

## **USDA-NRCS to Fund Conservation Design Pilot Projects Within St. Croix East End Marine Park**

**September 27, 2011 – San Juan, PR** –NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodovar, today announced the initiation of a conservation technical assistance project designed to address two (2) priority pollution sources and restoration opportunities in two watersheds adjacent to the St. Croix East End Marine Park (STXEEMP). NRCS will partner with the St. Croix Environmental Association (SEA), in collaboration with the DPNR Division of Coastal Zone Management (CZM), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the NOAA Coral Reef



**Overlooking St. Croix East End Marine Park's north shore from Point Udall.**

Conservation Program (CRCP) to complete engineering and design work for two key priority restoration projects in the STXEEMP. These priorities were determined through a year-long watershed management planning process funded by NOAA-CRCP for DPNR-CZM and conducted by Horsley Witten Group.

*“This is a great opportunity for us to strengthen our partnership with SEA in St. Croix,”* said NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodovar. *“Through this agreement, we look forward to protecting coral reef habitats, as well as endangered waterfowl and nesting sea turtles, in St Croix by reducing sedimentation caused by eroding sites.”*

Many residential areas in the USVI have unpaved road networks that lack proper storm water drainage. Soil erodes from these roads with each rainfall, and is transported as sediment into sensitive coastal habitats. Increased runoff of these land-based sediments into our coastal waters is one factor reducing coral reef diversity and abundance in the USVI. Salt pond wetland systems and beaches important for endangered waterfowl and nesting sea turtles have also been negatively impacted by increased sedimentation. In the STXEEMP, local and federal agencies have identified Southgate and Solitude watersheds as priority locations for restoration projects to reduce land-based sources of pollution. The first step is to develop comprehensive engineering designs and specifications for pilot project sites.

The Solitude watershed has roughly 4 miles of unpaved roads that transmit a projected 112 tons of sediment per year – 11 times higher than under natural conditions – into the marine habitats of Solitude

Helping People Help the Land

Bay. The roads in these neighborhoods are generally very steep and unpaved, and have deep ruts and gullies that carry storm water and large amounts of sediment when it rains. All of this runoff and sediment washes into the main gut and eventually into Solitude Bay.

Southgate watershed includes residential areas and pasture lands, and contains Southgate Pond – one of the largest and most ecologically-significant salt pond habitats in the USVI. Residential development in the watershed has increased storm water volumes and speed, causing severe erosion and landslides of gut banks. One severely eroded gut segment



Severely eroded head cut in Southgate pasture.

ranges from 20 to 40 feet wide, 10 to 15 feet deep, is over 1,500 feet long, and is carving out pasture land at a rate of 10 to 15 feet per year. Mounds of sediment eroded from the gut can be seen in the downstream culvert under East End Road, just a few hundred feet away from Chenay Bay.

*“SEA is looking forward to working with our partners and landowners to develop important tools to be used to reduce the sediment loads entering the East End Marine Park from these two watersheds,”* said Carol Cramer-Burke, Project Director. *“We appreciate the opportunity afforded us by USDA-NRCS to address this issue that is threatening the health of St. Croix’s marine environment and causing loss of precious topsoil from farm lands.”*

NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTAP) funds will help project partners to bring these two key projects to the shovel-ready stage for future funding, and support a pilot demonstration project of a residential rain garden. CTAP activities will directly address the territory’s Local Action Strategies and management priorities for coral reef protection, and will demonstrate how local and federal agencies and local communities can work together to reduce threats to our coral reef resources.

For more information on the NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance Program, please contact Mr. Jaime Valentine, State Resource Conservationist, at 787-766-5206 x229 or [Jaime.Valentin@pr.usda.gov](mailto:Jaime.Valentin@pr.usda.gov). For details about the St. Croix East End Marine Park watershed planning process, contact Paige Rothenberger at the DPNR-CZM STXEEMP office at 340-718-3367 or [paige.rothenberger@dpnr.gov.vi](mailto:paige.rothenberger@dpnr.gov.vi). For more information about the SEA CTAP Project, contact Carol Cramer-Burke at 340-773-1989 or [cburke@stxenvironmental.org](mailto:cburke@stxenvironmental.org).