

STEER Coastal Use Mapping Project

What is the STEER Coastal Use Mapping Project?

The Coastal Use Mapping Project is designed to collect critical information on human activities in and near the St. Thomas East End Reserves (STEER). The project purpose is to improve understanding of the spatial range and intensity of key human activities and uses in this region in order to better inform resource management. Workshops will be held on St. Thomas where the public, scientists, and stakeholders will be invited to participate in creating maps of ocean uses for the STEER.



Why Now, and Why the STEER?

Coral reefs in the USVI are facing increasing pressures from a growing variety of ocean uses, as well as increased coastal development and watershed impacts. The STEER contains extensive mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs. It houses a variety of commercial activities and is adjacent to a landfill, marinas, an EPA Superfund Site, and residential areas served by individual septic systems. The Coastal Use Mapping Project is intended as a step to improving coastal and watershed management activities. The information collected through this project will provide a better understanding of human uses, issues, and constraints in the STEER. It can help inform management decisions to better protect the ecosystem, while minimizing impacts on those who depend on marine resources and reducing user conflict. The project includes collecting and mapping existing watershed information, and conducting participatory mapping workshops to gain a better understanding of key human uses and use motivations that affect the STEER. Through this process we hope to better understand:

- Who are the primary resource users in the STEER?
- Where do activities take place, and where is activity most concentrated?
- When do different activities take place?
- What are the observed impacts of different uses?
- What local management activities are already in place?
- Where is there a potential for user conflicts?
- What are the perceived problems (and potential solutions) in the STEER?
- What are potential opportunities for management action?



What is the project area?

The STEER Coastal Use Mapping Project will focus on human uses within STEER and will also consider uses that occur further offshore and/or are tied to the crossing between St. Thomas and St. John.



STEER Boundary Map

How will the information be used?

Data collected during the mapping workshops will be available to workshop participants, the general public, and resource managers as maps, GIS mapping layers, and analytical products reflecting the variety and extent of ocean uses in the region.

How is the mapping project being coordinated with other STEER efforts?

Two other projects are being planned for the STEER area: 1) the development of a watershed management plan and 2) a characterization, contaminant assessment and environmental investigation. The coastal use mapping project will coordinate with these projects to provide the managers of this area with information and tools that they need to effectively manage and implement this reserve and to reduce the land-based pollutants that are impacting its coral reef resources.

Who is sponsoring the project?

The STEER Coastal Use Mapping Project is a partnership of the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP), NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM), NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), and the STEER Advisory Committee.



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