



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet

Virgin Islands 2024



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2023 Estimate
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$0
Forest Legacy	\$50,000
Forest Stewardship	\$101,580
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$0
State Fire Assistance	\$100,000
Urban and Community Forestry	\$281,395
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$0
Total	\$532,975

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 2023 Accomplishments	Value
Population	87,146	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	24
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	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	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 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 2022, 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 785 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 Legacy

The Forest Legacy Program Coordinator position was vacant from May 2022 until May 8, 2023 when Mathilde Aurelien-Wilson was brought on to fill the position. While in the position, the new coordinator was able to attend virtual trainings about FLIS and the Forest Legacy Program Implementations Guidelines. At the beginning in the position, the focus was to handle all past due administrative tasks and to have all paperwork up to date. 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.

The Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture, Forest Legacy Program continued monitoring efforts to acquire properties and made outreach efforts to identify important forest lands to opt and participate in future competitive process.

The Forest Legacy Program Coordinator and VIDA Commissioner/State Forester, VIDA Assistant Commissioner and UCF Coordinator were invited to assist in a wonderful Summer Summit 2023 in Puerto Rico. We established great partnerships with multiple Agencies like DRNA, PR Joint Chiefs LSR, PR Fire Dept., Protectores de Cuencas (PDC). We took several field trips and tours at FLP Acquisition Project.

St Thomas Inner Brass property received a competitive award of 5.9 millions. Now the US Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture is working on establishing the grant and proceed with the Yellow Book Appraisal which will determine the final appraised value of the property.

The FLP Program Coordinator visited St Thomas to make relationship with cost-share partners.

Forest Stewardship

The Forest Stewardship Program in the Virgin Islands was without a Coordinator from May 2022 to May 2023 until Mathilde Aurelien-Wilson was hired to fill the position on May 8, 2023. As she got onboard, the focus was to handle all the backlogged administrative tasks, get all paperwork up to date and participating in Forest Stewardship trainings with 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 following their management plans, and creating an education and outreach program for local landowners to expand program capacity with technical assistance.

Traveled to St Thomas and St. John to assess condition of tree nurseries in those islands, and met with Federally Licensed contractor to work out scope of work and quote for repairs.

Submitted a grant application for BIL Revegetation to produce over 30,000 native and non-native trees in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The grant was approved and soon activities will be starting.

A revision of the U.S.V.I Forest Action Plan was approved. The State/Territorial lead agencies are required to assess and evaluate the components of the plan at least every five years, so the next review should be completed in 2025.

The Forest Stewardship Program, VIDA Commissioner/State Forester, VIDA Assistant Commissioner and UCF Coordinator were invited to assist in a wonderful Summer Summit 2023 in Puerto Rico. We established great partnerships with multiple Agencies like DRNA, PR Joint Chiefs LSR, PR Fire Dept., Protectores de Cuencas (PDC). We took several field trips and tours at FSP Clients.

Participated in Working Group monthly meetings under the leadership of the Forest Stewardship Program Manager Maya Quiñones with various Agencies and local organizations to brainstorm projects and share opportunities.

Kept ongoing enrollment and monitoring efforts.

Urban and Community Forestry

The Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands hired a new Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator. The new Program Coordinator began reaching out to possible future sub-grantees and developing programming aligned with Urban and Community Forestry Program goals. The new coordinator has begun assessing open grants and developing plans to execute them. He has also begun training the Virgin Island Department of Agriculture staff on professional management of trees in the urban environment. This will lead to an increase in the knowledge and the capacity of forestry management practices in the US Virgin Islands. The Urban and Community Forestry Program began engaging sections of the community with questionnaires to solicit feedback about community forestry needs. Information obtained from these questionnaires will be used to inform decisions regarding Urban and Community Forestry programming.

In an effort to increase the knowledge and enforcement of the Heritage Tree Law the Urban and Community Forestry Program initiated conversations with advertisers, the Department of Public works, and the Virgin Islands Police Department. The Urban and Community Forestry Program received a commitment from the Department of Public works to issue waivers for the installation of the Heritage Tree Law signage. The Virgin Islands Police Department has committed to collaborating with the urban and community forestry office on creating an enforcement protocol for the Heritage Tree Law. Lastly, the urban and community forestry office has begun collaborating with the Virgin Islands department of agriculture horticulture director for the propagation of native plant material and the fertilization of the mango trees on site. These trees will be fertilized after harvest.

Contact Information



Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture

Louis E Petersen
Commissioner
RR1, Box 10345
Kingshill, VI 00850
340-778-0997
louis.petersen@vi.gov

US Forest Service International Institute of Tropical Forestry

Magaly Figueroa Vazquez
State and Private Forestry Programs
USDA Forest Service
Jardin Botanico Sur, 1201 Calle Ceiba
San Juan, PR 00926-1119
787-764-7718
magaly.figueroa@usda.gov
