



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NRCS U.S. Virgin Islands State Technical Committee Meeting



March 5, 2026
University of Virgin Islands, St. Croix, VI

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

Agenda

- 1. Welcome & Introduction – *Luis Cruz Arroyo & Dr. Louis Petersen***
- 2. STC Meetings & Efforts Recap – *Mario Rodriguez***
- 3. NRCS Conservation Programs Update – *Frank Velazquez & Javier Cruz***
 - a) FY 2025 Recap
 - b) FY 2026 Focus
 - a) Ranking Categories
 - b) Caribbean Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) for Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)
- 4. Priority Watersheds Discussion – *Mario Rodriguez***
- 5. Technical Service Providers Opportunities – *Mario Rodriguez***
- 6. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources Priorities – *Mr. Jean-Pierre Oriol & Dr. Nicole Angeli***
- 7. Partner Updates**
- 8. Wrap-up**



NRCS FY2026 Chief Priorities: A Farmer-First Approach

Under Chief Aubrey Bettencourt's leadership, NRCS has established five core priorities for FY2026 focused on streamlining operations, improving field-level service, and advancing outcome-based conservation.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Preserve and Protect Agricultural Land | Reducing loss of productive farmland through targeted conservation easement programs (ACEP). |
| 2 | Modernize Infrastructure and Technology | "One Farmer, One File" system, upgraded field office technology, reduced paper-heavy processes. |
| 3 | Recenter Field Engagement | Shifting staff to direct, in-person technical assistance; faster conservation planning. |
| 4 | Strengthen Partnerships | Leveraging partners as force multipliers; accepting third-party certified plans. |
| 5 | Outcome-Based Conservation | Measuring success through on-the-ground environmental improvements, not just acres covered. |

Key FY2026 Initiatives:

Regenerative Pilot Program (\$400M EQIP + \$300M CSP) | CART for all program ranking | "Farmer First" to reduce administrative burden



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A photograph of a terraced coffee field on a hillside. The terraces are made of dark brown soil and are arranged in a series of concentric, wavy lines that follow the contour of the hill. The field is surrounded by lush green vegetation, including trees and shrubs. In the background, a small cluster of houses is visible on a hillside under a clear blue sky.

STC Meetings & Efforts Recap

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Past STC Meeting - September 24, 2024

■ Updates

- NRCS Financial Assistance
- NRCS Engineering Projects
- Equity Subcommittee
- Wildlife, Wetlands & Forests Subcommittee
- Caribbean Area GARC WRE
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge & Caribbean Ecological Sciences Field Office
- USDA Caribbean Climate Hub

■ New Business

- VIDA High Priority Production Areas Discussion
- Arte Suelo Ser Project
- Soil Health Edge-of-Field Monitoring
- State Agencies Priorities for 2025

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NRCS Conservation Programs Update

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FY 2025 Financial Assistance by Programs

EQIP and CSP

FY 2025 Financial Assistance Programs

U.S. Virgin Islands

Item	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
Farmer Contracts	10	1
Obligations	\$566,742	\$21,917
Payments	\$9,437	\$4,000
Acres	91.70	2.50

- Active Contracts: **82**



FY 2026 Accounts and Allocations by Program Focus

EQIP, CSP and ACEP



FY 2026 EQIP Categories

Account Type	Allocation	Amount
EQIP Total	100%	\$14,070,000
CPAs, DIAs, CEMAs	2%	\$281,400
Beginning Farmers & Ranchers (BFR)	5%	\$703,500
Disaster	4%	\$562,800
Water Quantity	8%	\$1,125,600
CAFO/Energy	5%	\$703,500
Wildlife & Joint Chief*	10%	\$1,157,000
SDFR Mountainous Region	15%	\$2,110,500
SDFR Coastal, Hills and Valleys Region	23%	\$3,236,100
Regenerative Pilot Program	25%	\$3,517,500
General/Organic	1%	\$140,700
Reserve/Overrun Subaccount	2%	\$281,400
Reserved I	0%	\$0
Reserved II	0%	\$0

*\$250,000 must be used for Joint Chief Initiative.

FY 2026 CSP Categories

Funding Pool	Account Type	Allocation	Amount
	CSP Total	100%	\$4,428,000
NIPF		15%	\$664,200
Agricultural	Beginning Farmers & Ranchers (BFR)	5%	\$221,400
	Socially Disadvantaged (SD)	50%	\$2,214,000
	Regenerative Pilot Program	25%	\$1,107,000
	General	1%	\$ 44,280.00
	Organic	1%	\$ 44,280.00
	Reserve/Overrun Subaccounts	3%	\$132,840
	Reserved Categories I, II, III	0%	\$0

FY 2026 ACEP Accounts

Agricultural Conservation Easements Program	Allocation
Agricultural Land Easements General	\$1,000,000
Wetland Reserve Easements General	\$1,000,000
Wetland Reserve Easements Stewardship	\$10,000



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FY 2026 Programs Implementation Schedule

EQIP, CSP, RCPP and ACEP

FY 2026 Program Implementation Schedule

Caribbean Area NRCS Program Implementation Schedule FY2026							
Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)							
Fund Pools	Application Acceptance Deadline	Eligibility Deadline (All documents submitted to FSA)	WPT (Screening) (FO)	CART Assessment & Ranking Deadline (FO)	Application Preapprovals (SO)	Contracts Submitted for Obligation Review	Last Day of Obligation (ASTC-P)
EQIP FA (Signup 1)	15-Jan-26	13-Feb-26	20-Mar-26		27-Mar-26	22-May-26	31-Jul-26
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)							
Fund Pools	Application Acceptance Deadline	Eligibility Deadline (All documents submitted to FSA)	WPT (Screening) (FO)	CART Assessment & Ranking Deadline (FO)	Application Preapprovals (SO)	Contracts Submitted for Obligation Review	Last Day of Obligation (ASTC-P)
CSP Classic (Signup 2025-1)	15-Jan-26	13-Feb-26	N/A	20-Mar-26	27-Mar-26	22-May-26	31-Jul-26
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)							
Fund Pools	Application Acceptance Deadline	Eligibility Deadline (All documents submitted to FSA)	WPT (Screening) (FO)	CART Assessment & Ranking Deadline (FO)	Application Preapprovals (SO)	Contracts Submitted for Obligation Review	Last Day of Obligation (ASTC-P)
2498 Restoration Initiative RGA	6-Mar-26	10-Apr-26	N/A	8-May-26	15-May-26	14-Aug-26	28-Aug-26
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)							
Fund Pools	Application Acceptance Deadline	Eligibility Deadline (All documents submitted to FSA)	WPT (Screening) (FO)	CART Assessment & Ranking Deadline (SO)	Application Preapprovals (SO)	WRPO Finalized and Cost Estimates in CD	LO Deadline to Respond
ACEP WRE	15-Jan-2026	13-Feb-2026	N/A	13-Feb-26	13-Feb-26	13-Mar-26	31-Jul-26
.							
*Field offices are responsible for maling intent to proceed letters and completing field verifications after application preapproval.							
*Fund pools with a deadline under the WPT column, will require a the WPT to be completed on ALL eligible and pending applications for which participant submitted all documentation to FSA but is still appears ineligible in our business tools. Only HIGH priority applications will be ranked in first funding cycle. If funds are still available, we will reallocate funds and open a second funding cycle period to evaluate "high" and "medium" applications. In the second round, the applications will be selected by ranking score regardless of the priority. Applications with a medium priority CANNOT be ranked in the first funding cycle. FY2026 Fund Assessment dates: April 3 2026 and June 5 2026. Funds Returns Date July 31, 2026 States should obligate 95% of the funds by September 4 2026.							

