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**OFFICE OF INSULAR AFFAIRS PROVIDES \$2.6 MILLION GRANT TO SUPPORT
DESIGN OF MARINE CENTER AT SALT RIVER BAY**

Washington, D.C. -- The **Office of Insular Affairs** (OIA) has awarded \$2.6 million to the **National Park Service** (NPS) to continue the design and development of the **Salt River Bay Marine Research and Education Center** (MREC) at the **Salt River Bay National Heritage Park and Ecological Preserve** (SARI), a unit of NPS on St. Croix in the United States Virgin Islands (USVI).

The OIA grant will support completion of schematic architectural and engineering design and enable NPS to hire an education and research coordinator who will develop local educational and research programs related to the MREC. The coordinator will work closely with the faculty at UVI to develop K-12 study plans and educate the public about threats to the islands' ecology. It will also support the first major research project on bioluminescence at Salt River Bay.

"I am extremely pleased to continue our support for this pioneering new center on St. Croix" said Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Anthony Babauta. "OIA funding will significantly advance our efforts to complete the design phase of the MREC, bringing us closer to the realization of a world-class research and education center in the US Virgin Islands. Once completed, the MREC will bring the marine classroom to all Virgin Islanders as well as to the community of experts who have dedicated their careers to understanding the importance of our oceans and coral reefs."

The MREC is a partnership among **NPS** and **OIA**, both units of the **Department of the Interior** (DOI), the **Joint Institute of Caribbean Marine Studies** (JICMS) and the **Government of the Virgin Islands**. The JICMS is a consortium of four universities -- **University of North Carolina Wilmington; University of the Virgin Islands; Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey;** and **University of South Carolina** -- that have worked together since 1999 to develop the MREC on St. Croix.

NPS and the JICMS recently completed the conceptual design and architectural program for the 61,000 square foot facility. In July, SARI Superintendent Joel Tutein presented the MREC to NPS's Development Advisory Board, which approved the concept, enabling it to move into the next phase of NPS's *Partnership Construction Process*.

"We appreciate the support of the OIA and the opportunity the grant provides to build upon the progress all of the project partners have made in developing the MREC," said Superintendent Tutein. "This grant will support the next phase of design for the MREC, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with OIA, JICMS and the Government of the Virgin Islands to make this project a reality for students and researchers throughout the country and the people of the USVI."

The MREC will be located on Hemer's Peninsula adjacent to Salt River Bay on St. Croix's north central coast. The proposed facility will include wet laboratories, classrooms and lecture spaces, dock and diving operations, a museum collection/archive annex, living accommodations, and related support facilities. This predesign work was managed by NPS's Denver Service Center

and performed by a team led by Lord Aeck & Sargent, (LAS) an architectural firm based in Atlanta.

LAS led NPS and the JICMS through a series of design charrettes this spring in which the partners defined the project's sustainability goals. These include net zero standards for power generation, water collection and wastewater treatment, LEED Platinum status and certification through the Living Building Challenge.

The MREC campus will occupy about eight acres of the Hemer's Peninsula site, which was heavily disturbed during the 1960s and 1970s when a hotel and marina project was partially developed and then abandoned. The campus is planned to house 48 undergraduate students and 12 researchers/graduate students. The program also includes 12 lab modules to support marine science research projects.

The \$60 million project required conceptual approval as part of NPS's *Partnership Construction Process*. The partners will continue to work together through the fundraising, agreement and development phases of the process. Construction will not begin until all agreements are in place and the JICMS raises the required funds.

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