

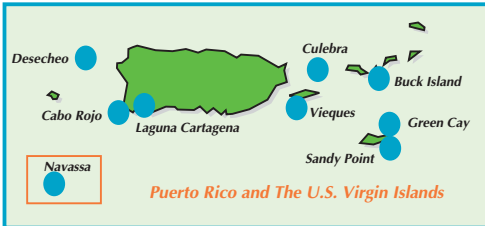


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The Coastal Program

Opportunities in the Caribbean

CELEBRATING A
CENTURY
of CONSERVATION



Caring for Our Coastal Habitats

Many islands...

Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are part of an archipelago of over 1,000 islands known as the West Indies, a chain of islands that separates the Caribbean Sea on the south from the Atlantic Ocean on the north.

The island of Puerto Rico, 110 miles long and 35 miles wide, has more than 300 miles of coastline, two additional inhabited islands and a number of uninhabited islands.

The U.S. Virgin Islands include St. Thomas, St. John, St. Croix, and 58 smaller islands and keys. These islands have approximately 233 linear miles of shoreline.



Much diversity...

The U.S. Caribbean supports tremendous biological diversity within tropical and subtropical habitats that include rain forests, coral reefs, dry forests, mud and salt flats, mangrove forests, coastal lagoons, and seagrass beds. The area hosts nine National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) with hundreds of miles of shoreline, and marine habitat.



The coastal shelf provides habitat and serves as a nursery for fishery resources of commercial, sport and food web importance, as well as subsistence fishing.



In addition to ecological values, the islands are rich in important cultural, historic, and archeological resources.

Caribbean Facts At A Glance

Did you know that Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands have:

- Nine national wildlife refuges;
- The Virgin Islands National Park, and several national monuments.
- The only tropical rainforest in the US, the Caribbean National Forest;
- Over 500 miles (800 km) of shoreline in their combined jurisdictions;
- Over 260 square miles (680 square km) of coral reef in their waters; the largest US Atlantic coral reef formation; all considered "at risk;"
- Approximately 40 square miles (100 square km) of mangrove remaining, representing a loss of 75% of the historic area;
- 79 Species listed as threatened or endangered including the Puerto Rican Parrot, the West Indian manatee, and 4 species of sea turtles;
- A total of 4 million people;
- The oldest city within the US and 17th largest port in world, the City of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Many opportunities...

Habitat losses have occurred at an increasing pace throughout the Caribbean from urban development, clearing for agriculture, and land use practices.



The damming and channelization of many major rivers has reduced water flow, destroyed riverine habitats, and altered the estuaries' ability to filter contaminants and sediments, thus creating siltation and destroying seagrass beds and coral reefs.

The Service's trust resources that are affected include endangered species, neo-tropical migrants and waterfowl, migratory fish, coral reefs, and near-shore species and their habitats.



Over fishing and degradation of habitats have reduced the populations of subsistence and commercial fish stocks, affecting the quality of human life.

Many partners...

In 1992, the San Juan Estuary became the only tropical ecosystem included in the National Estuary Program to initiate a public planning process to address estuary degradation and economic issues.

A Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan for the San Juan Estuary was completed in 2000 focusing on water quality, Coral Reef protection, salt marsh and mangrove restoration, and environmental justice concerns through community-based conservation and sustainable development goals.

Partnering opportunities include the Commonwealth and Territorial government agencies, other Federal agencies, Caribbean conservation groups, private industries, citizens, local landowners, and resort owners.



The Service priorities in the Caribbean include the identification, protection, and restoration of trust species and their habitat for the continued use of the Caribbean people. The establishment of a Caribbean Coastal Program would enable the Service to fund an on-the-ground partnering and voluntary efforts to address resource and cultural needs.

Much to do...

Examples of on-going and potential partnering opportunities and projects include:

Fish Passage Opportunities

An estimated 130 miles of riverine habitat is being restored through a partnership with Puerto Rico Aquaduct and Sewer Authority and the Finance and Infrastructure Agency to retrofit a fishway on a sugar mill dam on the Culebrinas River, Puerto Rico. Other potential

projects have been identified on the Rio Blanco and Guayanes Rivers in Puerto Rico.

Coastal Resource Restoration

Currently, over 500 acres of salt pond wetlands are being restored on the Cabo Rojo NWR, to be managed for native shore and wading bird species through partnering with the Commonwealth Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. The recently acquired Vieques NWR has several sites that would be suitable for restoration activities including the restoration of water quality within the Kiani Lagoon through the replacement of a bridge and removal of excess fill material that will reestablish tidal flushing.

Baseline Species Survey and GIS Mapping Efforts

The Service, working with other agencies and organizations, is currently mapping and inventorying coral reef and associated near-shore habitat. There is much need throughout the Caribbean to conduct baseline inventories to develop GIS resource data and compliment existing resource planning for terrestrial and aquatic habitat.

For more information

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