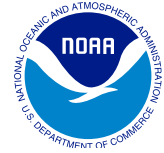
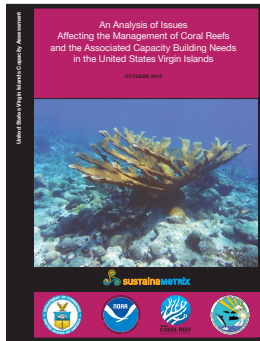


U.S. Virgin Islands



NOAA CORAL REEF CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Coral Reef Management Capacity Challenges and Recommendations



Coral reefs surround much of the landscape of the U.S. Virgin Islands with fringing and patch reefs as well as spur and groove formations frequently found around St. John and St. Thomas. St. Croix has several large barrier reefs and lagoons.

Coral reef conservation is coordinated through the Coastal

Zone Management Division in the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Loose collaborations exist among federal agencies, community stewardship organizations, and members of the public. There is no formalized coral reef conservation program.

A team of experts supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program conducted a coral reef management assessment for the U.S. Virgin Islands. The resulting report, *An Analysis of Issues Affecting the Management of Coral Reefs and the Associated Capacity Building Needs in the U.S. Virgin Islands*, is available on the NOAA coral program's website at www.coralreef.noaa.gov. Some of the findings are summarized below.

NATIONAL SUMMARY

As part of a capacity-assessment process, a team of specialists identified challenges common to all seven U.S. coral reef jurisdictions and provided recommendations to overcome them. These findings are summarized below.

CHALLENGES

- A lack of political will and formal commitment for increased coral reef management
- A lack of long-term and sustainable financing
- A lack of supportive and informed constituencies
- A need to move from planning to implementation
- A need for improved enforcement and compliance
- A need for increased support for the effective function and structure of management agencies

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support for a collaborative approach for the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000
- The expansion and institutionalization of staff capacity-building programs in the jurisdictions
- Establishment of a working group of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force focused on improving the enforcement of laws that safeguard coral reefs
- Strategic engagement of governors to champion coral reef conservation and management
- Facilitation of peer-to-peer learning exchanges among the jurisdictions

Read the full report, *A Synthesis of Issues Affecting the Management of Coral Reefs and Recommendations for Long-term Capacity Building in U.S. Jurisdictions*, at www.coralreef.noaa.gov.

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CHALLENGES

Limited capacity: Capacity to manage coral reefs is not generally limited by scientific and technical information. Capacity is limited because of inadequate levels of staff member promotion and program funding as well as a need for better land use practices, enforcement of existing regulations, and improved waste management systems.

Collaboration: Capacity could be improved by refining cross-agency groups and networks that currently exist within the territory.

Public support: Public support for coral reef conservation is overshadowed by interest in economic development. Decision makers often opt for development because they fear the loss of public support. For reef conservation to succeed, an understanding must be built among decision makers and the general public regarding the economic and cultural benefits directly related to the reef systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Education and outreach: Because of constant migration and immigration dynamics, a concerted and sustained education effort should be undertaken for the public and decision makers.

Strategic planning: There is a need for strategic planning that incorporates improved land use practices and a ridge-to-reef master plan approach.

Improved government policies: Policies should be reviewed with respect to hiring and leadership for the agencies charged with leading the effort to manage the territory's natural resources.

Funding: Improving the level of government funding through innovative means is necessary to effectively manage protected areas and resources.

MORE INFORMATION



This capacity assessment was conducted by Sustainamatrix under contract to the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program. We would like to thank the many partners who participated in this process. The assessments are available online at www.coralreef.noaa.gov/aboutcrp/strategy/reprioritization/capacityassessments.

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