



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet

Virgin Islands 2021



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2020 Final
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$0
Forest Legacy	\$30,000
Forest Stewardship	\$115,000
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$0
State Fire Assistance	\$70,000
Urban and Community Forestry	\$95,000
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$0
Total	\$310,000

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

The forestry programs in the US Virgin Islands have three primary goals. Goal One is contiguous forest conservation and management, which includes strategies to increase awareness of current forestry programs and develop educational materials on the importance of all forest types; collect data on wildlife usage of contiguous forest and corridors between forest patches; collect data on location and extent of wildfires; protect existing forests in important aquifers/watersheds; increase the number of parcels protected through conservation easement and fee simple acquisitions; increase number of trees planted; increase acreage under monitoring/control of invasive species; and reduce area of contiguous forests burned by wildland fires. Goal Two is urban forest management, which includes strategies to educate the public about the importance of protecting remarkable/heritage trees; identify and manage hazard trees; reduce the risk to forest health from invasive species; collect data to determine wildlife use of urban forest corridors; increase the number of trees planted in urban areas; develop and implement management plans for developed areas; train more certified arborists; and write and enact a Virgin Islands tree ordinance that implements many of these strategies. Goal Three is coastal forest ecosystems protection, which relies on the strategies of developing programs to educate the public about the importance of coastal forest ecosystems; collect data on and monitor the effects of climate change, especially on coastal forests; maximize forest cover to prevent erosion and sedimentation; and control invasive species in coastal forest ecosystems. Most of these strategies require the participation of other government agencies and programs and cannot be done through forestry programs alone. Thus, these goals, while ambitious, may be achieved through partnerships with both government and private agencies.

Program Goals

- Contiguous Forest Conservation and Management
- Urban Forest Management
- Coastal Forest Ecosystems Protection

Key Issues

- Decreasing contiguous forest loss
- Loss of transitional forests to development
- Increasing urban forest sustainability
- Increased hazard mitigation and storm preparedness
- Storm water, drought, and coastal erosion management
- Prevention of the degradation of coastal forest ecosystems
- Invasive species removal and mitigation

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2020 Accomplishments	Value
Population	108,612	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	0
Acres of Forest Land	46,967	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	0
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	1,000	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	20	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	0
Forest Based Employment	125	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	0
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	5	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	0
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 VI Fire Service (VIFS) provides service to over 108,000 year-round residents and additional seasonal vacationers of 10,000 to 15,000. From October 2019 to October 2020, the wildland firefighters responded to 121 brush fires that affected over 801.75 acres of land throughout the territory. 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 Prevention Unit of the Fire Service conducted yearlong fire education workshops, performed fire extinguisher training and fire drills. During National Prevention Week, this Unit conducted a series of activities that reached over 30,442 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 Conservation Training

To our unit is important to provide our partners with basic and specialized training opportunities to increase their capacity on forestry related topics. Training is a key element to sustainable forest management practices, establishment and management of urban forests, and protect our forest resources. During Fiscal Year 2020 we offered several training sessions hosted by partners and the State and Private Forestry Unit. We partnered with the University of Hawaii, the RNGR Team, Cafiesencia, the University of Puerto Rico- Extension Service, the University of Virgin Islands, and Centro para la Conservacion del Paisaje to coordinate and provide these training sessions. For example, we hosted a Nursery Management Webinar Series and a Master Gardener Webinar series for 25 UPR Extension Service volunteers. During Fiscal Year 2020 our unit hosted/supported a total of thirty-six (36) training sessions.

Forest Legacy

Throughout 2020, all Virgin Island Forest Legacy properties remained undisturbed with no buildout,

construction, or contract violation of any kind. The Forest Legacy coordinator position was vacant from the start of 2020 until November 9, 2020 when Eugenia Merkoulov was brought on to fill the position. Prior to the start of her position, the new coordinator was able to attend trainings in the summer of 2020 to prepare for her role. The focus of the final months of 2020 was on bringing administrative tasks and paperwork up to date and further Forest Legacy training with Magaly Figueroa. Priorities heading into the new year are to contact landowners who are presently requesting consideration for Legacy status and begin the process of land appraisal and evaluation.

Forest Stewardship

The Forest Stewardship program in the Virgin Islands was without a coordinator throughout most of 2020 until Eugenia Merkoulov was hired to fill the position on November 9, 2020. Prior to the start of her position, the new coordinator was able to attend trainings in the summer of 2020 to prepare for her role. The focus of the final months of the year was on bringing administrative tasks and overdue paperwork up to date and participating in further Forest Stewardship trainings with Magaly Figueroa and Maya Quinones. Priorities heading into the new year are the establishment of a native tree nursery on St. Croix, ensuring that all existing Stewardship properties are in compliance with their management plans, and creating an education and outreach program for local landowners.

i-Tree tools optimization for US Caribbean

Davey Trees Expert Company is optimizing their i-Tree tools for Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands to develop full functionality in the Caribbean US territories. The project is funded by the Urban and Community Forestry Program. The proposal from the International Institute of Tropical Forestry and local partners was accepted and awarded in 2020. Progress is ongoing and expected to be completed in late 2021.

LiDAR Canopy Cover Map

The US Forest Service is mapping canopy cover for Puerto Rico's urban areas and the entire US Virgin Islands using 2018 LiDAR data from USGS. The project is expected to be completed in late 2021.

Urban and Community Forestry

During the months of March through October local forestry activities were on hold pending the onboarding of a new coordinator. On October 26, of 2020 with the hiring of Mr. Andrews as Urban & Community Forestry coordinator. Once in the position, Mr. Andrews made efforts to close the gap by participating in online trainings and conferences with the regional and state forestry divisions in the months of June and May. Upon starting in October, the new coordinator worked on bringing the program up to date by finalizing and submitting overdue financial and progress reports and bringing the administrative portion of the U&CF program up to date. In an effort to prepare for community outreach, Mr. Andrews is working alongside the Forest Stewardship coordinator to launch a native tree nursery on St. Croix. Next steps include outfitting the newly built greenhouses with supplies to begin the first round of planting native trees. There are plans to develop a slide show/video and a new handout on tree planting, the benefits of trees, tree care and the social impact of trees in the urban environment. The video and handout will serve well during community events as a display along with a mailing list each site.

US Caribbean Island-scale Urban areas and Wildland Urban Interface Project

A collaboration between the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the International Institute of Tropical Forestry is mapping urban areas for Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands. The data will improve planning and analysis of urban areas at the island-scale. This project is also mapping the wildland-urban interface for Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands using the National standards used for the Continental United States. The wildland-urban interface is the social-ecological zone where human settlements and wildland vegetation meet or intermingle. It serves as a focal area of environmental conflicts such as forest loss and fragmentation, introduction of exotic species, wildlife subsidization, disease transfer, and wildfires

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