

**FEMA**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**University of the Virgin Islands VI Shoreline Protections in St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands**

**BACKGROUND**

In September 2017, Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused significant damages to the United States Virgin Islands (USVI or “the territory”). President Donald Trump issued one disaster declaration (DR-4335-VI) for Irma on September 7, and another one (DR-4340-VI) for Maria on September 20 encompassing the entire territory. The declarations authorized federal assistance to affected communities and certain non-profit organizations in accordance with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act of 1974 (42 United States Code [U.S.C.] § 5172), as amended. The Declaration also authorized direct federal assistance. The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency is the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) grant Recipient and the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) is FEMA’s Subrecipient.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared in accordance with Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended; and the Regulations for Implementation of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500 to 1508). This EA considers the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project and alternatives to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). In accordance with above regulations and FEMA Directive 108-1 and FEMA Instruction 108-1-1, FEMA is required, during decision-making, to evaluate and consider the environmental consequences of major federal actions it funds or undertakes.

**ALTERNATIVES**

FEMA and the Subrecipient considered alternatives that fulfill the purpose and need for this project. This consideration is based upon engineering constraints, environmental impacts, and available property. Budgetary constraints are included but not the controlling factor.

Additionally, a No Action alternative, also known as the “Future without Federal Project Condition,” is included in the analysis.

The No Action Alternative would result in no FEMA funding supporting natural coastal protection measures in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Proposed Alternative involves the expansion of coral and mangrove nurseries, outplanting of coral fragments and planting of mangrove seedlings in locations surrounding St. Thomas, USVI.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The coastlines of the USVI have been severely affected by the 2017 Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The proposed action would bolster the natural features that serve to improve the resiliency of USVI’s coastlines by increasing coral and mangrove restoration activities on the island of St. Thomas. Under the proposed action the Subrecipient would: (1) expand the coral and mangrove nurseries, (2) outplant coral fragments, and (3) plant mangrove seedlings in locations surrounding St. Thomas, USVI.

The expansion of the coral nurseries involves installing additional land-based coral seawater tables to the Center for Marine Environmental Studies and installing coral trees, made of PVC pipes, a buoy, and duckbill anchors at the existing nurseries at Flat Cay and West Cay and at a new location at Great St. James

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island. These completely submerged coral trees will be installed by divers using hand tools to secure the duckbill anchor into the seabed. The expansion of the mangrove nurseries involves adding additional seawater tables to the land-based nursery located at the Center for Marine Environmental Studies at Brewer's Bay. These seawater tables are bins containing water and substrate with a grid to support individual growth.

Outplanting of the coral fragments involves using marine grade epoxy to attach grown coral fragments to existing reefs. The coral outplanting will take place at several locations the Subrecipient has identified around the island of St. Thomas, which include Brewers Bay, Hull Bay, Flat Cay, Triangle Rocks, Buck Island, East End, and Coki Point. Outplanting of mangrove seedlings involves driving them 0.5m into the seabed by hand with a steel rod and hammer. The Mangrove out planting will take place at Magen's Bay, Mandahl Bay, Red Hook, St. Thomas East End Reserve (STEER), Range Cay, and Perseverance Bay.

### **SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION**

The Proposed Action as described in the EA may have negligible to no impacts on air quality. The Proposed Action would have short-term negligible to no impacts on water quality. The Proposed Action would have no impact to historic standing structure properties.

The Proposed Action may have long-term minor to moderate beneficial impacts on water quality. The Proposed Action may have long-term minor beneficial impacts on coastal resources, federally listed species and the socio-economic growth of St. Thomas. The Proposed Action may have long-term moderate beneficial impacts on the surrounding wetlands and floodplains.

The Proposed Action may have negligible to minor adverse impacts to archaeological resources.

FEMA anticipates that the Proposed Action will have beneficial cumulative impacts as a result of supporting on-going studies and planting efforts, potential increase in eco-tourism, habitat improvements, and potential increase in fishery stocks. There will be additional beneficial impacts to water quality and resilience of the coastline from erosion and failure and may support projects not yet scoped that reduce flood risk to coastal properties.

### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The EA was made available for public review and comment for a period of 30 days concluding on December 13, 2020. The public notice and EA were distributed electronically by the VI Coral Reef Advisory Group via their emailing list. Additionally, the public notice and this EA were posted on the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency website at <http://www.vitema.vi.gov/about/key-documents-and-reports>; the University of the Virgin Islands websites at <https://viepscor.org/fema-public-notice>, <https://www.uvi.edu/research/center-for-marine-environmental-studies/default.aspx> and <https://www.uvi.edu/community/virgin-islands-marine-advisory-service/default.aspx>; the Office of Disaster Recovery included a link on their website at <http://www.usviodr.com/public-notice-environmental-assessment-for-the-university-of-the-virgin-islands-vi-shoreline-protections-project/>; and the EA was also available on FEMA's website for download at <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/environmental-historic/region/2>.

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This EA reflects the evaluation and assessment of the federal government, the decision maker for the federal actions, taking into consideration any substantive comments received during the public review period to inform the final decision regarding grant approval and project implementation. The public was invited to submit written comments by emailing [FEMAR2COMMENT@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMAR2COMMENT@fema.dhs.gov) or by mail to Department of Homeland Security, FEMA Region II, Attn: Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation, 26 Federal Plaza, New York, NY, 10278.

**PERMITS & PROJECT CONDITIONS**

The Subrecipient is responsible for obtaining all applicable federal, state, and local permits and other authorizations for project implementation prior to construction and adherence to all permit conditions. The Subrecipient must obtain and comply with permitting for on-going studies and restoration activities for NOAA species, administered by the VIDPNR as delegated by NOAA. Any substantive change to the approved scope of work will require re-evaluations by FEMA for compliance with NEPA and other laws and EOs. The Subrecipient must also adhere to conditions identified in continuing consultations with resource agencies as specific work sites are identified. Failure to comply with grant conditions may jeopardize federal funds.

**FINDINGS**

FEMA received no comments from the public during the comment period; one comment from agency partners from the United States Environmental Protection Agency concurring with FEMA’s evaluation; and one comment from FEMA’s Office of Chief Council (OCC). The table below summarizes the Commenter, the Comment made, and FEMA’s response.

<b>Commenter</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>FEMA’s Response</b>
FEMA-OCC	FEMA Office of Chief Council requested clarification on the potential for duplication of benefits between the proposed scope of work, the University of the Virgin Islands on-going program, and other initiatives in progress.	FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program responded with a description of robust review under the Unified Hazard Mitigation Assistance Guidance policies, coordination with the Virgin Islands Office of Disaster Recovery, and Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency procedures for administration of grant funding for manual drawdown.

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In accordance with NEPA and the FEMA Directive and Instruction, FEMA has determined that the evaluated actions will have no significant adverse impact on the quality of the human environment. As a result of this FONSI, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared, and the actions as described in the EA may proceed. This FONSI serves as the final public notice for the proposed project.

**APPROVED BY:**

**JOHN J  
MCKEE**  Digitally signed by  
JOHN J MCKEE  
Date: 2020.12.20  
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John J. McKee  
Regional Environmental Officer, FEMA Region II

Date: 20Dec2020

**SIGNED FOR AWARENESS BY:**

**ROBERT J  
TRANter**  Digitally signed by ROBERT J  
TRANter  
Date: 2020.12.21 10:11:04 -04'00'

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Robert Tranter  
FEMA DR-4335/4340-VI Hazard Mitigation Branch Director

Date