Ranking Criteria

FY26 Ranking Pools – (EQIP Survey Questions Example)

FY26 National Instruction

- Establish minimum number of geographic pools needed per Program to support the signup.
- Determine categories needed in each pool based on program and resource needs.
- Applicability** and **Category** sections do not earn points. These sections are to determine applicability and categorize the application. Multiple categories can be selected.

Section: Applicability		
Question	Answer Choices	Points
Did the applicant submitted a NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), for a farm operation located in Puerto Rico or US Virgin Islands?	YES	--
	NO	--
Section: Category		
Question	Answer Choices	Points
Application Category. Select all that apply.	Beginning Farmer and Rancher (BFR)	--
	Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher (SDFR) Mountainous Region	--
	Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher (SDFR) Coastal, Hills or Valleys Region	--
	Regenerative Pilot Program	--
	Wildlife	--
	Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Initiative (JCLRP)	--
	Water Quantity	--
	CPA, DIA, CEMA	--
	CAFO/Energy	--
	Disaster	--
	General-Organic	--
	Reserved Category I	--
	Reserved Category II	--

In FY2026 Caribbean Area will have only 1 ranking pool for EQIP with multiple categories

EQIP Program Section – Must not exceed 200 points

- Some questions in this section will be answered for all applications, but other questions are conditional to the categories selected.
- Questions with * are conditional and will only be available to answer if the Category associated to this question was selected in the previous section (Category Section)

Section: Program		
Question	Answer Choices	Points
Did the applicant self-certify as a beginning farmer or rancher on the NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application?	YES	10
	NO	0
Does the applicant meet the NRCS definition of a veteran farmer or rancher (VFR)?	YES	10
	NO	0
Did the applicant participate in the CRP Transition Incentives Program (TIP), and has the land in the EQIP application come out of CRP within the last 2 years?	YES	5
	NO	0
Did the applicant self-certify as a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher on the NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application?	YES	10
	NO	0
Is the project located in the designated Socially Disadvantaged Mountainous Region? (ADJUNTAS, CIALES, JAYUYA, UTUADO, AIBONITO, BARRANQUITAS, COMERIO, COROZAL, MOROVIS, NARANJITO, OROCOVIS, TOA ALTA, LARES, LAS MARIAS, MARICAO, VILLALBA, CIDRA, CAYEY, SAN LORENZO, AGUAS BUENAS)*	YES	30
	NO	20
Is the project located in the designated Socially Disadvantaged Coastal, Hills or Valleys Region? *	YES	20
	NO	30
Is the applicant willing to develop a whole farm assessment and plan, and include soil testing by planning CEMA 216 in the first and last year of the contract? *	YES	40
	NO	10
Will the application address Aquatic and/or Terrestrial Habitat resource concerns?*	YES	20
	NO	0
Will the application includes practices to benefit and manage Water Quantity concerns?*	YES	20
	NO	0
Is the program application for the development of a Conservation Planning, Activity, Design and Implementation Activity, and/or Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activity (CPAs, DIAs, CEMAs)?	YES	10
	NO	0
Conservation treatments for assessed PLUs are in response to effects of a natural disaster in Puerto Rico or USVI?*	YES	20
	NO	0
Will this application address Inefficient Energy Use resource concerns?	YES	15
	NO	0
Will this application include the implementation of conservation practices in a Certified Organic, Transition to Organic or Exempt Organic Operation?*	YES	10
	NO	0

This section will include some geospatial questions.

Geospatial questions use a gis layer and result in a software answered question based on location of the farm and the determined geospatial definition and points assigned.

EQIP Resource Section – Must not exceed 200 points

Some questions in this section will be answered for all applications, but other questions are conditional* to the categories selected or the answer of any question associated in the Program section.

Section: Resource		
Question	Answer Choices	Points
Is the agricultural operation located within 150 Ft or less from a sensitive area? (ex: water body, stream, sinkhole, wetland, ditch, etc.)	YES	15
	NO	5
Does any planned land unit (PLU) intersect any impaired stream or waterbody listed in the 303d list?	Yes	15
	No	5
Will this application address soil quality and water quality resource concerns and includes CEMA 216 and at least one primary regenerative management practice? (CEMA 217, CPA 199, 328, 330, 331, 340, 554, 511, 666, 449, 484, 590, 595, 528, 329, 345, 585)*	YES	50
	NO	20
Is the farm located in the Puerto Rico Semiarid Mountains and Valleys, Semiarid Coastal Plains or the US Virgin Islands?*	YES	30
	NO	10
Will the application include practices to address Water Quantity concerns in an Irrigation Special Project area? (Ex. El Hucar Irrigation Project, Isabela Irrigation Project, Bordeaux Irrigation Project, etc.)*	YES	20
	NO	5
Is the program application for development or implementation of CPAs, DIAs or CEMAs of an Agricultural Energy Plan prepared by a TSP, Licensed Professional or Qualified Individual?	YES	10
	NO	0
Are the practices to be applied in response to the disaster in compliance with local, state, and federal laws?*	YES	20
	NO	0
Does the EQIP schedule of operations includes one or more of these practices: 327, 390, 391, 395, 396, 420, 422, 472, 580, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 649, 657, 658, 659, to improve terrestrial and/or aquatic wildlife habitats? *	YES	30
	NO	10
Does the EQIP schedule of operations include practices with the intent of increasing habitat for pollinators, beneficial insects, or both?	YES	5
	NO	0
Will the application include the Installation/improvement of conservation buffers to reduce sedimentation in water bodies or address inadequate habitat?	YES	5
	NO	0

This section will also include some geospatial questions.

Geospatial questions use a gis layer and result in a software answered question based on location of the farm and the determined geospatial definition and points assigned.

FY26 Ranking Pools – (CSP Survey Questions Example)

FY26 National Instruction

- NI 440-310 Exhibit H – CSP States must create separate ranking pools for CSP agricultural (AgLand) and non-industrial private forestland (NIPF) and must determine categories needed in each pool based on program and resource needs. (BFR, SDFR, Regenerative and Organic are required for CSP)
- Applicability** and **Category** sections do not earn points. These sections are to determine applicability and categorize the application. Multiple categories can be selected.

