



Land & Water Regulations and Trends

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Overview

The types of land and water uses allowed and where they occur influence economic, environmental, and social aspects of life in the Territory. Therefore, in the CLWUP, land and water use policies provide guidance and direction for all other aspects of the plan.

The USVI uses several tools to manage land development and coastal water use, most notably zoning. Zoning regulates where a particular use can happen, its placement within a parcel, and performance standards that ensure development meets community objectives around environmental quality and other impacts. Typically, zoning divides the land and waterfront into “districts,” and then each district will have a list of “allowable uses” with standards for size, drainage, parking, and other development features. Zoning is often developed consistent with a comprehensive plan that sets a vision for future development.

For many years, zoning has existed for the USVI without a comprehensive plan. This situation can create a wide range of damaging results, including but not limited to:

- Developing in areas where existing roads and utilities cannot support the development.
- Developing in ways that are damaging to habitat and natural resources.
- Creating land use conflicts that do not have an overarching policy framework to guide resolution.
- Creating unsafe conditions by exacerbating flooding, traffic, or other public safety concerns.

The CLWUP will be the basis for updating the way land development and coastal water use are reviewed and permitted in the USVI, with a goal of truly balancing development needs with conserving natural resources, respecting local heritage, providing access to housing, and providing services to residents and businesses.

History of USVI Land Use Regulations

With regard to land use policy, the USVI is not starting from scratch. There have been many good plans and policies drafted over many decades, some adopted and others not, that served to inform this CLWUP. Significant plans have been prepared for various agencies and departments of the Territorial Government since the United States purchased the islands from Denmark in 1917. Below is a brief, but important, timeline of land use plans and policies since World War II that provides context for the CLWUP.

Baranano Plan – 1954

- Predated the Territory's first development surge of the 1960s.
- Recommended actions to promote greater environmental protection and create infrastructure essential to support the Territory's economic development.
- Proposed the first comprehensive zoning plan.
- Approved by the Legislature, but very few of the Plan's recommendations were implemented.

General Physical Plan – 1964

- Developed by the Virgin Islands Planning Board (established in 1950).

- Made detailed land use recommendations and long-term policy guidelines based on population projections and land use characteristics.
- Served as the foundation for zoning plans that, in turn, provided the basis for the 1972 Zoning Law.
- Never submitted for legislative approval but was very influential in shaping land use decisions.

Halprin Plan – 1968

- Created in response to the rapid pace of development in the 1960s, moving from the traditional town centers (Charlotte Amalie, Christiansted, etc.) to the countryside.
- Explored conservation and preservation issues and the negative side-effects of growth.
- Called for growth limits and efforts to restrict suburban-style development in the rural countryside.
- Helped establish the local historic preservation program.
- Articulated environmental concerns that were later explored in the Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Program.
- Created political controversy and was never completed or presented to the Legislature.

Act 2774 – 1970

- This Act states: "*The Government of the Virgin Islands has a positive interest in the establishment of a planning process and in the preparation and the maintenance of a long-term comprehensive plan for the physical, social, and economic development of the Virgin Islands which can serve for all departments and agencies.*"

Zoning Law – 1972

- Provided a revised Zoning Law, prepared by The Virgin Islands Planning Office (now known as the Department of Planning and Natural Resources or DPNR).
- Reflected traditional U.S. mainland suburban-style ordinances aimed at accommodating low-density development outside of traditional town centers.
- Allowed for cisterns to substitute for potable water service in more remote areas that were just beginning to develop.

Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Act – 1978

- Defined and delineated the Territory's coastal zone.
- Established permissible land and water uses, a land and water use plan within the coastal zone, and a set of policies to administer the program.
- Employed a two-tiered concept which applied "major project review" only to narrowly defined coastal areas. Upland development operated under a different set of policies, often without adequate consideration of environmental impact.

Virgin Islands Comprehensive Policy Plan – 1983-1991

- Provided goals, objectives, and strategies for government action on a wide range of issues, such as land use, housing, economic development, and cultural resources.
- Established the *Guidelines for the Development of a Long-Range Comprehensive Plan for the United States Virgin Islands*, which can inform the comprehensive land and water use plan.

Governor's Reorganization and Consolidation Act – 1987

- Mandated the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) to prepare, and upon legislative approval, issue and continually revise a long-range comprehensive plan for the physical, social, and economic development of the USVI as stated in Act 2774 (1970).

Virgin Islands Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan – 2004

- Prepared by the Division of Comprehensive and Coastal Zone Planning of DPNR in consultation with Strategic Planning Group of Jacksonville, Florida.
- Intended to meet the longstanding mandate for a land and water use plan.
- Developed a new, unified process for planning and zoning and established preferred development scenarios for each of the three main islands.
- Never received legislative approval.

Virgin Islands Development Law – 2014

- Prepared by the Center for Government Services, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and Duncan Associates, Chicago, Illinois, for DPNR, this draft legislation was the culmination of many years of study and analysis.
- Intended to implement the *Guidelines for the Development of a Long-Range Comprehensive Plan*, namely to "[a]chieve a quality living environment through a well-planned mix of compatible land and water uses, while preserving the integrity of the natural environment."
- Intended to establish a unified regulatory zoning framework for both land and water, with seven land-based districts and five water-based districts.
- Never adopted by the Legislature.

These past planning efforts and laws will all inform the current effort to adopt a CLWUP, as much of this past work remains relevant today.

The USVI has experienced significant development pressures since the enactment of Act 2774 in 1970. While the population has declined in recent years, development pressure has not. By many documented measures, the last 50+ years have seen a gradual degradation of the quality of life of the citizens of the Territory. Many interrelated issues have created problems that will require complex solutions. For example:

- Increased traffic congestion
- Limited extent of public utilities such as water and sewer
- Rising cost of housing, food, and other living expenses
- Rapid development of land, coastal areas, and beaches, associated with a significant loss of environmentally sensitive areas and open space
- Degradation of water quality

The CLWUP can truly assist in guiding government and, ultimately, all residents, in balancing development pressures with the host of social, economic, and environmental impacts that usually result from rapid growth. Land development, conservation of natural resources, and a celebration of local heritage can and must go hand in hand.

USVI Land and Water Use Law and Regulations Today

Zoning

Zoning impacts everything that can happen on properties all over the Territory. Most places throughout the United States, including the USVI, use zoning to regulate the use of land within their borders. Zoning is aided by a detailed Zoning Map, which divides the Territory into “districts” or “zones.” For example, the USVI has numerous “residential zones,” where the primary uses are homes, and “business zones,” where the primary uses are shops, restaurants, and other services. See **Maps 2.1-2.3** for the Territory’s current zoning.

How does zoning impact me?

In general, zoning spells out what can be developed in each district, what it looks like, and what permits are required. It impacts different people in different ways. Some examples include:

- **Residents and Homeowners:** Zoning limits how a property can be used in residential zoning districts. For instance, zoning may prohibit the operation of a business or the construction of an apartment building in a single-family residential zone.
- **Business Owners:** Zoning determines where you can locate your business and how much parking you need. Zoning can also regulate how large your signs can be and where they can be placed.
- **Developers:** Zoning determines the size and shape of new development and where it can be located. For example, the number of homes that can be built within a subdivision is determined, in large part, by zoning.
- **Design and Construction Professionals:** Zoning often contains rules related to landscaping, parking, lighting, and building design, as well as the size and shape of new development.

The USVI’s zoning law was adopted in 1972 and some sections of the zoning law have been updated since it was first adopted. For example, the Table of Permitted Uses and Development Provisions were amended multiple times since 1972. The subdivision regulations (see inset), first adopted in 1961, have also been amended several times. Much of the guidance on subdivision regulation is not in the law itself; rather it is provided in the *Subdivider’s Handbook*, a guidance document published in 1985.

