



USDA Forest Service
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MEDIA RELEASE

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Coming this spring—first inventory of US Virgin Islands’ forests

(St. John, VI)... Starting in June, the USDA Forest Service will begin an inventory of the forests of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John. These surveys complete a four-year effort to measure the public and private forest land of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. Led by Thomas Brandeis of the Southern Research Station’s Forest Inventory and Analysis program, the work will be done by an expert team of biological scientists in collaboration with the International Institute of Tropical Forestry (IITF) and the Puerto Rican Conservation Foundation. Information from the inventory will be useful for assessing the sustainability of ecosystem management practices, evaluating wildlife habitat, and supporting forest planning and decisionmaking.

“We’re all very excited about this inventory” said Dr. Lawrence W. Lewis, Comissioner of Agriculture for the US Virgin Islands. “Although land managers can see what is happening on the ground on a daily basis, these surveys will show us what is going on relevant to change and trends over time.”

The Virgin Island’s inventory is expected to take five months, followed by remeasurements every five years to track changes in forest cover, land use patterns, biological diversity, and hurricane damage and recovery. It is part of a 75-year Federal effort to collect, analyze, and report information on the status and trends of America’s forests: how much forest exists, where it exists, who owns it, and how it is changing, as well as how the trees and other forest vegetation are growing and how much has died or been removed in recent years.

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One add--- First inventory of US Virgin Islands' forests

“Our goal is to help residents, legislators, and agencies understand the uniqueness of island ecosystems and the significant ecological changes that they have been experiencing recently.” said Brandeis. “Reports on forest condition will be most useful in crystallizing action because they will bring together information on the current situation and recent trends and point out what the future will be like if the trends are allowed to continue unchanged. With better information, resource managers can take steps to reinforce desirable trends and mitigate undesirable trends.”

After the forest surveys are completed, the information will be released in a report published by the Southern Research Station. To order a free copy, contact the Station distribution center (828-257-4830, pubrequest@srs.fs.usda.gov). The information will also be available for downloading from the Forest Inventory and Analysis Website (<http://srsfia2.fs.fed.us/>).

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