Section: Applicability		
Question	Answer Choices	Points
Did the applicant submitted a NRCS-CPA-1200 Conservation Program Application for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP-2026-1) for an agricultural operation located in Puerto Rico or US Virgin Islands?	YES	--
	NO	--

Section: Category		
Question	Answer Choices	Points
Application Category. Select all that apply.	Beginning Farmer and Rancher (BFR)	--
	Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher (SDFR)	--
	General	--
	Regenerative Pilot Program	--
	Organic	--
	Reserved Category I	--
	Reserved Category II	--
	Reserved Category III	--

In FY2026 Caribbean Area will have 2 ranking pools for CSP,1 for AgLand and 1 for NIPF, with multiple categories

CSP Program Section – Must not exceed 200 points

Some questions in this section will be answered for all applications, but other questions are conditional (*) to the categories selected or to the answer of any other associated question.

Section: Program		
Question	Answer Choices	Points
Does the producer have active CSP contract(s) but chooses not to include the newly acquired/newly eligible land?	YES	-200
	NO	20
Did the applicant self-certified as a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher on the NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application?	YES	40
	NO	5
Did the applicant self-certified as a beginning farmer or rancher on the NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application?	YES	40
	NO	5
Does the applicant meet the NRCS definition of a veteran farmer or rancher (VFR)?*	YES	10
	NO	0
Did the applicant participate in the CRP Transition Incentives Program (TIP), and has the land in the CSP application come out of CRP within the last 2 years?*	YES	10
	NO	0
Is the applicant willing to develop a whole farm assessment, include soil testing by planning CEMA 216 in the first and last year of the contract and at least one primary regenerative management practice? (CEMA 217, CPA 199, 328, 330, 331, 340, 554, 511, 666, 449, 484, 590, 595, 528, 329, 345, 585)*	YES	60
	NO	10
Will this application include the implementation of conservation practices in a Certified Organic, Transition to Organic or Exempt Organic Operation?*	YES	20
	NO	10

CSP Resource Section – Must not exceed 200 points

- States must develop questions using the following criteria.
- The natural resources conservation and environmental benefits of the conservation treatment on all state-identified priority resource concern categories at the time of application (i.e., existing stewardship).
 - How much the proposed conservation activities increase natural resource conservation and environmental benefits (i.e., additional conservation)

Section: Resource		
Question	Answer Choices	Points
At the TIME OF APPLICATION, the applicant meets one of the following.	Four to eight state priority resource concern categories across all land uses in the operation	100
	One to three state priority resource concern categories across all land uses in the operation	80
	Six to eight state priority resource concern categories across all land uses in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated agricultural land)	60
	Three to five state priority resource concern categories across all land uses included in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated agricultural land)	50
	One or two state priority resource concern categories across all land uses included in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated agricultural land)	30
	Four to eight state priority resource concern categories on at least one land use included in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated agricultural land)	20
	One to three state priority resource concern categories on at least one land use included in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated agricultural land)	10
By the END OF THE CONTRACT, the applicant will implement more conservation activities across the operation that will allow the producer to do one of the following.	Exceed the stewardship threshold for more than three additional resource concern categories on at least two land uses	100
	Exceed the stewardship threshold for two or three additional resource concern categories on at least two land uses	90
	Exceed the stewardship threshold for one additional resource concern category on at least two land uses	80
	Exceed the stewardship threshold for more than three additional resource concern categories on one land use	60
	Exceed the stewardship threshold for two or three additional resource concern categories on one land use	50
	Meet the stewardship threshold for two or three additional resource concern categories on at least two land uses	30
	Meet the stewardship threshold for one additional resource concern category on at least two land uses	20
	Meet the stewardship threshold for two or three additional resource concern categories on one land use	10



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A wide-angle photograph of a lush green wetland landscape. In the foreground, there's a large, gnarled tree with sparse yellow leaves. A small stream flows through the middle ground, surrounded by vibrant green vegetation. In the background, rolling hills and mountains are visible under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Caribbean Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) for Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

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NRCS Easement Programs

- ACEP – Agricultural Land Easement (ALE)
 - Eligible Entity holds the easement
 - Eligible Entity is responsible for monitoring, management, and enforcement of the easement
- ACEP – Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)
 - US Government holds the easement
 - NRCS is responsible for monitoring, management, and enforcement of the easement



Wetland Reserve Easements Programs

Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC)

- Each fiscal year the State Conservationist, in consultation with the State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC), must establish a process to determine easement and 30-year land use contract compensation values.
- ACEP-WRE policy guidance is found in the ACEP Manual, 440CPM Part 528, Subpart M, Section 528.122. The basis for the compensation offers for permanent easement or 30-year contract enrollments will be determined based on the lowest of the followings:
 1. The fair market value (FMV) of the land using either of the following: a Uniform Standards for Professional Appraisal Practices (USPAP) individual appraisal.
 2. An area wide market analysis (AWMA) or survey.
 3. The geographic area rate cap (GARC).
 4. An amount voluntarily offered by the landowner.

Puerto Rico GARC

- 95% of FMV, NTE \$20,000/AC
- For Both 30 year and Permanent Easements
- **Under WRE, the landowner is only retaining the right to quiet enjoyment and non-impact recreation.**
- **All agricultural and development rights are forfeited.**



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Priority Watersheds Discussion

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Connecting Priorities to Watershed-Scale Action

The National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) provides a direct pathway to implement the Chief's priorities at the watershed scale in the Caribbean Area. By targeting conservation delivery in DNER-identified priority watersheds, NRCS can simultaneously advance multiple FY2026 objectives.

Outcome-Based Conservation



NWQI requires measurable water quality improvements. Targeting watersheds with approved TMDLs and permanent monitoring stations allows NRCS to track real environmental outcomes, not just practice counts.

Strengthen Partnerships



Aligning with DPNR Vision leverages the territorial government's water quality monitoring infrastructure and regulatory programs. Coordination with Local Authorities and Partners multiplies conservation impact.

Recenter Field Engagement



Concentrating NRCS technical assistance within priority watersheds with the highest CLU density ensures staff time is focused on areas with the most agricultural producers and the greatest conservation delivery potential.

The following slides present the watershed prioritization analysis that supports this alignment.

NWQI ELIGIBILITY LOGIC

01

Agricultural Land Present

NWQI targets watersheds where farming generates measurable nonpoint source pollution — sediment, nutrients, pathogens.

02

Water Quality Impairment Documented

303(d) listings or documented LBSP threats to coral reefs, seagrass, and fishery habitat trigger eligibility.

03

Agricultural Producers Reachable

Active farm operations exist within the watershed boundary and can receive EQIP/RCPP financial and technical assistance.

04

Partners & Plans in Place

Watershed management plans and active agency partnerships improve likelihood of effective, funded implementation.

USVI-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS



Steep Terrain & Thin Soils

Island topography accelerates runoff velocity. Thin soils offer limited infiltration capacity, amplifying erosion from agricultural and unpaved surfaces.



Direct Ridge-to-Reef Connectivity

Short drainage distances mean agricultural sediment and nutrients reach coral reef systems rapidly. STXEEMP receives direct LBSP from all six East End watersheds.