Subdivision Regulations

Regulations for subdivisions usually act as a companion to zoning. These companion regulations apply when new lots and/or new public streets are proposed, providing standards for street design, access, and utilities.

Zoning and subdivision regulations are the primary tools local governments have available to implement long-range comprehensive land use plans and policies. For many years, various groups, organizations, and individuals have attested that the current zoning does not necessarily address many of the environmental, housing, and economic issues set forth by other studies or agencies. But in the absence of a long-range plan, these regulatory documents are the only formally adopted policies governing land

use development and review procedures. As noted above, neither the last draft CLWUP from 2004 nor the accompanying development law (which included zoning revisions for both land and water) were adopted by the Legislature. While there has been disagreement over the best way to reform the USVI's zoning, there seems to be general agreement among DPNR staff, elected and community leaders, developers, environmental groups, and others that the 1972 zoning law is deficient and needs to be revised shortly after the CLWUP is adopted.

Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Program

The intent of the CZM Program is to treat coastlines as unique places where conservation and special types of development should have priority. It seeks to achieve balance where there is competition among goals, such as where increasing coastal access competes with resource protection, where economic development conflicts with conservation, where urban expansion competes with the retention of natural areas, or where short-term economic gains result in the loss of long-term economic benefits. While the federal Endangered Species Act helped define and protect critical habitat in the USVI, the CZM program was the first local program in the USVI to introduce environmental protection standards into the land use regulatory system.

CZM adds a layer of authority over land in the coastal zone to address important issues which affect the coastal zone, freshwater, and nearshore marine resources that are not otherwise addressed in zoning and the land development regulatory process. However, this additional review of development only applies to a thin strip of coastal land (see **Maps 2.1-2.3**); the majority of the Territory's land area remains without an up-to-date land use map to guide rezoning and development decisions. Development that occurs immediately along an island's perimeter will affect coastal resources. Equally, inland areas beyond the present CZM boundaries also have an impact on these resources. This is especially true in the Territory where the physical dimensions of the islands are relatively small, and there are considerable amounts of steep terrain. For example, a development that might include buildings and roadways on a steep slope inland can undermine the stability of the land. This instability can create significant erosion and runoff problems that carry soil and other debris into nearby gulches and ultimately to the harbors and bays. This, in turn, could have disastrous consequences for reefs, seagrass beds, and water quality. The inland site, however, is outside the domain of CZM, and at the present time inland stormwater controls do not adequately address these issues.

For many years, the Territory has explored options to address these concerns, including regulatory reform that would create a single system for land use review and permitting, allowing Territory staff to treat land and water issues holistically.

Areas of Particular Concern and Other Management Tools

Designating Areas of Particular Concern (APC) is another tool the Territory has for land and water use protection. APCs are geographical areas that are environmentally sensitive or provide significant environmental value. There are special requirements and considerations for any development that occurs within an APC, and some APCs are protected from development altogether. For example, the St. Croix East End Marine Park, established in 2003, protects coral reefs, sea grass beds, wildlife habitat, and other resources through conservation and preservation of significant natural areas for the use and benefit of future generations. It is the Territory's first territorial marine park that is also designated and

managed as a [marine protected area \(MPA\)](#). Similarly, the St. Thomas East End Reserves (STEER) has specific land and submerged land protections, coordinated by a management plan adopted in 2011.

Several of the APCs with conservation distinctions guided the formation of the territorial MPAs in the U.S. Virgin Islands. MPAs are defined as areas that have been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protections for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein. Like APCs, some MPAs have enforcement and management plans with restrictions, while others do not. MPAs in the U.S. Virgin Islands include national monuments and national parks, territorial marine parks, marine sanctuaries, wildlife reserves, fishery closure areas, marine conservation districts, and many APCs. Many marine areas have multiple designations, particularly where APCs overlap with other MPA designations. For example, the Salt River Bay area is designated as the Salt River Bay Area of Particular Concern and Area of Preservation and Restoration, Salt River Bay Marine Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary, and Salt River National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve.

For more information and maps on wildlife reserves, marine reserves, and parks, please see the Natural Resources baseline.

Water Use Plans

The USVI is currently working to update its Water Use Plan for Mooring and Anchoring. This is one of the key documents the Territory uses to plan for and coordinate different water uses to avoid or minimize conflicts. The goal of the plan is to properly prepare for the future of the USVI's marine space and meet social, economic, and environmental objectives that support economic growth, increase resiliency, and balance multiple and competing uses. The plan will identify and evaluate the suitability of proposed mooring and anchoring area designations in seven bays across St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John, and Water Island through individual Water Use Plans (WUP).

The proposed WUPs will each be tailored to the needs and conditions of the seven planning areas and include two main components: (1) delineated mooring and anchoring areas; and (2) stipulations within those areas, including carrying capacity and vessel requirements. Some WUPs will include additional components, such as areas designated for non-boating uses, navigation channels, and supporting infrastructure (e.g., docks, pump out stations). The plan will also include territory-wide regulations regarding minimum standards for mooring installation and maintenance, and mooring ball coloring and labeling according to use type. In addition, the USVI intends to expand the scope of the WUPs to include aquaculture, energy, boating access, fishing access, etc.

Local Land and Water Use Regulatory Process

The regulatory process is largely set in the Virgin Island Code, Title 29: Public Planning and Development, Chapter 3. Virgin Islands Zoning and Subdivision Law. Because of the number of areas under federal jurisdiction throughout the territory, federal permitting, for example through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), is also important, but is not addressed here.

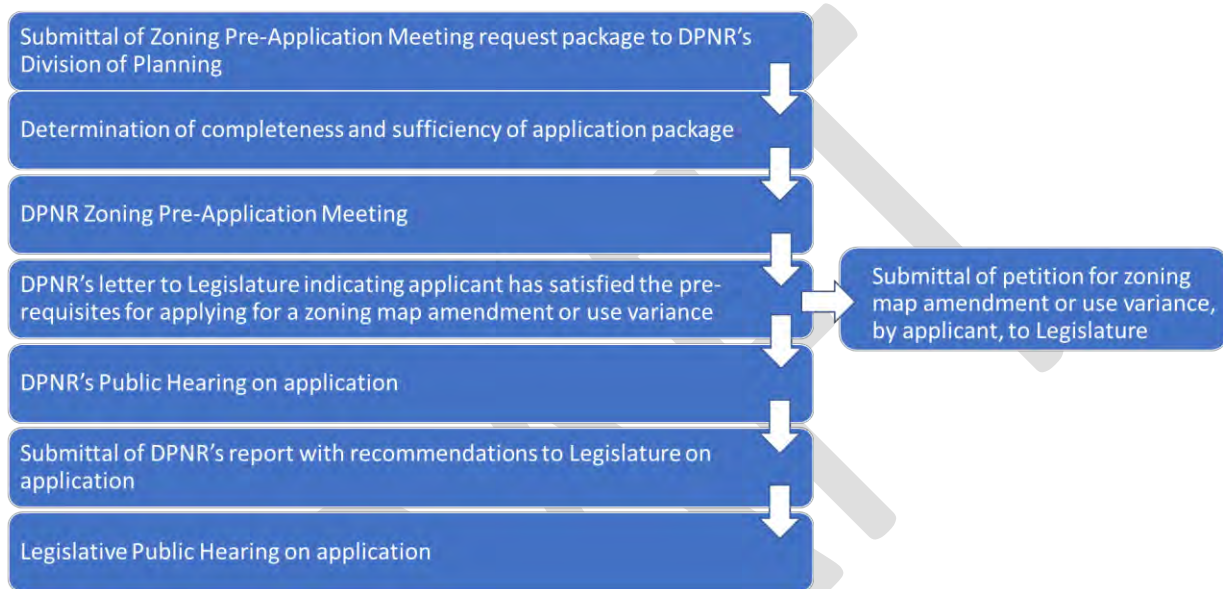
Land and Water Use Decision Making

DPNR is the primary Territorial agency in charge of land and water use. The Division of Comprehensive and Coastal Zone Planning (also referred to as the Division of Planning) within DPNR may recommend changes to zoning and other land use law, which are considered by the Legislature. It is the review body for special permits related to Group Dwellings and Planned Areas Developments (land developed as a

unit under single ownership or control, which includes two or more principal buildings, and which is at least five acres in area), as well as zoning amendments and the subdivision process. DPNR is required to adopt procedural rules and recommendations, such as the *Subdivider's Handbook*, to help guide applicants. Ultimately, the USVI Legislature is the final approval authority for zoning amendments and variances.

