

**U.S. Coral Reef Task Force  
Award Recipients  
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands  
October 2006**

**Outstanding Scientific Advancement of Knowledge**

**Jeff Miller, Rob Waara, & Zandy Hillis-Starr**

William “Jeff” Miller, Rob Waara and Zandy Hillis-Starr of the National Park Service (NPS), through their work in the U.S. Virgin Islands and other coral reef areas, have made lasting contributions for over 15 years to scientific monitoring and advancing understanding of coral reefs.

Working with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Jeff developed a monitoring method using permanent underwater linear study areas, utilizing video and the Aquamap SONAR navigation system. Aquamap employs a SONAR-based underwater positioning system that allows for random placement of transects within the study site, making the resulting data more scientifically reliable. Repeat digital video recordings of coral colonies provide a visual record of coral health and provide a record of changes over time, including documentation of bleaching or disease outbreaks.

Rob worked with Jeff to thoroughly document the coral bleaching event that occurred during the second half of 2005. Their data showed that corals within the Virgin Islands National Park and Buck Island Reef National Monument, already stressed by the bleaching event, were profoundly affected by disease. Information collected from their long-term monitoring efforts will enable NPS, USGS and NOAA to statistically quantify percentages of corals affected by the 2005 bleaching and disease outbreaks, and allow managers to develop responses to reduce stresses and enhance the long-term survival of coral reefs.

Zandy has been conducting long-term Elkhorn coral monitoring at Buck Island Reef National Monument on St. Croix since their devastation by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. Her work has documented recruitment and recovery of Elkhorn corals. In 1999 she began working closely with NOAA in conducting a biogeographic assessment of corals and fish to measure their response to protection in the newly created marine reserve. Zandy initiated additional site surveys in response to coral bleaching in 2005 and worked with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute to measure coral cover, live tissue, algae prevalence and the presence of bleaching.

## **Outstanding Public Awareness and Education**

### **Alida Ortiz**

Dr. Alida Ortiz exemplifies selfless dedication towards coral reef conservation in Puerto Rico. After ending a career as Education Director for Puerto Rico Sea Grant, she continues to promote stewardship of marine resources in Puerto Rico during her retirement

Her achievements include: participation in the Puerto Rico Local Action Strategy process, including providing insight to the Lack of Awareness working group; donating her consulting services for the production of an innovative educational tool: the comic book and poster ¡*Cuidado con los arrecifes!* (Be careful with the coral reefs!); working on various coral reef texts and brochures; assisting with the revision of the Cordillera Natural Reserve in Fajardo, Puerto Rico, including leading successful public meetings; and conducting workshops for the Department of Education to instruct teachers on the use of coral reef educational materials. In addition, Dr. Ortiz has assisted with the development of the Culebra Marine Reserve Management Plan while working closely with the Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC), including raising the awareness level of the PRTC about the importance of actively participating in coral reef conservation initiatives (as a result, the PRTC is now involved in the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force work in Puerto Rico related to the Local Action Strategies).

### **Virgin Islands Network of Educators – VINE**

The U.S. Virgin Islands are home to spectacular terrestrial and marine resources, but these fragile ecosystems are being stressed and degraded by diverse and often conflicting user groups. The Virgin Islands Network of Educators (VINE) brings together over 60 environmental educators in more than 30 agencies, divisions and organizations. The goal of VINE is to leverage available resources and decrease fragmentation of effort and duplication across programs by building capacity for environmental education within the territory. Founded in 2004, VINE is running two chapters, one each on St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John. It has created a database of environmental programs, educators and resources for teachers. Current work includes the development and implementation of a range of outreach and education initiatives.