Limited NRCS Engagement to Date

NRCS assistance to USVI farms has been limited. The 2026–27 NWQI cycle presents a defined entry point to establish a sustained agricultural conservation presence.



Existing WMPs & Partner Network

Active management plans (2011 WMP, 2023 Restoration Strategy) and established partners — NOAA, DPNR, VI RC&D, TNC, SEA — reduce startup costs significantly.



Current Projects: Enhancing Water Resources

Bordeaux • Dorothea • Bethlehem Watersheds

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in collaboration with local partners, is actively working to improve water quality and availability across key watersheds in the U.S. Virgin Islands — directly supporting the sustainability and productivity of local farmers.

THREE FOCUS WATERSHEDS

Bordeaux

Pond restoration & irrigation expansion

Dorothea

Water distribution infrastructure upgrade

Bethlehem

Water quality & regulatory framework



Significant efforts are underway to restore existing ponds and expand irrigation infrastructure — directly increasing water availability for agricultural use.

Pond Restoration

Schulterbrandt Pond

Sediment removal
& pond sealing

John Pond

Max capacity:
1,024,226 gal
Drainage: 44.95 ac

Girl Scout Pond

Max capacity:
1,391,745 gal
Drainage: 121.83 ac

Irrigation Infrastructure

Pipeline

~19,500 ft of
irrigation piping
planned

Sub Pump Station

Concrete foundation
10 × 1,000-gal
capture tanks

Distribution Lines

Inlet & outlet lines
along Bordeaux
roads

Future Enhancements

Pumping

Pumps for water
transfer between
ponds & tanks

Storage Expansion

Up to +5,000 gal
of additional
tank capacity

Gravity Feed

Proposed gravity-
feed & 2-well
system fill line



A focused upgrade of water infrastructure ensures more reliable and efficient water distribution to Dorothea farmers — from reservoir to field.

01

Reservoir Pond Pump

A pump is installed in the Pump Room to draw water from the reservoir pond and feed the distribution network.

02

~3,500 ft Irrigation Piping

Approximately 3,500 feet of new irrigation piping is installed to extend water reach across Dorothea farms.

03

Distribution Line Installation

Water distribution lines along the left side of the road are completed to ensure full connection to all farm parcels.

04

Water Meter Readers

Meters are installed on new and existing water lines entering each farm to improve tracking and water management efficiency.

AT A GLANCE

~3,500 ft

New irrigation
piping to be installed

100%

Road-side distribution
line completion target

Metering

Each farm to be installed
on all entry points

Property: GVI owns ID 102701010700
11 REM & 16F-1 Dorothea No. 6
Littlenorthside QTR

BETHLEHEM WATERSHED

Agricultural and conservation zoning accounts for 29% of the Bethlehem watershed. Farming and ranching operations rely on 36.7 acres of manmade freshwater ponds and 20.4 miles of guts for livestock watering and crop irrigation — placing agriculture at the center of watershed resource concerns.

RESOURCE CONCERNS LINKED TO FARMING & RANCHING

01

Nutrient Runoff from Cultivated Land

Total Phosphorus exceeded Class B coastal standard by >80% in gut grab samples. Total Nitrogen exceeded the USVI standard at all sampled locations. **TP and TKN are primarily derived from agricultural runoff during storm events**, fertilized fields, and animal waste on unmanaged pastures.

02

Sediment from Unprotected Agricultural Slopes

Agricultural areas in Bethlehem lack stormwater infrastructure — drainage follows natural topography with no erosion controls. High-runoff soils (HSG-C/D) cover 80% of the watershed. Channel erosion accounts for 89% of total TSS loading, exacerbated by exposed, unprotected agricultural fields.

03

Animal Waste & Fecal Contamination

E. coli and Enterococci were detected at 100% of gut sampling locations. Fecal coliform modeling identified SSOs, illicit discharges, and animal waste as the dominant bacterial loading sources. **Unmanaged livestock access to guts and ponds directly contributes to gut contamination.**

04

Riparian Buffer Degradation Along Gut Corridors

77% of existing riparian buffer coverage in the watershed is non-forested. Agricultural clearing and grazing to the gut edge removes the vegetated buffer that would otherwise filter sediment and nutrients before they reach guts, ponds, and coastal receiving waters.

NRCS CONSERVATION PRACTICE OPPORTUNITIES

590

Nutrient Management Plan

Nutrient runoff

Develop site-specific nutrient management plans for farms in the Bethlehem watershed to match fertilizer applications to crop need, reducing excess TP and TN entering guts. Directly addresses Class B standard exceedances documented in WMP grab sampling.

590
/
317

Composting & Waste Utilization

Animal waste

Establish proper manure and organic waste management for livestock operations. Controlled composting facilities and waste utilization plans reduce fecal coliform loading to guts — the primary bacterial source identified in WMP watershed modeling.

382
/
614

Fence Out Livestock from Guts & Ponds

Animal waste /
Fecal bacteria

Exclusion fencing along the 20.4 miles of guts and around the 36.7 acres of manmade freshwater ponds prevents direct livestock access, reducing sediment, nutrient, and fecal contamination at the source. Alternative water supply infrastructure (Practice 614) provides off stream watering.

393
/
390

Filter Strips & Riparian Buffers

Sediment &
nutrients

Establish vegetated filter strips along agricultural field edges and restore riparian buffers on the 77% of gut corridors currently lacking forest cover. Native plantings intercept sediment and nutrients before they reach guts, directly addressing the dominant TSS pathway confirmed by WMP modeling.

342
/
638

Critical Area Planting & Cover Crops

Erosion / bare soil

Establish perennial cover on highly erodible agricultural slopes (HSG-C/D soils dominant at 80% of watershed). Cover crops during fallow periods stabilize bare soil, reducing the runoff connectivity that drives the 89% channel erosion share of total TSS load documented in the WMP.



Collaborative Efforts for a Water-Secure Future

Bordeaux • Dorothea • Bethlehem

These projects provide essential water resources for agriculture, mitigate environmental risks, and support sustainable farming practices across the USVI — contributing to environmental health and economic resilience.

WA

Water Availability

Restored ponds, expanded pipelines, and new pump stations deliver reliable water to USVI farm operations year-round.

WQ

Water Quality

Federal and territorial regulatory frameworks safeguard the quality of agricultural water from source to field.

CI

Continued Investment

Long-term success requires sustained collaboration among NRCS, VIDA, DPNR, and local farming communities.

INITIATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Bordeaux

- 19,500 ft piping planned
- 2 ponds restored & sealed
- 10 × 1,000-gal capture tanks
- Gravity-feed system proposed

Dorothea

- 3,500 ft new piping
- Reservoir pump installed
- Full road-side distribution
- Meters on all farm inlets

Bethlehem

- 5 federal/territorial laws
- 4 water quality classes
- EPA NPDWR benchmarks
- 2019 USVI WQ Standards



OTHER USVI PRIORITY WATERSHEDS: TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENT IDENTIFIED WATERSHED AREAS

Notice

The watershed analyzed data to be disclosed has not yet been curated at the field level. This presentation aims to boost open discussion about watersheds of interest and to prioritize them based on stakeholder interests and goals.

