



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

-----0-----

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

4611 Tutu Park Mall
Suite 300
St. Thomas, VI 00802
(340) 774-3320

45 Mars Hill, Frederiksted
St. Croix, VI 00840
(340) 773-1082
dpr.vi.gov



Office of the Commissioner

CONTACT: Jamal Nielsen, Media Relations Coordinator
jamal.nielsen@dpr.vi.gov

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**DPNR AWARDED COMPETITIVE GRANT TO CONSERVE
FRESHWATER HABITATS**

Commissioner Jean-Pierre L. Oriol of the Department of Planning & Natural Resources is pleased to announce that the Division of Fish and Wildlife recently received its first Competitive State Wildlife Grant (C-SWG), awarded for large-scale conservation projects and related activities.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service granted \$229,130 to the Division of Fish & Wildlife to provide a subaward to the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) and Clemson University to study the distribution and habitat associations of Species of Greatest Conservation Need and to assess aquatic organism barriers in the freshwaters of the Virgin Islands. The initiative was selected along with 17 others out of 29 eligible applicants for \$7.7 million available for the program.

"These fragile ecosystems and their fauna are becoming increasingly threatened by numerous human activities. Among these threats, loss of connectivity to the ocean is among the most dire," said Sean Kelly, Ph.D., Wildlife Biologist and Coordinator of State Wildlife Grants said.

"Because most of the freshwater species spend some portion of their life cycle in the ocean, barriers restricting species movement between marine and freshwater environments cut off their critical habitat and choke out freshwater biodiversity in the VI," Kelly concluded.

The project includes SARP using their road-stream-crossing protocol to assess 40 potential barriers, along with training for local stakeholders occurring this week. Clemson University will be subcontracted to survey sites across the territory for fish, fauna, and instream habitat, to collect information on the American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*), as well as other critical species including the freshwater crab (*Epilobocera sinuatifrons*), various shrimp, clams, and aquatic insects. For more information, call 340-773-1082.

###