Below is the typical procedure for a zoning map amendment.

Procedure for all Zoning Map Amendment Proposals



Development Permitting Process

Division of Permits

DPNR's Division of Permits provides three services, which include Administrative, Plan Review, and Inspections. The primary responsibilities of the Division of Permits are to enforce and regulate the local and national building codes and regulations for Tier 2. The Division of Permits reviews and issues various types of permits, including, but not limited to: building, plumbing, electrical, demolition, flood, renewable energy, wireless facilities/wireless support, mechanical and occupancy for the construction of new or existing residential, commercial or any other type of structure that will be occupied or used by an individual, family or group. The division inspects all construction activity throughout the Territory to ensure minimum local and national building code compliance. It also conducts public outreach programs and activities to educate building and construction professionals and the community at large about the building codes.

Division of Coastal Zone Management

The Division of Coastal Zone Management manages a variety of programs covering planning, permitting, and the management and protection of natural resources in the CZM area (Tier 1), including submerged lands. Permitting in the CZM includes major and minor land and water permits, coral mitigation, waivers for repair and maintenance, etc.

Environmental Protection Division

The Division of Environmental Protection is a regulatory body within DPNR. In collaboration with various other DPNR divisions, the Division of Environmental Protection is entrusted with the responsibility for environmental protections and with the enforcement of USVI environmental laws and regulations and certain national environmental laws. Its mission is to protect human health and preserve the quality of the USVI's air, land, and water resources for use and enjoyment today and in the future. Depending on the scope and scale of development, projects may need review from this division for issues such as brownfields redevelopment, groundwater protection, underground storage tanks, stormwater management, and water pollution/quality.

Division of Fish and Wildlife

The DPNR Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) preserves, protects, restores, and manages the fish and wildlife resources of the Virgin Islands for ecological conservation and sustainable use by the community. The Division of Fish and Wildlife consists of three Bureaus; The Bureau of Environmental Education provides access and knowledge to the public, the Bureau of Fisheries aids recreational and commercial fishers, and the Bureau of Wildlife coordinates wildlife issues and populations. DFW provides permits for, among other things, work and activities that may impact endangered, threatened and indigenous fish, wildlife, and plants of the Virgin Islands.

State Historic Preservation Offices (VISHPO)

The State Historic Preservation Office, (VISHPO), is a division within DPNR. VISHPO's mission is to preserve the reminders of the territory's architectural and archaeological heritage by increasing awareness and appreciation of the USVI's unique history. Programs include the Statewide Historic Resources Survey, the Virgin Islands Registry of Historic Buildings, Sites and Places, the National Register of Historic Places, the federal historic rehabilitation tax credit program, the Certified Local Government program, the state historic preservation grants program, state and federal environmental review, and a wide range of technical assistance. VISHPO provides permits for, among other things, work and activities that may impact historic and architectural control districts.

General Governance Structure in the USVI

The Government of the United States Virgin Islands consists of three co-equal branches of Government: the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches.

Executive Branch. The executive power of the USVI is vested in the Governor who, together with the Lieutenant Governor, is elected by voters for a four-year term. The Governor is limited to two consecutive terms. The Department of Planning and Natural Resources and other government agencies reside in the Executive Branch along with their appointed Commissioners and Directors.

Legislative Branch. The legislative power of the USVI is vested in a unicameral legislature consisting of 15 senators: seven from St. Croix, seven from St. Thomas, and one Senator-at-Large who must be a resident of St. John. Senatorial elections are held every two years.

Judicial Branch. The judicial power of the USVI is vested in the District Court of the Virgin Islands, the Supreme Court, and the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands.

Delegate to Congress. The USVI are represented in the United States House of Representatives by a non-voting delegate elected by voters. The delegate serves a two-year term and can sit and vote in committee.

Land Cover Trends

Land is a finite resource and is especially limited in a place like the USVI where the ocean provides such a clear boundary for the resource and steep slopes create significant development challenges on St. Thomas and St. John. With very little land remaining that is “suitable” for development, competition and market pressures are high. Development over time has changed the landscapes on all three of the major islands dramatically, creating a mix of areas with different visual identities that have emerged and changed rapidly in recent decades.

Note: The consultant team is in the process of gathering both more recent and more historic data on land use and land cover. The analysis below is based on the information and data we have to date and will be updated as additional data is analyzed.

While data on land cover trends for the USVI are limited, availability is improving over time. Currently, the most recent land cover data, from 2012, is reported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Coastal Management. Data available prior to 2012 includes 2002 data for St. Croix, 2003 for St. Thomas, and 2005 for St. John.¹ While development in the USVI has slowed compared to the rapid development during the second half of the 20th century, loss of forests and other natural lands to development continues to be a significant concern. Even in the relatively brief span of seven to ten years represented by NOAA’s land cover data, this trend is visible – particularly on St. Croix and St. Thomas. See **Maps 3.1-3.3** to see what previously undeveloped lands have been developed

¹ NOAA Office for Coastal Management, 2022. C-CAP Land Cover, United States Virgin Islands, St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas, 2002, 2003, 2005, and 2012. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/inport/item/47841>

during these time periods and what forest lands have been lost, either to development or to other types of natural landscapes (e.g. shrublands).

UNDEVELOPED TO DEVELOPED

Island	Undeveloped to Developed (Acres)
St. Croix 2002-2012	1,128.3
St. Thomas 2003 - 2012	325.4
St. John 2005 - 2012	61.9

As seen in the table above, St. Croix experienced the most conversion of land from undeveloped to developed over this time. Those 1,128 acres of development represent approximately 2.1% of the island’s land area in just ten years. New development on St. Thomas over the nine-year period amounts to approximately 1.6% of the island’s land area. While development on St. John has been less by comparison (approximately 0.5% of the island’s land area), the data represents a shorter period of time and approximately 2/3 of St. John is National Park Service land. When National Park Service land is removed from calculations, the development over this seven-year period represents approximately 1.5% of St. John’s remaining land area.

FOREST LANDCOVER CHANGE

Island	Forested to Other Natural Landscape (Acres)	Forested to Developed (Acres)	Total Forest Change (Acres)
St. Croix 2002-2012	181.48	177.64	359.13
St. Thomas 2003 - 2012	63.40	145.70	209.11
St. John 2005 - 2012	15.95	44.67	60.62

The loss of forestlands is important to note over these time periods. Of the new development on St. John over this time period, approximately 72% was built on formerly forested lands. The same is true for approximately 45% of the new development on St. Thomas and 15% of the development of St. Croix. Forestlands are critical for stabilizing hillsides, minimizing erosion, reducing heat, providing habitat, retaining water quality, and cleaning the air.