Data Sources:

USVI Watershed Management Plans <https://dpnr.vi.gov/resources/management-plans/> ,
NOAA <https://coralreef.noaa.gov/digital-corals/> ,
Local Government Priority Assessments,
NRCS Caribbean Area Records

Total Priority Areas: 4 Major Watersheds | St. Croix East End contains the greatest concentration of agricultural land

WATERSHED ASSESSMENTS TABLE

Watershed assessment / project title	Geographic scope / island(s)	Identified agricultural-land resource concerns (explicit excerpts; focus terms)
Bolongo Bay [15] Watershed Management Plan	St. Thomas	Runoff/erosion framing tied to land disturbance and access infrastructure: “Failure to manage stormwater runoff from roads, most notably unpaved roads, is one of the primary land-based sources of pollution,” with “roadway erosion” and sediment-clogged culverts illustrated. [17]
Cyril E. King Airport [20] Watershed Management Plan	St. Thomas	Primary concerns in accessible excerpts center on stormwater-driven pollutant transport and flood risk; stormwater BMPs described as improving water quality through “filtration, infiltration, or settling” and moderating runoff volumes/velocities (relevant to erosion/sediment delivery). [21]
St. Thomas Harbor [24] Watershed Management Plan	St. Thomas	Water-quantity relevance to agriculture is explicit in one passage: guts “are still used as a source of freshwater for agriculture and to recharge groundwater.” [25] Broader runoff/erosion concerns are not captured in the accessible excerpt set for this plan.
Bethlehem [29] Watershed Management Plan	St. Croix	Agricultural land presence is explicit in zoning/land-use characterization: “Most of the watershed is... low-density residential (43.5%) and agriculture (29.0%).” [30] No explicit excerpted passage describing nutrient runoff/pesticides/irrigation impacts was retrieved.
Diamond [31] Watershed Management Plan	St. Croix	Erosion/sedimentation linkage to access infrastructure is explicit: “Failure to manage stormwater runoff from roads, most notably unpaved roads, is one of the primary land-based sources of pollution,” and roadway erosion/clogged infrastructure contributes to flooding and erosive velocities. [32]
HOVENSA [33] Watershed Management Plan	St. Croix	Pollutant categories relevant to agricultural lands/soil loss are explicit in BMP modeling: practices reduce pollutants “associated with sediment and erosion (TN, TP, & TSS)” but are “not effective at treating... wastewater (Fecal Coliform).” [34]
Long Point Bay [37] Watershed Management Plan	St. Croix	Core concerns are framed as land-based sources of pollution and flood risk; the plan emphasizes “ridge to reef” thinking and the need to account for changing conditions. [39] (Agricultural-land-specific pollutant types are not explicit in retrieved excerpts.)
Salt River Bay [41] Watershed Management Plan	St. Croix	In the retrieved excerpt set, the main concern is lack of structural stormwater BMP coverage: “There were no identified existing BMPs in Salt River Bay.” [42] (No explicit excerpted statement on agricultural runoff/pesticides/irrigation impacts was captured.)
St. Croix East End Marine Park [43] East End Watersheds Management Plan	St. Croix (six watersheds around the East End Marine Park)	Agriculture-relevant pollutant pathways are explicit: “Uncontrolled runoff from... agricultural lands... [and] livestock” are included among sources in a model that evaluates TSS, TN, TP, and fecal coliform. [10] The plan also frames territory-wide susceptibility of unpaved roads/exposed soils to erosion and sediment deposition. [10]
St. Thomas East End Reserves [46] watershed management plan (STEER)	St. Thomas (uplands draining to STEER marine reserves)	NOAA record describes the watershed as “upland area that drain directly” to marine reserves and notes the report provides “watershed restoration recommendations.” [47] (No agriculture-specific pollutant phrase is provided in the repository excerpt.)
Fish Bay [49] Watershed Management Plan (Final)	St. John	Explicit resource concern framing centers on erosion/sedimentation: it is stated policy “to prevent adverse environmental impacts... due to erosion, soil loss, and sedimentation.” [51] Sediment is treated as a measurable watershed outcome, with the plan noting monitoring needs and that higher sediment yields/turbidity were observed

COVERAGE REVIEW — KEY FINDINGS

All priority watersheds with agricultural significance have been evaluated. Two exclusions documented below.

ST. CROIX

All six (6) East End Marine Park watersheds formally identified in the 2011 WMP and reaffirmed in the 2023 Horsley Witten Restoration Strategy are included in the evaluation. No additional priority agricultural watersheds exist for St. Croix currently.

NRCS Implication: NRCS agricultural partnership opportunity exists across the STX EEMP sub-unit.

ST. THOMAS

The STEER encompasses three sub-drainage areas: Jersey Bay, Red Hook Bay, and adjacent Frenchman Bay watersheds. The presentation treats STEER as a single unit. All three sub-watersheds are dominated by residential, marina, and commercial land uses with negligible agricultural footprint.

NRCS Implication: Other agencies partnership opportunity exists across the STEER sub-unit.

ST. JOHN

Cruz Bay / Great Cruz Bay watershed was not included. This watershed serves as the main commercial and ferry hub of St. John. The Coral Bay WMP documents eight named sub-watersheds, all covered. Fish Bay has a separate management plan and is included.

NRCS Implication: Other agencies partnership opportunity exists across the STJ sub-units. No NWQI consideration warranted.

Overall Finding: The evaluation is comprehensive for NWQI purposes. All watersheds with measurable agricultural presence are accounted for.



USVI PRIORITY WATERSHEDS — LOCAL GOVERNMENT IDENTIFIED AREAS

ST. CROIX

East End Marine Park

6 sub-watersheds
Highest agricultural
opportunity in USVI

- Great Pond Bay
- Madam Carty Watershed
- Solitude Bay Watershed
- Southgate Watershed
- Teague Bay Watershed
- Turner Hole Watershed

★ HIGHEST AG POTENTIAL

ST. THOMAS

STEER Watershed

Limited agricultural land
Primarily residential
Research & monitoring focus

ST. JOHN

Coral Bay / Fish Bay

Mixed use watersheds
Development pressure
Existing partnerships

Total Priority Areas: 4 Major Watersheds | St. Croix East End contains the greatest concentration of agricultural land

WATERSHED COVERAGE QUALITY REVIEW — ALL THREE ISLANDS ASSESSED

Verification against local government priority watershed documentation and USVI Watershed Management Plans

ST. CROIX

✓ COMPLETE — All 6 Watersheds Covered

● Great Pond Bay	Primary NWQI target
● Southgate	Primary NWQI target
● Solitude Bay	Primary NWQI target
● Teague Bay	Low ag — included
● Turner Hole	No ag — included
● Madam Carty	No ag — included

Source: STXEEMP WMP (2011); Horsley Witten (2023)

ST. THOMAS

⚠ NOTE: Sub-Watersheds Clarified

● STEER (overall)	Covered in evaluation
● → Jersey Bay sub-watershed	Within STEER
● → Red Hook sub-watershed	Within STEER
● → Frenchman Bay (adjacent)	Adjacent drainage
● St. Thomas Harbor	Urban / no ag

All sub-watersheds drain into the STEER protected area. Negligible agricultural land in all three units. NRCS role remains limited regardless of sub-division.

