

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice of Availability of Environmental Assessment for the  
University of the Virgin Islands VI Shoreline Protections Project  
St. Thomas, USVI  
FEMA-4335-DR-VI

Notification is hereby given to the public of the intent of the Department of Homeland Security-Federal Emergency Management Agency (DHS-FEMA) to provide Federal financial assistance to the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA), as Recipient, and the University of the Virgin Islands, as Subrecipient, to expand the coral and mangrove land and sea based nurseries on St. Thomas, as well as provide the out planting of mangrove seedlings and coral fragments. The purpose of the project is to improve the resiliency of the shorelines of St. Thomas to reduce damages from future storms. On September 6, 2017, Hurricane Irma caused extensive damage to US Virgin Islands (USVI), especially the islands of St. Thomas and St. John. Hurricane Irma's incident period was declared a major disaster on September 7, 2017 (FEMA 4335-DR-VI). This declaration makes federal disaster assistance available to affected communities and certain nonprofit organizations in accordance with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act of 1974 (Stafford Act; 42 U.S.C. 5172), as amended.

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) out plant 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 and West Cay and at a new location at Great St. James 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. Out planting of the coral fragments involves using marine grade epoxy to attach grown coral fragments to existing reefs. The coral out planting 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. Out planting 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.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to assess the potential impacts of the proposed action on the human environment. DHS-FEMA's requirement of addressing floodplain management and wetlands protection in accordance with 44 CFR Part 9 is incorporated within the EA. The EA is available for public comment, and comments can be sent via email to [FEMAR2COMMENT@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMAR2COMMENT@fema.dhs.gov). The EA will be available for download from <http://www.vitema.vi.gov/> and <https://uvi.edu/>, and will be distributed to the VI Coral Reef Advisory Group via their e-mailing list. The EA is also available on FEMA's website at <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/environmental-historic/region/2>.

The comment period will end 30 days after the date of this publication on the FEMA and VITEMA websites listed above. Written comments on the EA can be mailed or e-mailed to the contact below. If no substantive comments are received, the EA will become final and a Finding of No Significant Impact will be signed. Substantive comments will be addressed as appropriate in the final documents. Contact: FEMA 4335-4340 JFO, Attn: Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation, 4500 Sunny Isle Shopping Center, Unit 37 and 38, Christiansted, VI 00820, or via email at [FEMAR2COMMENT@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMAR2COMMENT@fema.dhs.gov).