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CORAL WORLD OCEAN AND REEF INITIATIVE WORKS WITH NATIONAL PARK
SERVICE TO SUPPORT CORAL RESTORATION

Coral World Ocean and Reef initiative, Inc. (CWORI) was established in 2019 as an independent organization to advance and expand the conservation work being carried out by Coral World Ocean Park. Coral World Ocean Park President Trudie Prior noted, “As a non-profit, CWORI would be able to access funding and seek donations unavailable to Coral World Ocean Park for coral restoration and wildlife rehabilitation among other much-needed efforts to conserve our marine habitats. We saw a great need to broaden Coral World’s existing work in the U.S. Virgin Islands.”

Last year, the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of Interior (NPS) approached CWORI to provide technical assistance in support of coral restoration activities in the Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument and Virgin Islands National Park. NPS and CWORI have since entered into a two-year cooperative agreement. According to NPS, “The project will benefit all stakeholders by providing resources for the ecological restoration of coral reefs within the Virgin Islands National Park and the Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument. The information produced by this project will be shared to increase public awareness, knowledge and understanding of the Nation’s resources.”

Logan Williams, formerly Education and Research Coordinator for Coral World Ocean Park, has become CWORI’s first Conservation Manager. As CWORI’s Conservation Manager, Williams manages all coral rescue, rehabilitation, and restoration efforts. Williams, who was born and raised on St. Thomas, USVI recalls spending much of her childhood snorkeling on reefs surrounding St. Thomas and St. John with her father. She obtained a Bachelor of Science Degree with a Major in Marine Sciences, at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg Fl. Williams states, “During my undergraduate studies, I spent much of my summer and winter breaks assisting with coral reef related projects at the University of the Virgin Islands. I was drawn to the Master of Science in Marine and Environmental Science program at UVI and started my graduate work there directly underneath Dr. Marilyn E. Brandt. I began my work at Coral World Ocean Park after receiving my Master’s degree.”

Williams went on to say, “Coral reefs and their associated species provide shoreline protection from storm events, recreational opportunities for park visitors, and an economic benefit to adjacent communities. Hurricanes, most recently two back-to-back Category 5 hurricanes, Irma and Maria, which made landfall in the U.S. Virgin Islands on September 6 and September 19, 2017, respectively, caused significant damage to coral reefs in national parks in the Caribbean and Florida. These reefs were already stressed as a result of coral disease, rising sea temperatures, coral bleaching, and recreational pressures.” Williams has worked with other scientists to help manage, mitigate and understand the effects of the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease on reefs in the USVI and has spent countless hours performing interventions on diseased colonies and tracking treatment successes.

The NPS project involves coral collection and transport of coral fragments of target species from field sites to in-water and/or land-based nurseries for asexual propagation. The land-based nurseries will be constructed on Coral World Ocean Park property. Matthew Tartaglio, Assistant General Curator of Coral World Ocean Park, who has years of experience building, operating, and maintaining life support systems at Coral World Ocean Park, will be responsible for the construction of the NPS coral tanks. Tartaglio said, “to propagate the corals and prepare them for outplanting, we have to ensure adequate seawater filtration and sterilization capabilities, flow rate and light level control.”

Williams said, “In addition to outplanting corals around St. John to fulfill the NPS USVI restoration plan, we will be monitoring in-water nurseries and fragments for coral growth and health, developing and conducting public outreach and educational programs, and creating a project exhibit at Coral World Ocean Park for public display.”

CWORI President and Executive Director Lee Kellar noted, “The work contemplated by the NPS-CWORI cooperative agreement will require at least 6 coral restoration technicians and 3 senior aquarists/supervisors. We are currently hiring and welcome applications. The positions are listed on the VI Department of Labor website <https://www.vidolviews.org>. We encourage anyone who has the qualifications and interest to submit an application.”

About Coral World Ocean and Reef Initiative, Inc.

Coral World Ocean and Reef Initiative, Inc. (CWORI) was established in 2019 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. CWORI is dedicated to conserving marine habitats and wildlife through rescue, rehabilitation, restoration, research, and empowering others with public education. Our emphasis is on combatting coral disease and restoring coral reefs, the rescue and rehabilitation of sea turtles and birds, and marine mammal research.

For more information, visit the Coral World Ocean and Reef Initiative website at <https://cworl.org/>