Source: STEER Sediment & Contaminants Report (DPNR/NOAA)

ST. JOHN

⚠ NOTE: Cruz Bay Excluded (No Ag)

● Fish Bay
● Coral Bay (8 sub-basins)
● → Coral Harbor, Hurricane Hole
● → Round Bay, Johnson Bay
● → Friis, Johns Folly, Privateer, Drunk
● Cruz Bay / Great Cruz Bay

Cruz Bay is the commercial hub of STJ. No documented agricultural activity. Exclusion is documented.

Source: Coral Bay WMP (CWP/DPNR); Fish Bay WMP (DPNR, 2001)

ST. CROIX

East End Marine Park

6 sub-watersheds
Highest agricultural opportunity in USVI

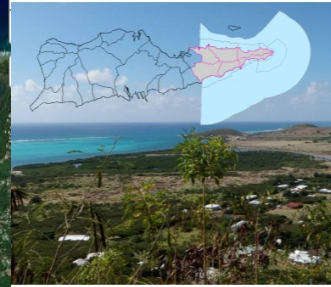
- **Great Pond Bay**
- **Madam Carty Watershed**
- **Solitude Bay Watershed**
- Southgate Watershed
- Teague Bay Watershed
- Turner Hole Watershed

★ HIGHEST AG POTENTIAL

St. Croix East End Watersheds Management Plan

U.S. Virgin Islands

FINAL November 2011

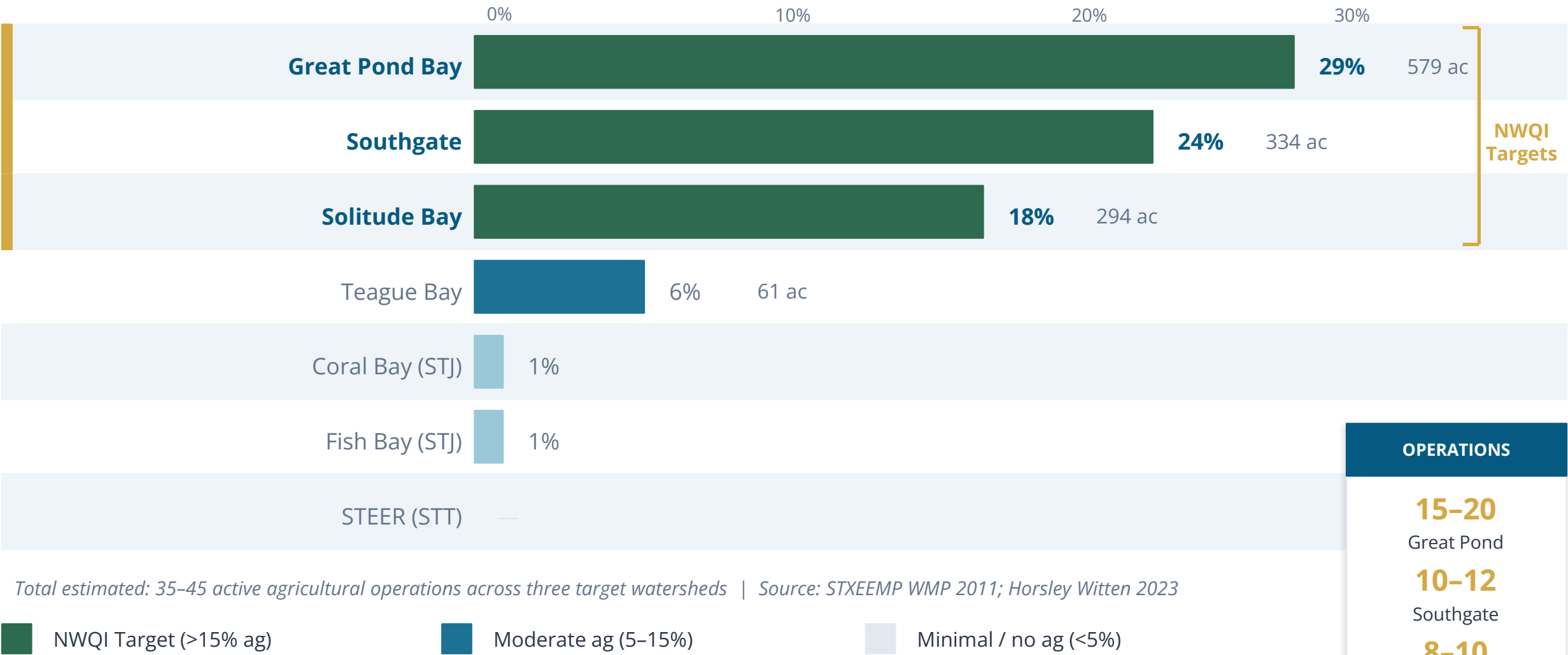


Prepared for:
St. Croix East End Marine Park
USVI Department of Planning and Natural Resources
NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program
USDA-NRCS, St. Croix Field Office

Prepared by:
Horsley Witten Group, Inc.
90 Route 6A, Sandwich, MA, 02563
www.horsleywitten.com



Total Priority Areas: 4 Major Watersheds | St. Croix East End contains the greatest concentration of agricultural land



Total estimated: 35–45 active agricultural operations across three target watersheds | Source: STXEEMP WMP 2011; Horsley Witten 2023

LAND USE COMPARISON — PRIORITY WATERSHEDS

Great Pond Bay (1,996 ac)



Agriculture 29%

Undeveloped 55%

Residential 9%

Other/Parks 7%

Southgate (1,392 ac)



Agriculture 24%

Undeveloped 50%

Residential 23%

Other/Parks 3%

Solitude Bay (1,635 ac)



Agriculture 18%

Undeveloped 50%

Residential 31%

Other/Parks 1%

Teague Bay (1,017 ac)



Agriculture 6%

Undeveloped 44%

Residential 14%

Other/Parks 36%

NWQI 2026–27 MATRIX & RECOMMENDED ACTION PLAN

Watershed	Ag %	Ag Acres	303(d)	LBSP Threat	Producers	Partners	NWQI Score
Great Pond Bay	29%	579 ac	Yes	HIGH	15–20	Strong	TIER 1
Southgate	24%	334 ac	Yes	HIGH	10–12	Strong	TIER 1
Solitude Bay	18%	294 ac	No	HIGH	8–10	Active	TIER 1
Teague Bay	6%	61 ac	Yes	MED	Minimal	Some	TIER 2
All STJ	<2%	—	STJ	LOW	—	VI RC&D	Monitor
STEER (STT)	0%	—	No	LOW	—	NOAA	—

2026–27 RECOMMENDED ACTION PLAN

Q2 -3 2026	Designate Great Pond Bay, Southgate, and Solitude Bay as USVI NWQI priority watersheds. Notify DPNR, NOAA, TNC, and SEA of NRCS engagement intent.
Q3 - 4 2026	Conduct producer outreach in all three watersheds. Identify eligible operations for EQIP enrollment. Coordinate with VI RC&D on BMP implementation pathways.
Q1 2027	Initiate EQIP contracts in Great Pond Bay and Southgate. Focus: unpaved road erosion control, pond water supply, and gut stabilization practices aligned with 2023 Restoration Strategy priorities.
Q4 2027	Expand to Solitude Bay — coordinate with TNC reef restoration. Evaluate Teague Bay for Tier 2 consideration based on producer participation rates and available funding.

