

# Revitalization of Guts as Urban Recreational Spaces in the U.S. Virgin Islands

## Basic Information

<b>Title:</b>	Revitalization of Guts as Urban Recreational Spaces in the U.S. Virgin Islands
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<b>Descriptors:</b>	
<b>Principal Investigators:</b>	Lloyd S. Gardner, Stevie Henry, Toni Thomas

## Publication

1. None as yet.

## **PROBLEM AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Watercourses in the U.S. Virgin Islands are important resources, providing ecological, recreational, economic, and community development services. Yet those watercourses, or guts as they are commonly called, are threatened by the impacts of development activity. The Virgin Islands Code protects watercourses through a prohibition on cutting of vegetation within 30ft. of the center of a natural watercourse, or 25ft. from the edge, whichever is greater. Despite the legal protection, guts continue to be degraded through clearing of vegetation, changing drainage patterns, pollution inputs, and physical alterations. These development impacts result in the impairment of coastal water quality, the degradation of gut resources, and reduction of the amenity value of such areas.

In addition to the provision of water for domestic, agricultural, and commercial purposes, streams and watercourses (guts) have traditionally been used for recreational purposes in the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition to the use by individuals, community groups conduct hikes to selected guts. Such hikes are used not only as a form of recreation, but also to share knowledge of natural and historical resources with school children, residents, and visitors.

Periodic studies have noted that the guts represent one of the few remaining areas where canopy forest can be found in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and which encompass potentially higher levels of biological diversity. Additionally, guts are increasingly being used for teaching, general recreation, research, and as a source of water for agriculture. However, there is no estimate of the demand for gut resources.

There is no program that translates the protection afforded by the law into actual protection strategies or that offers protection of guts through the development control process. For example, the wildlife strategy for the U.S. Virgin Islands, prepared by the Division of Fish and Wildlife-Department of Planning and Natural Resources (2005), does not include guts in the classification of wetlands, and does not offer any direction for protection of this ecosystem. A comprehensive program to promote awareness and protection of guts has not been formally adopted by community groups or the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the primary natural resource management agency in the Territory.

This project was designed on the assumption that greater attention would be given to streams/guts if they were promoted not only as environmental resources to be protected, but also as recreational spaces for residents and visitors.

The project attempted to determine whether guts and associated resources are still important in the development of the U.S. Virgin Islands, to ascertain the current policy and legal protections, to ascertain relevant programming by local institutions, and identify the main issues relevant to guts and associated resources. That information was then used to design a management framework within which a gut protection program can be established by the relevant natural resources management agencies and research institutions in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The specific objectives were listed as:

- (a) Determination of the state of knowledge concerning guts in the U.S. Virgin Islands;
- (b) Review of the current programming relevant to guts/streams;

- (c) Preparation of a draft policy and plan for gut management;
- (d) Endorsement of the draft gut management program by the relevant public sector and research institutions, and
- (e) Development of demonstration activities involving one site each on St. Croix and St. Thomas.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The project commenced on November 1, 2007, and the first two months were spent contacting individuals and institutions known to have an interest in the subject matter. A Project Fact Sheet was prepared during this initial period, and circulation of the Fact Sheet continued throughout the project.

A review of the literature (research papers, natural history notes from noted naturalists, project reports, laws, etc.) was used as the basis for determination of the past uses and benefits of guts to the U.S. Virgin Islands. The information gathered from the literature was supplemented by information compiled from the websites of the public sector regulatory agencies, as well as interviews with a number of public sector and civil society institutions. The information gathered through this process was used to prepare the report on the current state of knowledge concerning guts.

The project also included a consultation process that started in November 2007, and which continued for the duration of the project. An attempt was made early during this process to inform the wider community of the existence of the project, and to invite their participation therein. This was done by having two members of the project team participate in the Afternoon Mix, a one-hour radio show aired on WWVI 1000 AM. The session on guts was aired on December 11, 2007. The consultation process included interviews with personnel in public sector agencies and civil society institutions, as well as two “public” meetings.

Information was circulated on an ongoing basis by email to a list of persons identified as having interest in issues relevant to guts. Additionally, a Yahoo-based listserv was established to support communication between interested individuals during the project. A number of the project documents and relevant reports were posted on the website.

## **PRINCIPAL FINDINGS AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The main findings of the project are:

- (a) Guts continue to provide goods and services that are used in the social and economic development of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The increased use of gut resources for tourism and education will place greater pressure on those resources. This, coupled with the increased impacts from development activity, is likely to raise the focus on guts by the environmental professionals in the Territory.
- (b) There are a number of programs in several public and civil society institutions that have an impact on guts, directly and indirectly.
- (c) The policies relevant to guts need to be revised to address policy and legislative gaps, as well as ensure program integration across agencies.
- (d) There is no institutional framework that currently supports inter-agency planning and consultations on environmental management strategies, including guts. An appropriate institutional framework was recommended in the draft management plan.
- (e) The data to support decision making relative to guts is inadequate, especially as it relates to biodiversity functions of guts, impact of storm water management plans on guts, and changing drainage patterns in the watersheds.
- (f) A strategy for management of guts in the U.S. Virgin Islands is needed. Participants in the two public sessions agreed that such a management strategy should support the development of a more cohesive policy and management framework for watersheds management.