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Coral Bay Watershed Project Breaks Ground

[1]A public and private partnership made the Coral Bay Watershed Stabilization project a reality, several speakers said Wednesday at the groundbreaking ceremony for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)-funded project.

"It's the collaborative effort that makes these projects a success," said Samuel D. Rauch, NOAA's deputy assistant administrator for regulatory programs.

Gov. John deJongh Jr. gave kudos to the private sector for moving the project forward.

The ceremony was held at the Agriculture Department's Coral Bay facility with the groundbreaking a five-minute walk down the road at the site of one part of the project. A group of children from Guy Benjamin School in Coral Bay attended to assist with the groundbreaking. About 75 people were at the ceremony.

NOAA, using federal stimulus funds, provided a total of \$1.5 million through the V.I. Resource Conservation and Development Council to the Coral Bay Community Council to pay for watershed improvements in six areas of Coral Bay. Four projects will be done in the Johnny Horn Trail area, four in lower Bordeaux, six in the Coral Bay valley, two in Calabash Boom, one in Hansen Bay, and two in John's Folly. They are on both public and private land.

The projects provide jobs and help the environment.

"A healthy economy and a healthy environment go hand in hand," Rauch said, estimating the number of jobs generated at 25.

The project includes road paving, catch basins and other efforts to keep the dirt from running downhill into Coral Bay.

"It will visibly reduce the muddy plum of storm water running into beautiful blue Coral Bay. Water doesn't care whether it's public or private land. It's heading for the ocean," Coral Bay Community Council President Sharon Coldren said.

Rauch put the reduction in sediment going into Coral Bay at 130 tons per year.

The project involves numerous government agencies. Public Works Commissioner Darryl Smalls said the project will help the government develop "best practices" that can be used throughout the territory.

"St. John is the leader," he said.

Agriculture Commissioner Louis Petersen said his department will benefit because a water-retention pond constructed as part of the project will be used to irrigate plants. Housing Parks and Recreation Commissioner St. Claire N. Williams said his department has a five-acre plot in Coral Bay that will be used as a staging area for the projects.

Coral Bay Community Council competed against 114 other applicants. The organization was one of 50 that succeeded in getting grants.



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