Rural Lands and Agriculture

As development has increased, so has the loss of active farms and rural lands. Much of the remaining undeveloped or lightly developed rural lands today on St. Thomas and St. John are too steep and mountainous to build on or they are preserved as National Park Service or other park lands. St. Croix, with a flatter topography, has maintained more rural areas with active farmland. The Territory's new Agriculture Plan, completed in 2021, sets goals to get more people excited and prepared to work in the agricultural sector, ensure land is available for agricultural production, and bolster the support network to get produce processed and to market, both locally and off island.

Suburban Expansion and Services

The USVI experienced significant suburban development in the latter half of the 20th century. This rapid development partly led to the adoption of zoning in 1972. That zoning was modeled on mainland suburban zoning, separating uses, and encouraging the spread of automobile-oriented residential subdivisions and shopping centers. On the one hand, these subdivisions provided important housing opportunities for many families and commercial development brought better access to groceries, shops, and other services. However, it also meant the loss of many forests and farmlands, and significantly increased the population's reliance on private automobiles, straining the territory's road network and other infrastructure. These strains persist to this day. Many subdivisions remain unserved by public water and sewer, and solid waste management is a consistently difficult service to provide. Also, as housing becomes more expensive across the Territory, the cost of single-family homes in the suburbs is becoming increasingly out of reach for the average resident.

Urban

Urban areas in the USVI include the traditional "town" settlements of greater Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas, and Christiansted and Frederiksted on St. Croix. They also include major industrial and transportation resources, such as the Cyril King and Henry E. Rohlsen Airports, the areas around the former oil refinery on St. Croix, and the ports. Smaller "town center" areas like Red Hook, St. Thomas and Cruz Bay, St. John, while not traditionally urban, are certainly distinct from the Territory's rural and suburban areas. Regardless of size, it is often feasible to walk in these urban areas to get to places such as government buildings, schools, shops, restaurants, and playgrounds, rather than use a car. There are also concentrations of historic buildings and homes that help define the Territory's culture. Many of the Territory's urban spaces are disinvested in for a variety of reasons, including lack of personal wealth to

The Intersection of Tourism and Land and Water Use

As discussed in the Economic Development section, tourism is a significant part of the Territory's economy and provides both critical economic support but also significant strain to the local environment, infrastructure, and heritage. There is no question that cruise ships, hotels, resorts, and tourist-oriented shops and restaurants provide jobs and other economic benefits. But from a land and water use perspective, there is a continual balance between how much and which spaces are allowed for tourism development versus what is reserved for local use. Where should hotels and resorts be allowed? How much cruise ship capacity should be pursued? What waters should be used for private recreation, public recreation, and business/industry? Where should short term rental of private homes be allowed? And who benefits from these decisions? These are perennial and sometimes contentious questions for the USVI, and there are tradeoffs with every approach.

reinvest in properties, properties stuck in probate, lack of government assistance for those who need it most, and inadequate private bank financing.

Sensitive Lands

As development has increased, so has the loss of forestland, critical habitat, and coastal resources (see the Natural Resources section). While much land in the USVI is preserved as park lands, reserves or sanctuaries, many sensitive areas remain unprotected. The Territory has made it a priority to conserve more sensitive environmental lands and forests. However, as discussed above, current land use regulations limit the Territory's ability to regulate land outside the coastal management zone. The Territory has limited tools to ensure that sensitive environmental areas are developed sustainably, even where land is not permanently conserved or protected. However, the Territory does have the ability to adopt new tools to better balance nature with development. For more information on tools to protect sensitive lands, please see the Natural Resources baseline.

St. John and National Park Service Land

It is important to note that approximately 2/3 of the land area on St. John is owned and managed by the National Park Service. While this is arguably a positive thing for the natural environment and certainly an attractor for tourists, it can make it difficult for residents to find land to build the community infrastructure they need to thrive, such as schools and other public facilities and gathering places. It will be important to maintain a constant dialogue with the National Park Service about ways to share federal lands or otherwise use them to help support the needs of year-round residents.

Variations and Zoning Amendments

One unfortunate outcome of having outdated zoning and the lack of a regulatory land use plan is that variances and amendments are frequently needed to do what property owners and the Territory would like to do. Variances or zoning amendments are often needed for many positive changes such as reinvesting in historic properties, mixing residential and commercial uses in the same building, or providing flexibility for adding spaces to homes as family size and age shifts over time. The added time and money this requires can be a barrier to such changes. Conversely, because variances and amendments have become so common, sometimes they get approved counter to good planning, allowing uses in places that might be incompatible with their neighbors or with the environment. Further complicating this matter is that the USVI Legislature makes final decisions on such land use issues, rather than DPNR staff or a body of local representation. The CLWUP and any new land use regulations developed to support the plan should be designed to promote the type of development the Territory wants, provide more scrutiny for development that may negatively impact neighbors and the environment, and limit the need for variances and zoning amendments.

Water Use Trends

The Territory regulates uses that are water-dependent, both in the water and on land needed to access these uses. For example, almost all public boating access resources in the territory are planned and managed by DFW, often working closely with the Department of Public Works. There are many competing interests for coastal and water use, and it is extremely important to plan for these uses in order to avoid conflict. It is a very challenging task to balance the needs and rights of the public versus the private development rights of individual landowners and water users. Identifying the specific competing interests in water use trends that are the most harmful to natural resources and public use is critical for identifying the right water use tools to implement in this plan.

Public Recreation

Residents of the USVI have a strong cultural connection to the islands' coast and waters. It is important to identify areas that will remain publicly available for swimming, recreational fishing and boating, or simply walking and playing. It is also important that these areas are planned in a way that they are easily and safely accessible. A boating access strategic plan is being developed by DFW, and DPNR manages various programs and enforces regulations for several marine protection statutes, such as the Clean Vessel Act, to make sure recreational waters remain clean.

Private Recreation & Tourism

As noted above (see the call out box for The Intersection of Tourism and Land and Water Use), tourism is likely to remain a significant portion of the Territory's economy. Consequently, it is important that space be made available for waterfront resorts, private marinas and docks, and other such functions. However, it is even more important that these areas be planned carefully so that roadways, utilities, and other infrastructure can accommodate uses and not overwhelm residential areas or cause undo environmental harm.

