BRING CORALS INTO THE CONVERSATION. Consider coral reefs and possible connections to each policy/decision and whether it will affect the health of our coral reefs. Support reef-friendly policies, comprehensive land and water use planning, and enforcement of best practices.

CREATE A SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MECHANISM that generates funds through tourism to protect coral reefs.

DRAFT AND ADVOCATE FOR LEGISLATION naming USVI coral reefs as a priority protected habitat accompanied by funding for coral reef research, outreach programs, and protections.

HOW DPNR & PARTNERS PROTECT AND RESTORE OUR REEFS

The mitigation and management of threats to coral reefs are currently managed by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and partners in the territory.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THESE ACTIVITIES INCLUDE:

- Development and implementation of the territory's first coral restoration plan, including innovating techniques to grow corals on land and underwater to restore degraded reefs.
- Development of watershed management plans to mitigate land-based sources of pollution to nearby coral reefs.
- Facilitation of a group of community-based conservation organizations focused on outreach and education.
- Funding for removal of derelict vessels and marine debris from territorial waters.
- Management and enforcement of territorial and federal Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).
- Creation of laws protecting coral reefs such as the single use plastic straw ban, harmful sunscreen ban, and building and zoning best management practices.

HOW SENATORS CAN HELP

LEARN MORE

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HOW SENATORS CAN HELP

PROTECTING OUR USVI CORAL REEFS
Our reefs are DECLINING IN HEALTH due to CLIMATE CHANGE, DISEASE, UNSUSTAINABLE TOURISM & RECREATION, UNSUSTAINABLE FISHING, VESSEL GROUNDINGS, IRRESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT & RUNOFF, and MARINE DEBRIS.

Stony coral tissue loss disease is a lethal coral disease that affects over 50% of all Caribbean coral species and kills nearly 100% of infected corals without treatment.

Arriving in the USVI in early 2019, the disease is now on almost every reef in the territory, killing our healthy corals and leaving behind dead coral skeletons in a matter of weeks or months. To date, there is no known direct cause of the disease but it is transmitted through water and direct contact.

USVI quickly responded by creating an inter-agency Virgin Islands Coral Disease Advisory Committee to lead tracking and response efforts and communicate best practices to the public. This novel disease outbreak will require intensive resources for years to come. Funding and staff capacity are needed to respond with in-water treatments, continue to address the top local threats to reefs, and implement the territory’s upcoming coral restoration plan.

USVI residents enjoy, rely on, and care about the ocean. USVI residents enjoy, rely on, and care about the ocean.

Did you know?

- 79% of USVI residents are aware that coral reefs protect the USVI from erosion and natural disasters.
- 92% agree that coral reefs are important to USVI’s culture.
- 78% recreate at the beach.
- 45% snorkel.
- 40% fish or gather marine resources.
- 17% dive.
- 79% swim.

Value of USVI Reefs:

- $187 million annually, which includes values from tourism, recreation, culture, amenities, commercial fisheries, and coastal protection.
- Serve as natural breakwaters, diminishing wave energy by up to 97% and providing $47 million in annual flood protection benefits to people, properties, and economic activity.
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- As a result of Earth’s changing climate, scientists predict more frequent and severe storms in the coming years. Without the protection provided by reefs, more money will be needed for infrastructure repairs in coastal areas, which will be increasingly costly to the territory.

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Top Threats:

- Irresponsible development & runoff
- Vessel groundings
- Unsustainable fishing
- Storms
- Unsustainable tourism & recreation
- Disease

Disease:

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1 Van Beukering et al. 2011  2 Storlazzi et al. 2019  3 Gorstein et al. 2019