

TECHNICAL FINAL REPORT On

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of the US Virgin Islands*
Investigator(s): Nicolas Drayton
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Executive Summary

On behalf of Ocean Conservancy, it is our pleasure to provide NOAA with this final report on the results of our grant related to engaging youth and organizing a Youth Summit for the Future Leaders of the U.S. Virgin Islands (U.S.V.I.). The goal of this project was to inspire, equip, and empower Virgin Islands youth to take action on marine resource conservation issues and involved three phases of work on the part of Ocean Conservancy: the Pre-Summit preparation; 2) the actual Summit event itself; and 3) the Post-Summit follow-up.

Reflecting back on the grant, one of the core milestones achieved was the Youth Summit that Ocean Conservancy held in October 2007 after months of intense preparation that also involved a handful of young people who contributed their time, energy, ideas to make this event a success. Together with our partners, we brought 35 youth leaders from the U.S.V.I. and British Virgin Islands to St. Thomas. Over the six days of the Summit, these youths learned about the state of the region's ocean resources through hands-on field trips, speakers, movies, and participatory workshops and about the unique opportunities that are available through science, education, politics, and participation to improve the health of their environment. At the celebration dinner the final night, the participants interacted with government representatives and reflected on the learning experience. From those discussions emerged four key areas needing action—awareness of ocean issues and attention to addressing overfishing, water/coastal pollution, and examining impacts of land development. Their ideas were subsequently incorporated into a final report submitted to key government officials that addressed everything from more strenuous enforcement of dumping rules to conservation education for schoolchildren and fishermen.

Inspired by the Summit, many of the participants took their newfound knowledge and began actively engaging in the issues, showing promise as new young leaders. Specifically, participants have given presentations in their communities, continued their studies in marine issues, and participated in International Year of the Reef events on St.

Croix. Our partners, which included representatives from the University of the Virgin Islands (EPSCOR and Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service), the B.V.I. National Parks Trust, and the Junior Gardening and Ecology Academy were critical to the success of the Summit and helped to shape the agenda and organize the activities. A full list of partners can be found at the end of the final report to the government in Appendix 8.

In bringing this project to a close, we are also submitting to government officials a final report on the Summit which captures the essence of the 2007 Virgin Islands Youth Summit, highlights the concerns of the participants, and gives their recommendations to the current leaders of the U.S.V.I. for policy actions that are needed to protect the region's critically important marine resources.

We believe that the Youth Summit for the Oceans reached the hearts of the local youth and has helped to build a constituency for ocean conservation in the territory that will pay dividends for years to come.

Very recently, in October 2008, Ocean Conservancy made the decision to shift our programmatic focus to climate change, sustainable fisheries, and improving ocean policy and management. Due this shift, we have decided to terminate our coral reef work and close the U.S. Virgin Islands office over the next month. We are proud of what we have been able to accomplish in the region, including advocating for the East End Marine Park, producing a landmark report on overfishing in the region, and this successful Youth Summit. While we have just concluded the work under this grant, we are currently exploring with our partners whether any of the work we have started might be continued by another local organization to ensure that the energy and enthusiasm of the Future Leaders continues to be harnessed for protecting the region's marine resources.

Based upon the project activities as listed in the original proposal, below is a full accounting of our work in furthering these goals.

1) The Pre-Summit Preparation Phase

a) Involving the Future Leaders:

Several youths were actively engaged in the pre-Summit preparation phase, including all of the planning sub-committee groups (Media and Public Relations, Budget and Fundraising, Participant Selection, Hospitality, Mentoring, Session Content, and Logistics). Their energy and fresh ideas were very helpful to our efforts to build a Summit that would engage and interest the youths.

b) Securing the Involvement of High Profile Conservation and Entertainment Celebrities as Motivators During the Coral Reef Youth Summit:

Prior to the Summit, we were able to attract key presenters with strong backgrounds in marine conservation and science. The preeminent speaker was Professor Jeremy Jackson, who gave the keynote address and interacted with the youth over the event. Dr. Jackson, a highly respected scientist at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, has inspired thousands of people to protect the ocean through groundbreaking studies and

lectures. Pastor Dexter Skepple of *Pass the Word* Ministries agreed to give a motivational speech at the beginning of the Summit. Other presenters included representatives from the U.S. and British Virgin Islands government agencies (B.V.I. Conservation and Fisheries Department, V.I. Waste Management Authority, V.I. Fish and Wildlife, the Coastal Zone Management Authority (CZM), and others), federal government agencies (U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. National Park Service), the University of the Virgin Islands, fishermen and tourism representatives, and others. The full list of speakers can be found in Appendix 1.