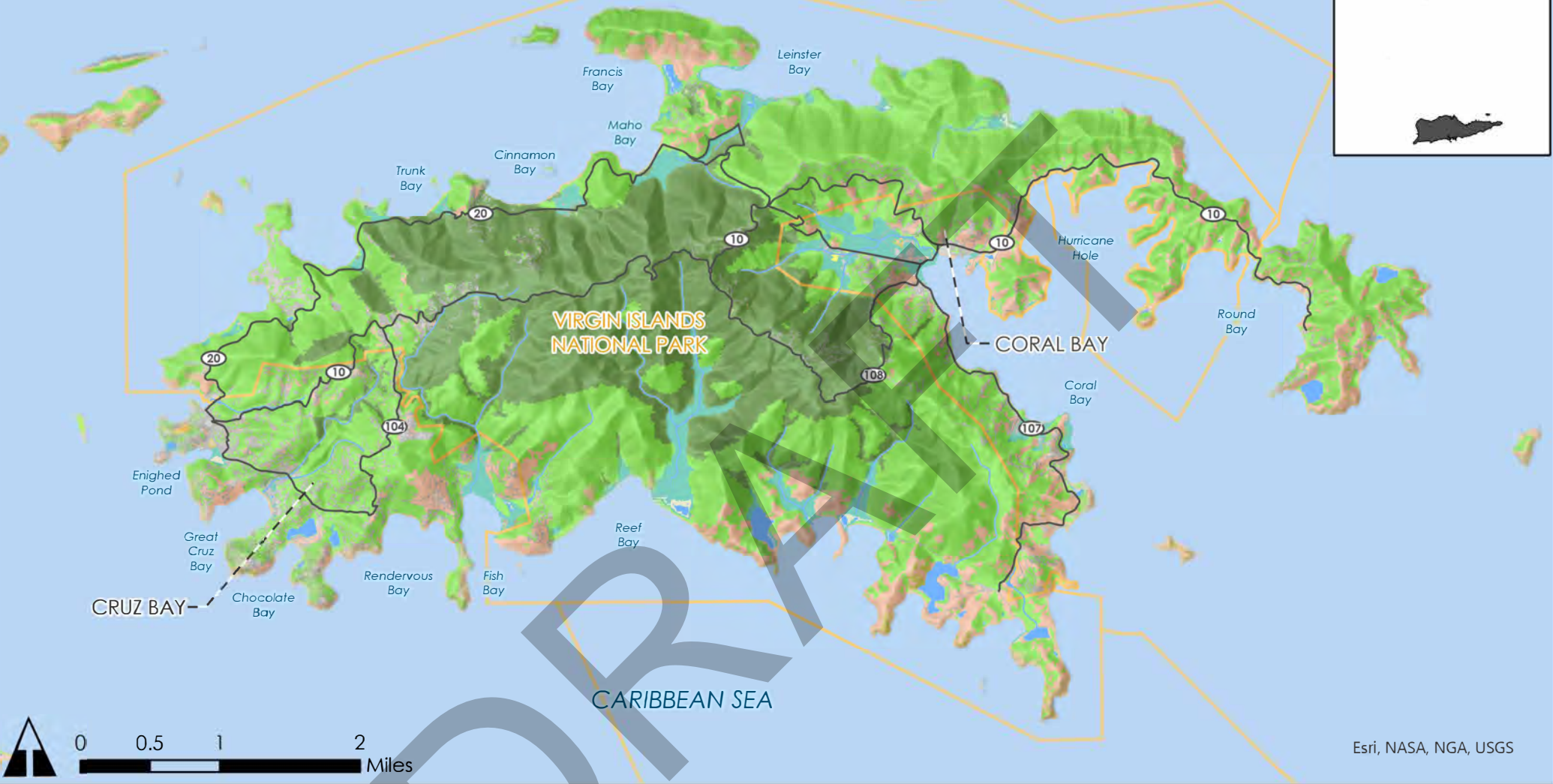
Fishing & Industry

Coastal waters also play an important role in the Territory's economy for commercial fishing, shipping, boat building, and other water-dependent industries. While these activities are important for the economy, they can impact water quality and coastal and watershed habitats if not regulated and monitored. Regulations for use of water for fishing and industry can set requirements for environmental sustainability while still allowing such businesses to thrive.

Conservation

The USVI has a long history of conserving marine areas, particularly through the designation of APCs and MPAs, including fishery closure areas and marine conservation districts. It is important that these designated areas have regularly updated comprehensive management plans that are actively implemented and enforced.

U.S. Virgin Islands Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan
Map 1.1



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS

Legend

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| Surface Water Bodies | Land Cover (2012) | Developed, Open Space | Wetland |
| Guts | Barren Land | Evergreen Forest | |
| Major Roads | Cultivated Crops | Grassland/Herbaceous | |
| National Park Service Land | Deciduous Forest | Scrub/Shrub | |
| | Developed, High Intensity | Unconsolidated Shore | |

Land Cover (2012) - St. John



Date: 4/24/2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, USDA Forest Service
 Note: This map is for informational purposes only and is not suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes.

U.S. Virgin Islands Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan



Map 1.2



Legend

Surface Water Bodies	Land Cover (2012)	Evergreen Forest
Guts	Barren Land	Grassland/Herbaceous
Major Roads	Deciduous Forest	Pasture/Hay
National Park Service Land	Developed, High Intensity	Scrub/Shrub
	Developed, Open Space	Unconsolidated Shore
		Wetland

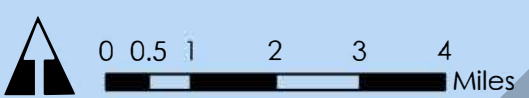
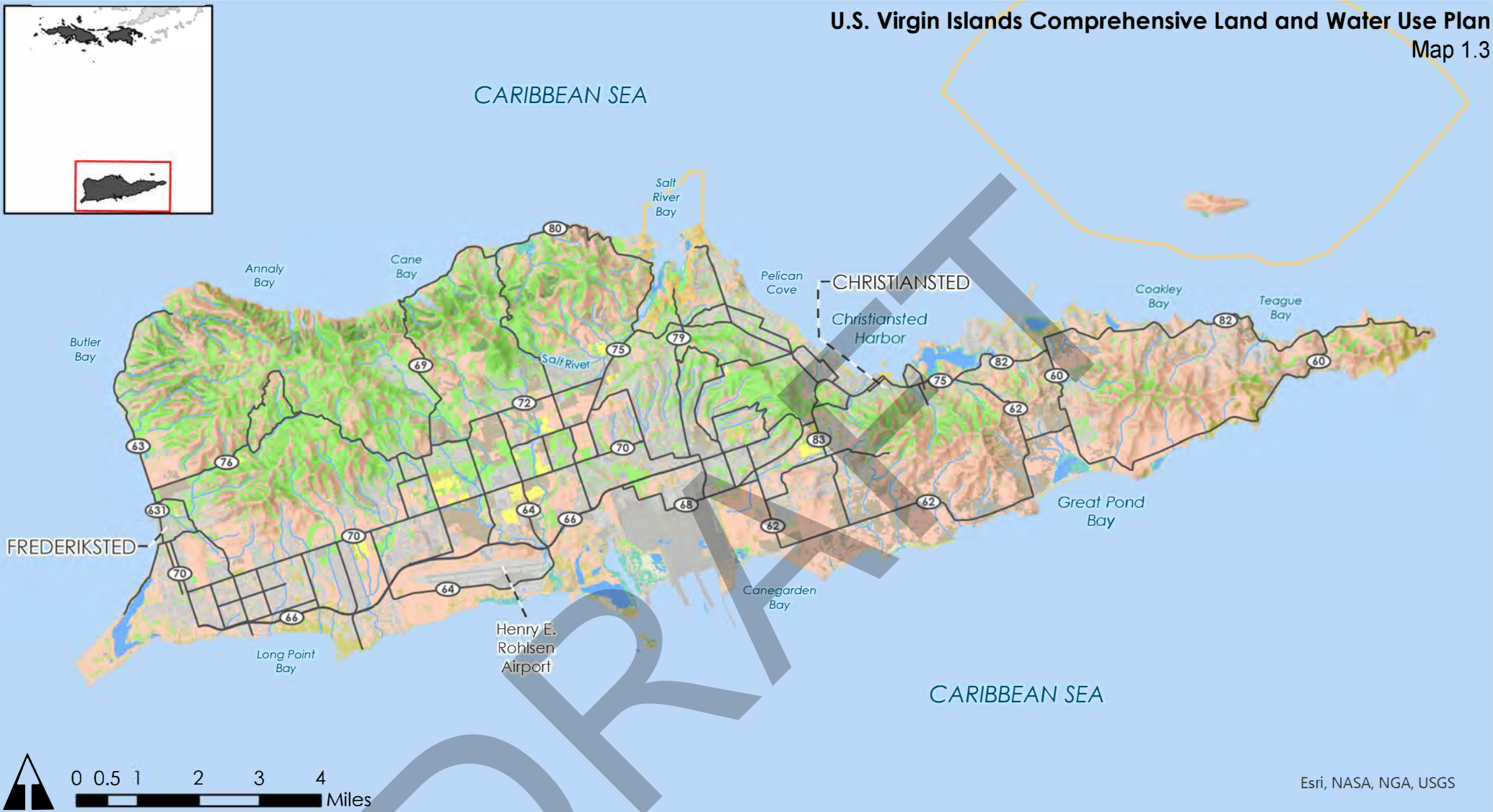
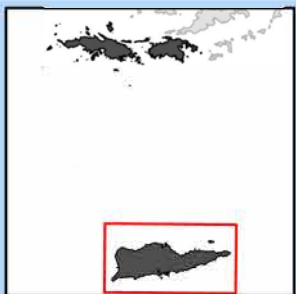
Land Cover (2012) - St. Thomas