CURRENT PARTNER ACTIVITIES — EXISTING INITIATIVES BY WATERSHED

NOAA / EPA

All Watersheds

Coral reef protection and water quality monitoring across all priority watersheds. Primary focus on East End Marine Park.

VIDA / DPNR

All Watersheds

Regulatory permitting and land use planning. Coordinates environmental review across all islands.

Coral Bay / NGO's

Coral Bay / Fish Bay

Erosion control projects and community-based natural resource initiatives.

LGU's / UVI

STEER / East End

Research, data collection, and ecological monitoring at established stations.

USDA NRCS

Current
Role

Expansion Needed

Increasing engagement. **Identified significant opportunities to expand presence and services** in high-agriculture watersheds.

01 Watershed Prioritization

- What watersheds do you agree focusing on?
- Are there other watersheds with unidentified agricultural potential?

02 Resource Concerns

- What primary concerns are observed in these watersheds?
- Which conservation practices are best suited to USVI conditions?

03 Producer Engagement

- How can NRCS better reach agricultural producers in these areas?
- What are the primary barriers to program participation?

04 Partnership Opportunities

- Which organizations should NRCS prioritize for engagement?
- How can we build on existing partner initiatives?

References

- Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Management Plans & Guidelines (includes watershed plan index). [\[4\]](#)
- Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Environmental Protection. *The U.S. Virgin Islands Nonpoint Source Management Program Plan, FY 2023–2027*. [\[55\]](#)
- Horsley Witten Group (prepared for DPNR and partners). *St. Croix East End Watersheds Management Plan (FINAL November 2011)*. [\[10\]](#)
- NOAA CoRIS (document repository). *Fish Bay Watershed Management Plan (Final)*. [\[64\]](#)
- NOAA CoRIS (repository record). *St. Thomas East End Reserves watershed management plan (STEER)*. [\[47\]](#)
- Center for Watershed Protection conference materials (USVI-focused). *Vetiver Grass for St Thomas* (presentation). [\[56\]](#)
- Center for Watershed Protection conference materials (Coral Bay, St. John). *Stormwater Structure Management Toolkit for Residents* (presentation). [\[57\]](#)
- Center for Watershed Protection conference materials (USVI). *Agency collaborations for watershed & stormwater improvements in the US Virgin Islands* (presentation). [\[60\]](#)



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

A photograph of a rustic stone wall built from large, flat, greyish-brown stones. The wall runs across the middle of the frame. Behind the wall is a dense tropical forest with various green plants, including palm trees and broad-leafed shrubs. The ground in the foreground is reddish-brown soil with some dry leaves and small green plants. The text "Technical Service Providers (TSP) Updates" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

Technical Service Providers (TSP) Updates

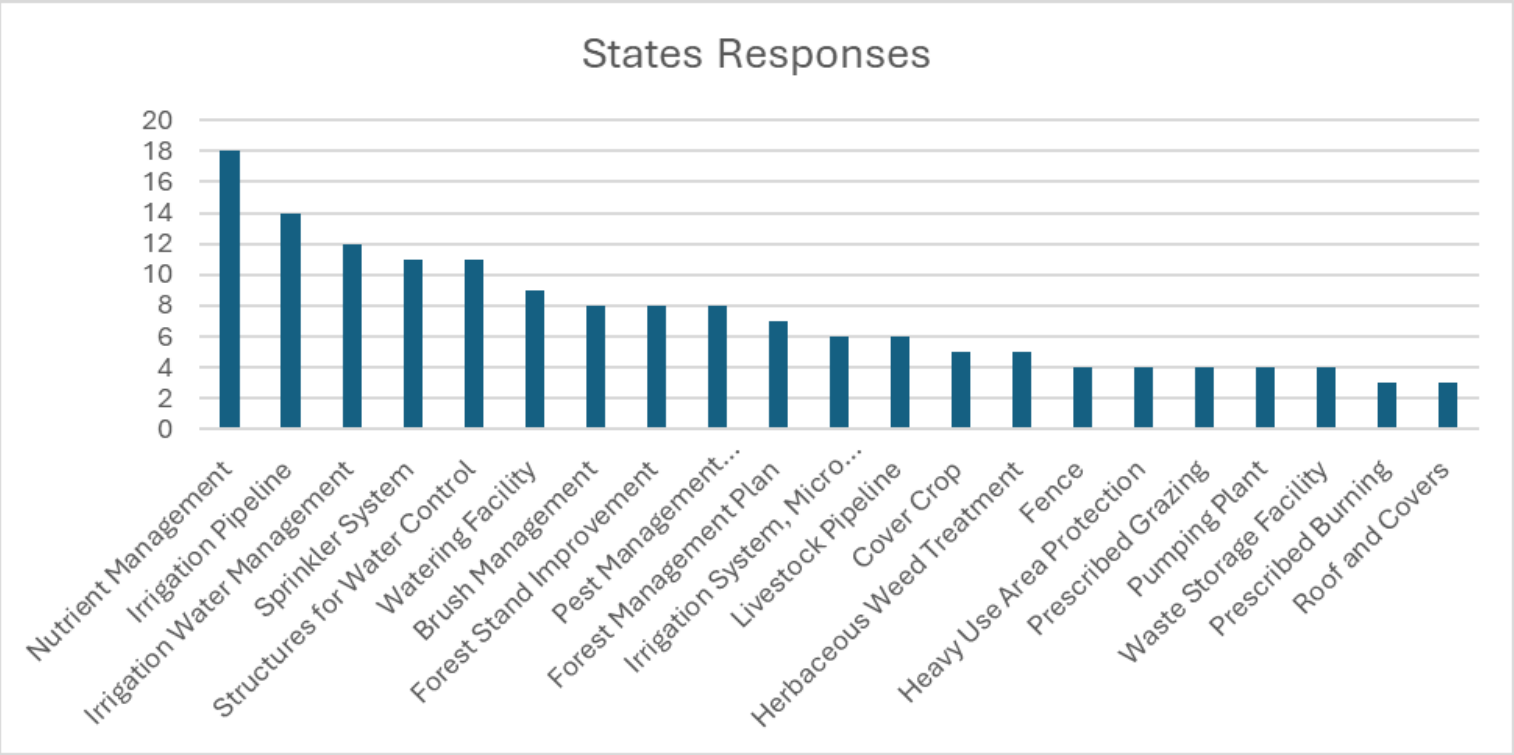
FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
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Conservation Needs Survey: Summary of 20 Most Common Practices



Conservation Needs Survey:

Practices Most Likely to Delegate to TSP



Practice Code	Practice Name	Responses
590	Nutrient Management	18
430	Irrigation Pipeline	14
449	Irrigation Water Management	12
442	Sprinkler System	11
587	Structures for Water Control	11
614	Watering Facility	9
314	Brush Management	8
666	Forest Stand Improvement	8
595	Pest Management Conservation System	8
CPA-106	Forest Management Plan	7
441	Irrigation System, Micro irrigation	6



Why TSPs Matter for the USVI

Technical Service Providers
extend NRCS capacity to
deliver conservation on
the ground for producers.

