



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

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**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE & UVI PARTNER ON ARTIFICIAL REEF**

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Commissioner Jean-Pierre L. Oriol of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources is pleased to announce that the territory is set to establish its first artificial reef through an initiative funded by the Division of Fish & Wildlife in its continued efforts to help protect coastal infrastructure and enhance resilience against future storms.

A subaward to the University of the Virgin Islands of \$763,784 in disaster funding stemming from 2017 Hurricanes Irma and Maria will support the design, construction, and installation of an 18' by 12' reef in the waters near the shoreline surrounding St. Thomas.

“This initiative will create a prototype that positions the Virgin Islands as a regional leader in developing critical habitats to help safeguard our local fish, coral, and reef life from upcoming natural disasters,” Commissioner Oriol said. “We are excited to partner with the university on preventing widespread damage to our valuable undersea resources and increasing their chances of survival for time to come,” he concluded.

Already, UVI is readying the strongest specimens out of roughly fifteen types of coral in nurseries for eventual propagation onto the reef, which will take the shape of an iconic petroglyph. The institution is collaborating with researchers from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution on cutting-edge technology to create an environmentally sensitive design made from sourced materials ranging from carbon-friendly cement to natural chemicals to help stimulate coral growth. The permitting process for the project with the Division of Coastal Zone Management, and the Army Corps of Engineers is moving toward final approvals of location.

Once installed, the settlement and growth of reef life on the artificial reef will be tested and scientists will monitor its effectiveness through benthic and fish surveys. Based on the project's results, UVI will provide a policy prescription to the Division of Fish and Wildlife.

“This is the first of its kind project in the territory,” Dr. Marilyn Brandt, the project manager, and a Research Professor at UVI, said. “The goal is to provide enhanced habitat for corals

struggling from climate change and provide added shoreline protection as we work to restore natural coral reefs. We're hoping to learn a lot and inform any future work."

The project is scheduled to be completed in July of this year. For more information, call the Division of Fish & Wildlife at 340-773-1082.