Date: 4/24/2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, USDA Forest Service

Note: This map is for informational purposes only and is not suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes.



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS

Legend	
Surface Water Bodies	Land Cover (2012)
Guts	Barren Land
Major Roads	Cultivated Crops
National Park Service Land	Deciduous Forest
	Developed, High Intensity
	Developed, Open Space
	Evergreen Forest
	Grassland/Herbaceous
	Pasture/Hay
	Scrub/Shrub
	Unconsolidated Shore
	Wetland

Land Cover (2012) - St. Croix

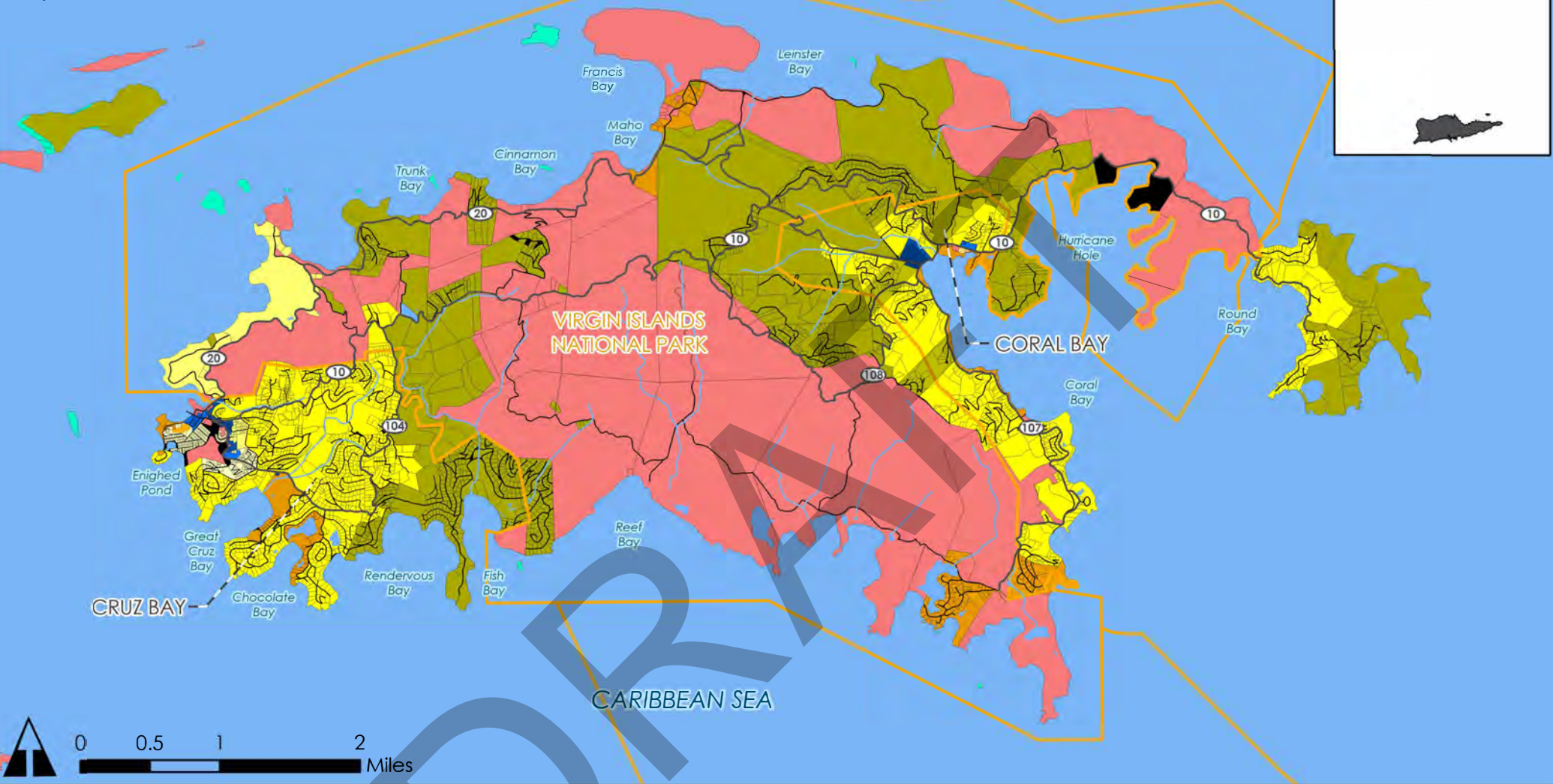



Date: 4/24/2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, USDA Forest Service

Note: This map is for informational purposes only and is not suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes.

U.S. Virgin Islands Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan
Map 2.1



Legend

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|------------------------------------|
| Surface Water Bodies | Zoning Code | P (Public) | R-4 (Residential - Medium Density) |
| Guts | B-2 (Business - Secondary/Neighborhood) | R-1 (Residential - Low Density) | W-1 (Waterfront - Pleasure) |
| Major Roads | B-3 (Business - Scattered) | R-2 (Residential - Low Density - One and Two Family) | W-2 (Waterfront - Industrial) |
| National Park Service Land | B-4 (Business - Residential Areas) | R-3 (Residential - Medium Density) | Cay |
| | | Road | |