Conservation Planning & Design

TSPs assist producers through all 9 steps of the conservation planning process, from identifying problems to evaluating implemented plans. They provide design, installation oversight, and checkout services.

Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP)

Certified TSPs can support 15 primary practices under RPP, including cover crops, nutrient management, grazing management, and irrigation water management. They may also provide CEMA 216 soil health services.

Two Categories of TSP Services

Conservation Activities (CPA, DIA, CEMA) use FA funds and are included with original contracts. 900 Series (911 Design, 912 Oversight, 913 Checkout) use state-level TA funds and are added through contract modifications.

Top Practices Delegated to TSPs:

Nutrient Mgmt (590) | Irrigation (430, 449) | Sprinkler System (442) | Forest Stand (666)

TSP SERVICES FALL INTO TWO MAIN CATEGORIES

Conservation Activities

- Conservation Planning Activities (CPA)
- Design and Implementation Activities (DIA)
- Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMA)

Offered identically in all payment schedules.

Use FA funds
Typically included with the original contract obligation

Code 900 Series

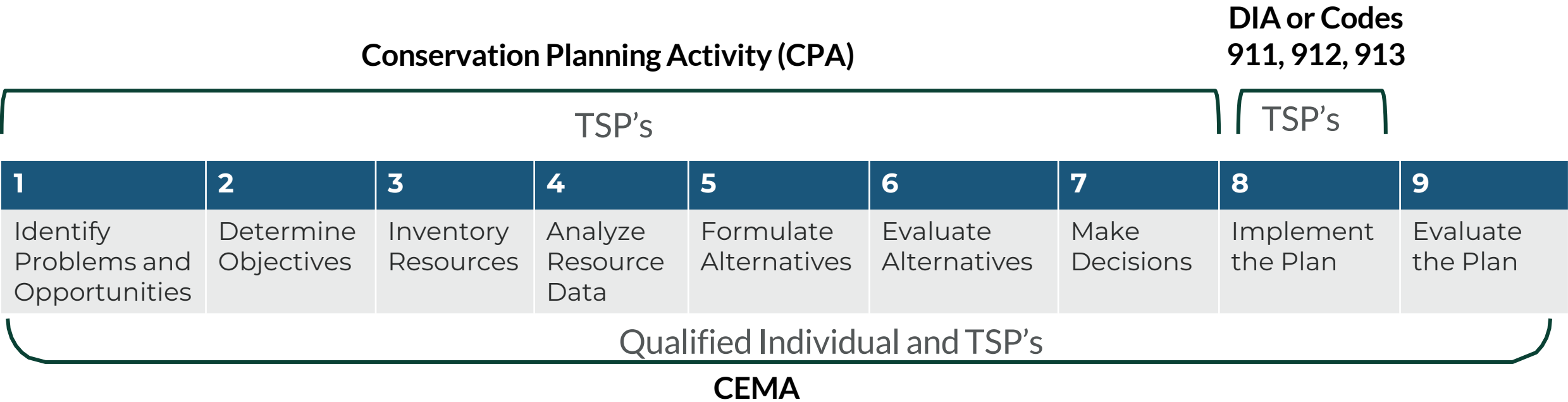
- Design of a Conservation Practice (911)
- Installation Oversight of a Conservation Practice (912)
- Check-Out of the Completed Conservation Practices (913)

Created by individual payment regions and voluntarily adopted by states

Use state-level TA funds
Added to an active contract through a modification

How can TSPs help producers with their conservation needs?

- A TSP can assist with all nine steps of the conservation planning process through NRCS Financial Assistance Programs





Caribbean Area TSP-1 Streamlined Process

Accelerating TSP certification while maintaining technical standards (Title 440 Part 504)

1

Application Submission

Submit credentials including PE or Agronomist License

2

Practice Selection

Specify conservation practices seeking certification for

3

License Verification

NRCS confirms candidate holds a valid license

4

TSP-1 Form Generation

STC/Area Director or delegate generates TSP-1 form

5

Work Example Review

Category 2 practices: submit work samples for review

6

Area Coordinator Review

Caribbean TSP Coordinator reviews and submits to Region

7

Regional Processing

Regional Coordinator uploads completed TSP Form 1

8

Certification Determination

Regional Certifier evaluates and certifies each service

9

Finalization

Certification agreement executed; valid for three years



NRCS has 60 days to review and make a certification decision | Certification valid for 3 years and may be renewed



Caribbean Area | Data as of March 2026

Certified TSPs Available in Caribbean Area

Technical Service Providers 8

- B

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Puerto Rico TSPR NTE Rates (per Ac)

Practice	910 Planning	911 Design	912 Application	913 Check Out
Tree/Shrub Site Prep (490) (Ac)	\$2.45	\$54.74	\$47.51	\$61.04
Pasture & Hay (512) (Ac)	--	\$13.43	\$8.64	\$6.72
Grazing Mgmt (528) (Ac)	\$76.87	\$76.87	--	\$30.75

TSPRs are Not To Exceed (NTE) rates. TSPs submit invoices based on actual costs.



FY26 Update

NB 440-26-5 published Jan. 15 regarding state responsibilities for adopting TSPRs. All active FOTG practices now have released NTE rates.



How USVI Professionals Can Participate?

Expand TSP coverage and availability in the U.S. Virgin Islands

www.nrcs.usda.gov/tsp



Apply for Certification

Individuals, businesses, tribes, and nonprofits can apply.
Visit the NRCS website for National TSP Criteria Requirements FY26 and the streamlined TSP-1 process.



State-Level Requirements

Summer 2026: States will review and update requirements. October 2026: Changes adopted.
Requirements must reflect state laws impacting TSP services.



Encourage Qualified Experts

Licensed agronomists, engineers, and foresters in the USVI are encouraged to apply. Reach out to your SRC or Regional TSP Coordinator for guidance.



Regional Coordinator

Puerto Rico/Caribbean: Miguel Oliveras, (870) 209-0089, miguel.oliveras@usda.gov. Visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/tsp for full details.



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Partner Updates

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Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NRCS U.S. Virgin Islands State Technical Committee Meeting



March 5, 2026
University of Virgin Islands, St. Croix, VI

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

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