To help ensure the most effective planning possible, we put together a Summit Advisory Committee to help guide decisions, including selection criteria, media relations, logistics, and session content. Members of these committees included representatives from the CZM, University of the Virgin Islands, the Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service, and several youths. Other activities that were completed before the Summit included an intensive application process, preparing materials such as a workbook for participants, a media packet, and a Youth Summit web site. The committee members can be found in Appendix 2 and the Summit workbook can be found in Appendix 3.

Out of 65 applications, we chose 35 youths to participate in the Summit, basing our decision on participation at pre-Summit meetings, interest in environmental issues including previous participation in clubs or other activities, and interest in post-Summit activities. Two youth ambassadors from the state of Texas, sponsored by the Gulf of Mexico Foundation also attended, which brought the group total to 37. A full list of attendees is shown in Appendix 4.

2) The Five-Day Coral Reef Summit

a) Plenary and Working Group Sessions and b) Field Trips and Outdoor Sessions:
In October, 2007, Ocean Conservancy and our partners brought together 37 youth, ranging from 14 to 28 years old, to learn about the region's unique marine resources and how they can help protect them. Over five days, these participants experienced first-hand the challenges facing efforts to protect the waters of the Virgin Islands, engaging in an intense series of activities and lectures to increase their knowledge of problems facing management of their marine resources and ways to become more involved.

Specific activities included:

- A keynote presentation by one of the world's leading coral reef scientists, Jeremy Jackson, that covered the current state of the Caribbean's reefs and a message of hope that strong action can save the reefs;
- A field trip on the Atlantis submarine to see first-hand the current condition of the region's coral reefs;
- Hands-on water quality testing at the research station at Great Lameshur Bay on St. John; led by staff from USVI Department of Environmental Protection and BVI Conservation and Fisheries Department. Participants checked pH, salinity,

- depth, turbidity, and temperature, focusing on how to use water quality as a tool in environmental management;
- Field sessions that focused on three different aspects of ocean conservation: biological research methods, socio-economic research techniques including survey development, and water testing as mentioned above; and
 - Workshops and think tanks to brainstorm recommendations to government leaders and ways that they can contribute in their communities.

The participants were asked to keep a journal over those five days, noting their impressions, questions, and recommendations after each session. These notes were then used along with plenary discussions to formulate the list of recommendations to government representatives. The most powerful moment of the Summit came at the conclusion on the final night, when a group of Future Leaders presented an abbreviated report of these recommendations to USVI government representatives at the Youth Summit Dinner. Government representatives in attendance included: Elton Georges (British Virgin Islands (BVI) Deputy Governor), Janice Hodge (VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources), Barbara Peterson (St. Thomas/Water Island Administrator), Usie Raymond Richards (USVI Senate President), and Terrence Nelson (U.S.V.I. Senator). The response from this group was very positive; Barbara Peterson commented that, “The preservation of our coral reef ecosystems is a daunting task and the Ocean Conservancy Youth Summit has now added a new level of hope in its preservation.” Please see Appendix 5 for a full Summit agenda.

In addition, the event received both television and print media coverage including coverage in the *Daily News* and *St. Croix Source Online* newspapers, as well as the TV2 local television’s News program. Media clippings can be found in Appendix 6.

c. Comments from Summit Participants:

Based upon surveys conducted after the summit, participants rated how well they thought the event was run and how useful it was (all ratings are on a scale of 4.0):

- “Feel empowered to bring change” – 3.6.
- Greater conservation ethic and consciousness – 3.4.
- Interest in continuing a dialog on protecting marine resources – 3.7.
- Felt it was a good use of time – 3.9.

A sampling of comments from participants:

- “The socio-economic session had a positive impact on me as I learned there needs to be a balance between the people.”
- “The motivational speaker gave me confidence to be a leader.”
- “We discovered issues I didn’t know about.”
- “I learned different things I didn’t really know or think about before.”

A summary of the evaluations can be found in Appendix 7.

3) Post-Summit Follow-up

Following the Summit, we undertook a number of activities to encourage the Future Leaders to continue to learn about ocean issues and become involved in local efforts to protect marine resources. We worked with the participants to put together a toolkit that several used to give presentations in their communities. The participants also put together a page on the online networking site Facebook to maintain contact. Our staff also supported the efforts of participants to pursue further education on marine issues, writing letters of support and helping them to fill out applications. In addition, we worked to connect the Future Leaders with efforts to educate and protect the reefs, including advocating for a Marine Awareness Month and participating in coral reef events on St. Croix.

a. Tool Kit:

We put together a Youth Summit toolkit that assists participants in presenting their experience at the Youth Summit. The toolkit is in CD format and includes a PowerPoint presentation that can be tailored to the specific audience or needs of the presenter, photos taken during the Summit, lists of resource persons and their organizations, and a list of talking points that came out of the Summit. Additionally, we are distributing copies of the acclaimed *11th Hour* DVD which was shown during the Youth Summit. This documentary had a powerful impact on many of the youths, which they will be able to show to their families, schoolmates, youth groups, or communities.

b. Coral Reef Internet Forum for Youth

We set up a Future Leaders page for participants on Facebook, in which roughly 1/3 of participants registered and participated.

c. Reporting on the Coral Reef Youth Summit's Proceedings and Media Coverage:

After delays due to school breaks, we have completed the summit proceedings and are sending them today to government representatives. The proceedings, included in the Appendixs, were put together with input from participants and lay out a vision of ocean conservation in the territories. This report is the final deliverable of this grant and officially completes our work on the Youth Summit. Unfortunately, due to the closing of the V.I. office, we will not be conducting any further media outreach around this report.

d. Reconvening a ½ day Future Leaders' Follow-up Retreat:

We had a Retreat planned for earlier this fall, which had to be postponed and now due to the closing of the office, we are not able to convene a retreat for participants. We are talking to other organizations that helped to organize the Summit to explore opportunities to continue follow-up activities. While we had hoped to convene this retreat as a supplemental activity, we feel we have met the primary deliverables of the grant, which were to organize the Summit and report the findings to government representatives.

e. Assisting the Future Leaders with Post-Summit Activities Utilizing Acquired Knowledge and Skills, and Sharing Lessons Learned

The Summit provided participants with skills that have enabled them to go back into their communities and youth organizations and be leaders with a clear coral reef conservation message. We have surveyed all of the participants and the results show strongly that participants learned the current state of the waters of the USVI, as well as ways to become advocates for protecting their waters. Nick Drayton worked closely with several of the participants since the Summit, including one who was accepted at Tuskegee University's Marine Sciences Program, as well as a group in St. Croix that get together for regular meetings to learn about current ocean topics. Several participants also worked with the Delegate to Congress' office and Makeda Okolo on efforts to designate one month as Marine Awareness Month. And still others have participated in activities around the International Year of the Reef on St. Croix.

f. Presenting the Final Recommendations to Key Government Officials

Our last deliverable for this project is presenting the final recommendations to members of the U.S. and British Virgin Islands governments. This report, which can be found in Appendix 8, lays out the primary issues facing the territories, recommendations from the youth and Ocean Conservancy, and next steps. This report was sent today first to the Governors, Lieutenant Governors, and Deputy Governors of both territories, and the V.I. Delegate to Congress. We will also send copies over the next week to key government agency representatives, including the Department of Coastal Zone Management, Fish & Wildlife, and others, as well as all of the attendees of the final presentation. This report will form a basis for future efforts to improve marine resource management in both territories.

Post Summit mini-projects

The post-summit mini projects were to be funded through monies that were federally designated for economic development research purposes. For this project, our original intent was to motivate Summit participants to continue learning about natural resources and policy after the event in order to capitalize on the energy built up at the Summit in a timely way. Further, the projects were to be conducted by participants, perhaps by some of their peers as well, and paid for through "mini-grants" distributed to the youth as part of a formal application and award process.

It was apparent immediately following the Summit that this application and award process was going to take longer than we previously thought when submitting our proposal to NOAA, and at the same time, we had another project emerging in the U.S.V.I. that was a good fit with the original intent of the "mini-grants." Therefore, in March 2008, NOAA program officers for this grant project agreed that instead of "awarding mini-grants" to youth Summit participants for projects of their own design, the funds could instead be well applied to Ocean Conservancy's NOAA award #NA06NMF4630108, "Understanding Critical Elements of the Socio-Economic and Political Situation of St. Croix U.S.V.I., in Order to Develop a Campaign Strategy for

Greater Community and Political Support for the East End Marine Park.” For this project, surveys of tourists were needed to identify the socioeconomic impacts of tourism in the U.S.V.I., particularly the East End Marine Park. Funds for the mini-projects were shifted towards these surveys and the youth that conducted the surveys this fall, and the mini-projects are therefore no longer a part of the reporting for this Youth Summit award. Note that the survey work will be reported on under our other NOAA grant project #NA06NMF4630108.

Conclusion

Over the past year and a half, we have successfully built a group of future leaders that will participate in marine conservation in the Virgin Islands for years to come. While we did not accomplish everything we had hoped, we were able to meet our core deliverables and engage youth in every stage of the process, from pre-Summit planning to the event itself and maintained their involvement afterwards. The Summit itself was a major success, with five days of engaging activities and a well attended closing event. These future leaders were very positive in their comments on the Summit and many have gone on further educate themselves and participate in ocean-related activities. The final report from the Summit will provide a powerful wrap-up to the event, with recommendations for the future of ocean policy in the region.