

Paige Rothenberger and Susan Curtis

The St. Croix East End Marine Park: A Tool to Manage Submerged Lands in the U.S. Virgin Islands

Biography

Paige Rothenberger is currently the Marine Resource Ecologist for the Division of Coastal Zone Management within the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Ms. Rothenberger received her Bachelor of Science degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from the University of Arizona and her Master of Science degree in Environmental Science and Policy from George Mason University. She has been working in the field of natural resource management for over ten years. Her research interests include coral reef ecology and health with a particular emphasis on coral diseases.

Susan Curtis is a NOAA Coral Reef Management Fellow with the Virgin Islands Division of Coastal Zone Management. She attended graduate school at Arizona State University for Urban and Environmental Planning and has been working in community development and environmental management since 1997. She spent over three years working on sustainable natural resource projects in rural Guatemala and is currently developing an education and outreach program for the St. Croix East End Marine Park.

Abstract

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are marine conservation tools that can be used to achieve a variety of goals including protection of essential habitat, management of commercially important species, preservation of culturally important areas and reduction of user conflicts. An MPA can be designated as no access, no impact, or zoned for multiple uses. Within the U.S. Virgin Islands the St. Croix East End Marine Park (STXEEMP) is an example of a MPA being used to achieve the mission of the Division of Coastal Zone Management to protect, maintain, preserve, enhance and restore the overall quality of the environment in the coastal zone (V.I. Code Title 12, Section 904(h)). Envisioned as a first step in creating a system of territorial marine parks, the STXEEMP was created to "protect territorially significant marine resources, promote sustainability of marine ecosystems including coral reefs, seagrass beds, wildlife habitats and other resources and to conserve and preserve significant natural areas for the use and benefit of future generations" (V.I. Code Title 12, Chapter 1, Section 98). This 'shoreline park' encompasses an area of approximately 60 mi² and has been designed as a multiple use marine protected area. Park zones include no-take zones, recreation zones, a turtle wildlife zone and an open zone. The STXEEMP is a mechanism to employ three strategies for managing our submerged lands and marine and coastal resources: legislation and regulation, monitoring and research, and education and outreach. Draft rules and regulations have been developed for the park and will be distributed for public comment in the near future. Biological monitoring efforts are ongoing within the park, including benthic, invertebrate and reef fish assessments. An active education and outreach program exists and will be expanding to reach new audiences.