Zoning - St. John

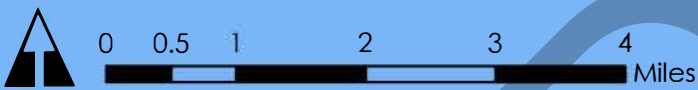
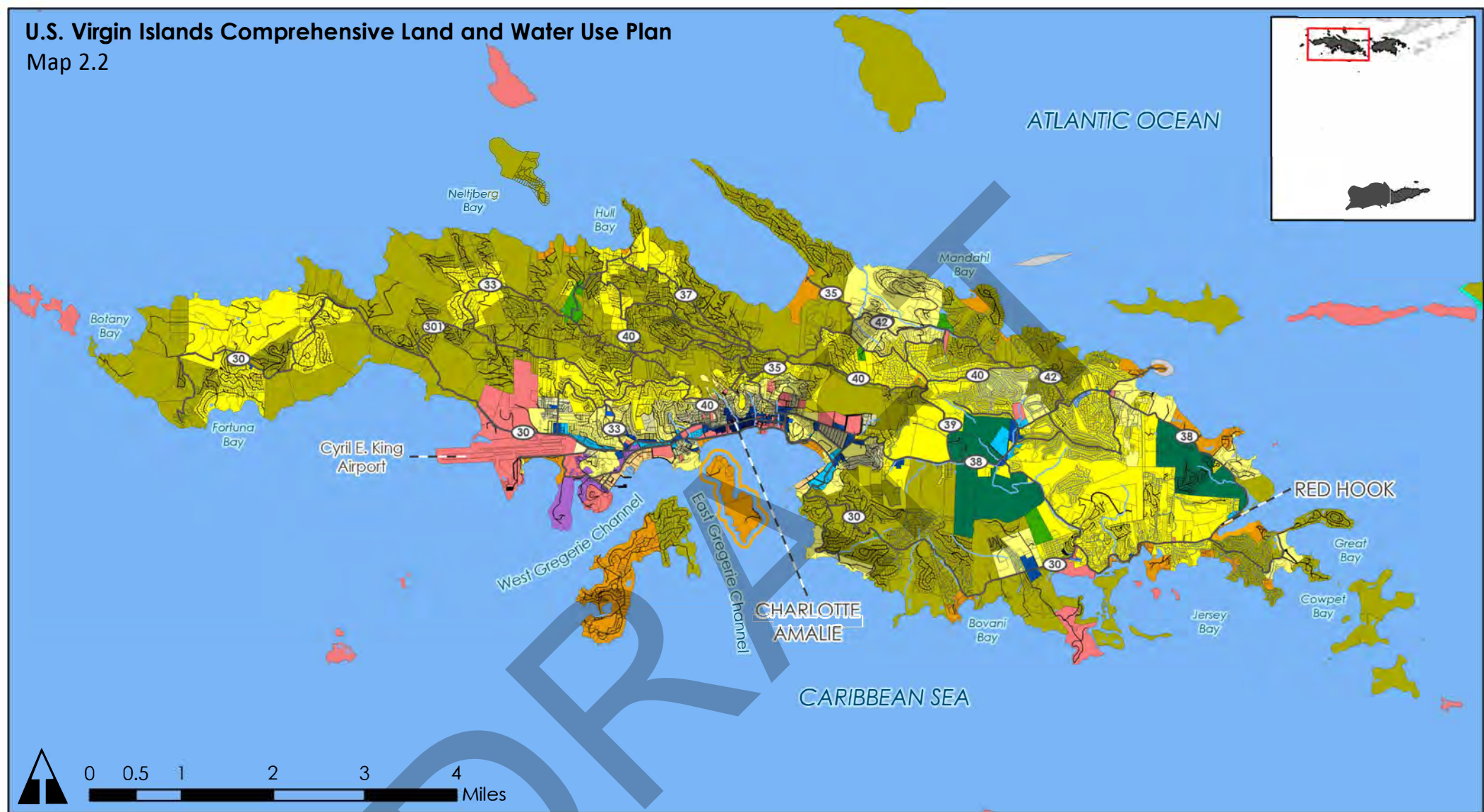
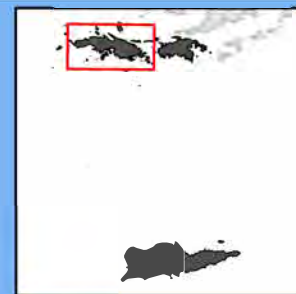


Date: 4/24/2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, USDA Forest Service
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U.S. Virgin Islands Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan



Map 2.2



Legend

Surface Water Bodies	B-1 (Business - Central Business District)	I-2 (Light Industry)	R-4 (Residential - Medium Density)
Guts	B-2 (Business - Secondary/Neighborhood)	P (Public)	R-5 (Residential - High Density)
Major Roads	B-3 (Business - Scattered)	R-1 (Residential - Low Density)	W-1 (Waterfront - Pleasure)
National Park Service Land	B-4 (Business - Residential Areas)	R-2 (Residential - Low Density - One and Two Family)	W-2 (Waterfront - Industrial)
Zoning Code	A-1 (Agricultural)	R-3 (Residential - Medium Density)	Road
A-2 (Agricultural)	C (Commercial)		Other

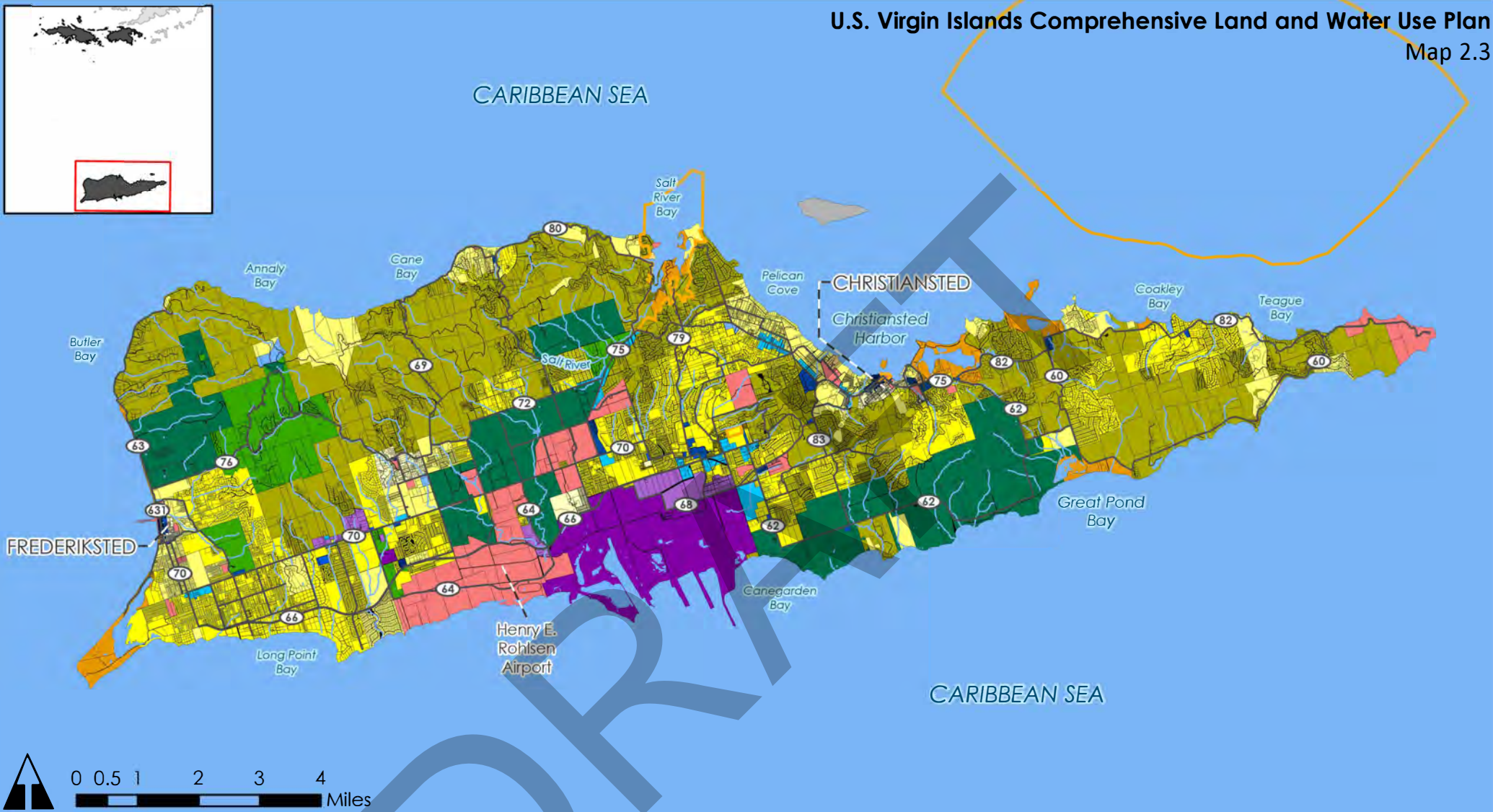
Zoning - St. Thomas

Date: 4/24/2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, USDA Forest Service



Note: This map is for informational purposes only and is not suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes.