VINE brings coordination, cohesion and greater effectiveness to the environmental education communities in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with a particular emphasis on coastal and marine health. Achievements include: participation in the Quality Education Standards for Teachers (QuEST) teacher professional development workshop for the past two years; conducting the first cross-organizational assessment of outreach and education capacity gaps and staff needs throughout the USVI; leveraging funds to build the capacity of local marine educators through training targeted directly to local gaps in expertise and using a \$10 K award from the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council to commission a local artist to paint a mural depicting USVI's coastal ecosystems for a variety of outreach products. In addition, VINE fostered the development of the

Virgin Islands Coral Conservation Consortium (VICCC), a collaboration of agencies and organizations dedicated to cooperative conservation of coral reefs and related ecosystems, and is working to bring its cooperative conservation approach to the British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

### **Anna Wallace Francis**

Anna Wallace Francis has become one of the great fixtures of marine environmental awareness on St. Thomas. She is the Program Manager of the Environmental Rangers in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the founder and director of Camp Umoja, a summer program that sponsors the Rangers, and the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher at Addelita Cancryn Junior High School.

Founded in 2003, the Environmental Rangers is an environmental science program that educates USVI youth on preserving and protecting the ecosystem. Participants in the Environmental Rangers have been introduced to marine biologists, ecologists, aquaculturists and historians. Field trips include visits to the local land fill, wastewater treatment plant, salt pond exploration, trips to Coral World Marine Park as well as beach clean-ups. The main goal of Anna's Environmental Rangers is to empower students in their ability to reach out and teach others about USVI's environmental and cultural heritage.

Anna also excels in her role as a science teacher at Addelita Cancryn Junior High School. She encourages her students to be a part of the Environmental Rangers; weaves practical, Virgin Islands environmental concepts into her lesson plans; invites outside speakers into her classroom and has an annual award ceremony to celebrate those in the USVI who have given their time and dedication to enriching the environment and environmental education in the USVI. A particular area of concern for Anna is educating Virgin Islanders about non-point source pollution. She includes outside presentations on the subject and has her students prepare displays on causes, problems and possible solutions to non-point source pollution in hopes that they will continue to educate others.

Anna Wallace Francis has given more than lessons and field trips to her students. She has developed comprehensive, sustained programs to enrich her students' knowledge and sense of stewardship of the fragile ecosystems of the U.S. Virgin Islands. She promotes grassroots engagement by those who can make a difference.

## **Outstanding Management**

### **British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust**

The British Virgin Islands (BVI) National Parks Trust was established in 1961, three years before designation of the territory's first national park.. Since then, the National Parks Trust has advanced conservation of both marine and terrestrial resources; there are now 20 national parks. Within the last 15 years, the government of the BVI and in particular, the National Parks Trust, has stepped up their conservation efforts in response to growing concerns about the environmental resources of the BVI.

With initial funding from the Overseas Territories Environment Program (OTEP) and working in close partnership with the Department of Conservation and Fisheries, and Warwick University, the National Parks Trust recently completed an updated atlas of all the near shore and terrestrial areas of the BVI. This project has been instrumental not only in identifying the extent of marine and terrestrial habitats and the organisms dependent upon them, it has also provided the foundation for the design of a territory-wide network of protected areas.

Starting in late 2004, the National Parks Trust engaged in a partnership with The Nature Conservancy's Eastern Caribbean Program (with funding support from NOAA's International Coral Reef Conservation Program). The objective of this partnership was to design an effective network of protected areas comprising of 30% of near shore coral reefs and associated habitats territory wide. The National Parks Trust is now nearing completion of the design, declaration and implementation of a fully protected (no-take, non-extractive) network of marine protected areas. They expected that legislation creating this network will be signed into law in 2006.

### **Nick Drayton**

Nick Drayton, The Ocean Conservancy's (TOC) Caribbean Ecosystems Manager, has played a critical role in strengthening local coral reef management and conservation efforts in the Caribbean islands.

Born and raised in Barbados, Nick has dedicated his life to the conservation of the Caribbean marine environment. Over the past 18 years his management expertise, research, facilitation and consulting services have supported marine conservation efforts throughout the Eastern Caribbean. Previous to his employment with TOC, Nick worked for the Caribbean Conservation Association of Barbados, the British Virgin Islands National Trust, and for the Nature Conservancy's Eastern Caribbean Program. In the past five years with TOC, Nick has played a critical role in domestic coral reef management efforts in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). He was instrumental in the establishment of the first Territorial marine park in the USVI, the East End Marine Park, is the chair of the park's advisory committee, and is intimately involved with the implementation of the park's management plan.

He has been a true leader in the implementation of the USCRTF Local Action Strategy initiative in the USVI and served as lead coordinator of the LAS development effort for the Territory. He authored and published the "State of the Coral Reefs of the Virgin Islands", to inform the VI government, elected officials and decision-makers about coral reef resources and the threats that they face. Nick is currently organizing a youth summit for students in the USVI to introduce them to the world of marine and coral reef conservation. He is also working to support local government efforts in the USVI to develop a territorial system of marine parks and to assess the effectiveness of their existing MPAs.

## **Rafe Boulon**

Rafe Boulon has made significant contributions in coral reef science, conservation, and environmental education in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI)., Rafe worked for 18 years for the US Virgin Islands Territorial Government Division of Fish and Wildlife.

For the last seven years, Rafe has worked for the National Park Service on St. John as the Chief of Resource Management of the Virgin Islands National Park. His professional and steadfast efforts to reduce the adverse effects of the increasing development on St. John, development that directly threatens survival of coral reefs, are exemplary. He also devotes a large amount of time to evaluating research and collecting permits to ensure that the proposed methods do not adversely affect the Park's marine resources. In addition, Rafe supervises several individuals who work to reduce damage to reefs by maintaining an extensive mooring buoy system, among other projects.

## **Outstanding Community Level Participation**

### **Island Green Building Association**

The Island Green Building Association (IGBA) was established in 2004 by a small group of concerned construction industry professionals and island residents. The IGBA promotes the sustainable and environmentally responsible construction of roads, buildings and other structures in harmony and balance with the fragile ecosystems and priceless natural beauty of St. John.

The guiding principles of IGBA are: to promote construction that is in harmony and balance with fragile ecosystems, to preserve native vegetation and traditional cultures and lifestyles of St. John, to develop and improve upon tropical green building design and construction to create healthy environments, to educate the building industry, clients and public on the importance of sustainable green building design and construction, to work towards changing policies, regulations and standards in government and commerce such that sustainable green building design and construction become standard practice, to bring existing buildings up to green building standards, and to achieve definable measurable green building results within each project undertaken.

Through their Web site and direct contact with organizational members, the IGBA advises individuals considering residential or commercial development. Through smart development planning and practices, IGBA members are educating the community on sustainable growth with minimal impact on the Virgin Islands environment.

## **Special Award for Outstanding Service to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force**

### **Honorable Judge Craig Manson**

As co-chair of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force from 2002 to 2005, the Honorable Judge Craig Manson provided outstanding leadership during a time when the Task Force considerably expanded the scope of its efforts. He presided over the creation of Local Action Strategies and the establishment of priorities in coral conservation efforts. Judge Manson was a strong and effective advocate for the Task Force and coral reefs on Capitol Hill, and within the Federal government. He co-chaired the Task Force with a mixture of firmness and humor, seeking to accommodate all viewpoints while always keeping efforts focused on on-the-ground results. Judge Manson left the Task Force a far larger, more complex and more visible entity than it was when he arrived.

## **Coral Ecosystem Champion**

### **Dr. Edward Towle**

In remembrance of Dr. Edward Towle, U.S. Coral Reef Task Force recognizes him for his work conserving and restoring the environment of small islands, particularly in the Caribbean.

From 1972 to 1998, he was the president of Island Resources Foundation in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, an organization he founded with his wife Judith in 1972. He remained active as a Senior Environmental Planner and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation after his retirement.

Among his many honors, in 1988, Dr. Towle was recognized as one of the United Nations Environment Programme's "Global 500" honorees. He was the author of over 60 major publications, primarily on small island development and environmental planning. At the time of his death he was actively involved in planning implementation strategies for the preservation and management of Sandy Cay in the British Virgin Islands. He was the founding president of the Virgin Islands Conservation Society in the US Virgin Islands and president of the regional Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA) from 1968 to 1974. It was during his tenure as president that the CCA emerged as the first region-wide voice for conservation and environmental planning in the Caribbean.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, Dr. Towle was a major contributor to both global and Caribbean-wide initiatives for small island protection. He frequently appeared as a small islands advocate in international forums and provided services to many international institutions, including the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and many Caribbean regional institutions.