public schools, educating students on urban forestry and management. The program also enjoyed an increase in volunteer hours and some additional advocacy work, which complemented the program's goals. By incorporating education, volunteerism, and advocacy, the UCFD enhanced forestry management practices across the U.S. Virgin Islands.

UCFD supported communities through trainings, workshops, and interagency collaborations within the Water and Power Authority, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, and the Housing Authority on best management practices, Tree Law, and public green spaces management. This was achieved through UCFD by the presentations of students and the distribution of informative materials, raising awareness about the Heritage Tree Law. UCFD initiated the process of appointing the first Tree Board of the territory in order to enforce this law.

Efforts to improve food security included educating the public on managing fruit trees like soursop, papaya, and mango. UCFD spread native, heritage, and fruit trees across St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, distributing over 300 ecologically beneficial trees through community engagement. Three new organizations have submitted applications for funding from the Urban and Community Forestry Grant Assistance Program. Furthering this community outreach and engagement, UCFD initiated a tree-labeling program within VIDA. The mango orchard now boasts permanent signs decorated with local artwork on painted rocks contributed by school students and community members themselves. This activity successfully intermingled education, creativity, and collaboration, tightening the bond among the public in relation to engagement with the department.

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