Legend

Surface Water Bodies	B-2 (Business - Secondary/ Neighborhood)	P (Public)
Guts	B-3 (Business - Scattered)	R-1 (Residential - Low Density)
Major Roads	B-4 (Business - Residential Areas)	R-2 (Residential - Low Density - One and Two Family)
National Park Service Land	C (Commercial)	R-3 (Residential - Medium Density)
Zoning Code	A-1 (Agricultural)	R-4 (Residential - Medium Density)
A-2 (Agricultural)	I-1 (Heavy Industry)	W-1 (Waterfront - Pleasure)
B-1 (Business - Central Business District)	I-2 (Light Industry)	W-2 (Waterfront - Industrial)
		Marsh
		Road
		Other

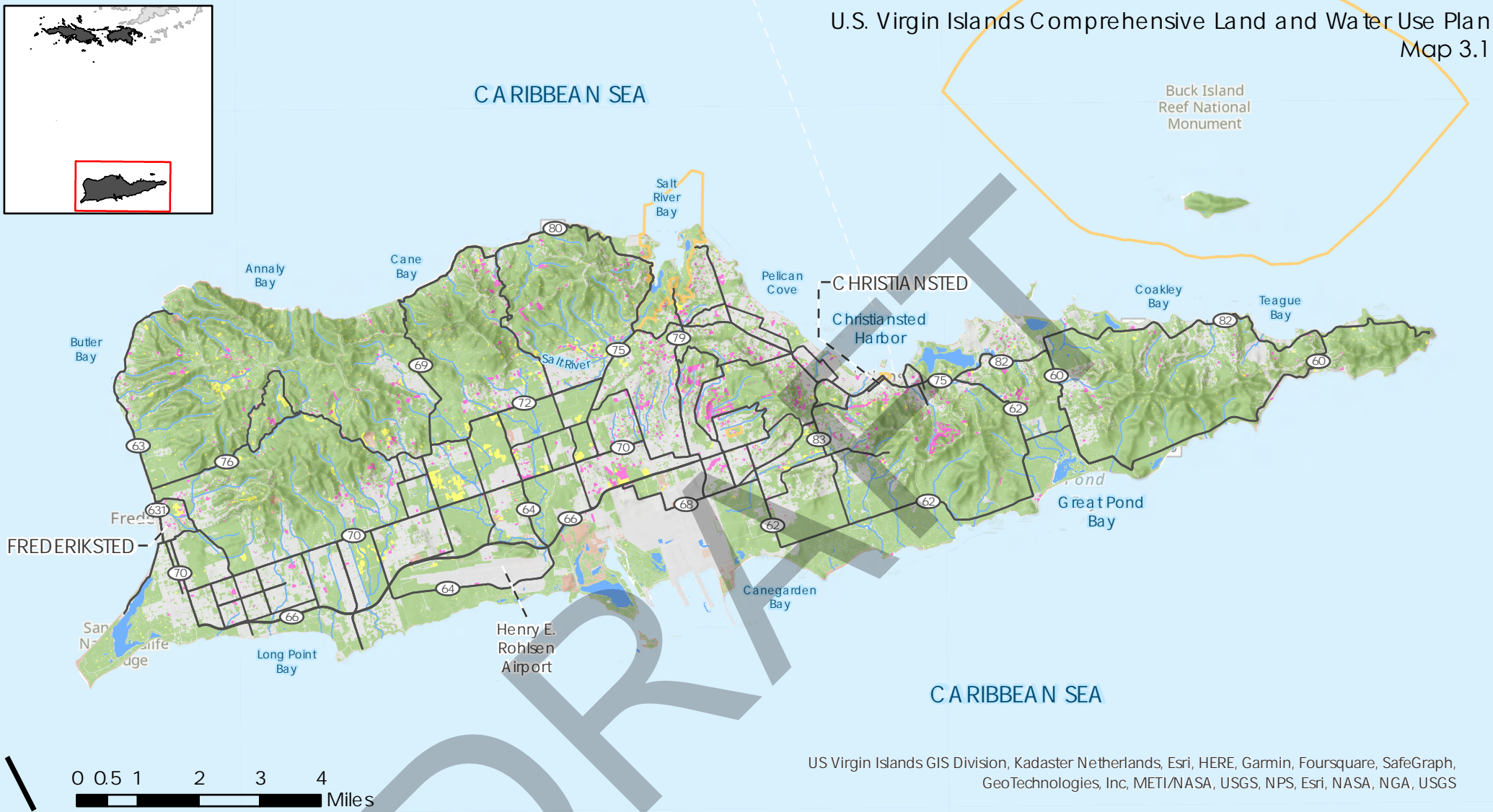
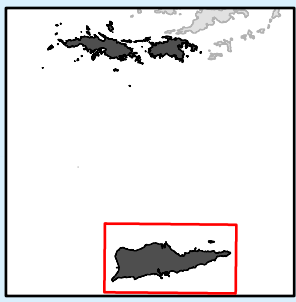
Zoning - St. Croix

Date: 4/24/2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, USDA Forest Service

Note: This map is for informational purposes only and is not suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes.



US Virgin Islands GIS Division, Kadaster Netherlands, Esri, HERE, Garmin, Foursquare, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, NPS, Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS

- Legend**
- Major Roads
 - Developed Land
 - Barren Land
 - Undeveloped Land
 - National Park Service Land

- Surface Water Bodies
- Forest Landcover Change
 - Forested to Other Natural Landscape
 - Forested to Developed

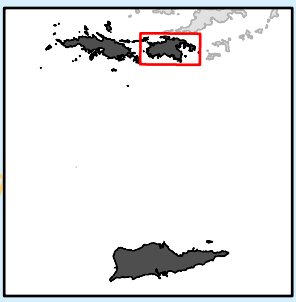
Land Cover Trends - St. Croix 2002 - 2012



Date: 4/24/2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, NOAA C-CAP
Note: This map is for informational purposes only and is not suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes

U.S. Virgin Islands Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan
Map 3.2



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, US Virgin Islands GIS Division, Esri, HERE, Garmin, Foursquare, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, NPS

- Legend**
- Major Roads
 - Developed Land
 - Barren Land
 - Undeveloped Land
 - National Park Service Land

- Surface Water Bodies
- Forest Landcover Change
- Forested to Other Natural Landscape
- Forested to Developed

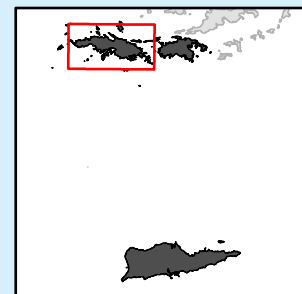
Land Cover Trends - St John 2005 - 2012



Date: 4/24/2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, NOAA C-CAP
Note: This map is for informational purposes only and is not suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes.

U.S. Virgin Islands Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan
Map 3.3



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, US Virgin Islands GIS Division, Esri, HERE, Garmin, Foursquare, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, NPS

- Legend**
- Major Roads
 - Developed Land
 - Barren Land
 - Undeveloped Land
 - National Park Service Land

- Surface Water Bodies
- Forest Landcover Change
- Forested to Other Natural Landscape
- Forested to Developed

Land Cover Trends - St. Thomas 2003 - 2012



Date: 4/24/2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, NOAA C-CAP
Note: This map is for informational purposes only and is not suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes.