

An Environmental Profile of the Island of Jost Van Dyke, British Virgin Islands

Executive Summary



including Little Jost Van Dyke, Sandy Cay, Green Cay and Sandy Spit



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This *Environmental Profile* is a synthesis of the state of the environment, near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, in the smallest of the British Virgin Islands—the island of Jost Van Dyke*—and in the immediately adjacent smaller islands of Little Jost Van Dyke, Green Cay, Sandy Cay, and Sandy Spit. It is the first such effort in the British Virgin Islands.

The *Profile* opens with an introductory description of the Profile islands (Chapter 1), focusing on their natural and physical features as well as the community setting, in order to provide the reader with an overview of “the place”. This is followed by a second introductory chapter (Chapter 2) which focuses on the institutional and legal framework for protecting and managing the environment in the BVI, particularly as resource management institutions and laws impact Jost Van Dyke and its satellite islands.

At the end of each of the six chapters that follow (Chapters 3-8) is a section in a double-column, framed format that highlights the priority resource management and protection issues surrounding each chapter’s central theme; alongside each issue are specific recommendations for action.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the terrestrial and marine natural resource sectors. “*Conserving the Biodiversity of Jost Van Dyke*” (Chapter 3) provides the first comprehensive inventory and assessment of the terrestrial environment of Jost Van Dyke, encompassing separate sections on floral and faunal resources and a further section on salt ponds as a critical ecosystem. “*Jost Van Dyke and the Sea*” (Chapter 4) moves to the marine and coastal environment to examine both the maritime traditions of the island as well as the economic primacy of the sea in the lives of Jost Van Dykians. The island’s marine biological communities—its beaches, mangroves, seagrasses and coral reefs—are examined, as well as the fisheries sector.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to the man-made environment, focusing on the island’s historical heritage and its cultural traditions. The historic sites of Jost Van Dyke and Little JVD are inventoried and assessed in Chapter 5, while the non-tangible artefacts of JVD’s cultural heritage are explored in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 looks at waste management and pollution control issues, while the last chapter of the *Profile* (Chapter 8) looks to the future, at priorities for protection and how a small place with a small population might participate more fully in the management of its commonly-shared resources.

The *Profile* provides easier access to environmental data, findings and recommendations than has ever been available for the targeted islands. It presents JVD as an island where resources and community are undergoing change as a result of economic growth. It identifies those resources most at risk and discusses current practices and policies that continue to place these resources in jeopardy. It links the healthy sustainability of the island’s resource base to its economic future, given the island’s economic dependence on tourism. It provides options and choices for Jost Van Dyke’s residents and stakeholders, and for the Government of the Virgin Islands as it shares responsibility for the island’s future with Jost Van Dykians.

As stated elsewhere in this *Environmental Profile*, Jost Van Dyke finds itself positioned between a past it does not want to lose or squander and a future that promises expanded growth, but with costs. Its citizens and Government need to find a balance between what they want to protect and how they want to grow. When assessing the limits of growth, Jost Van Dyke must ask: what can be removed from the environment and from the cultural patrimony, and how much can be put back in the way of pollution or extracted and lost forever for future use and enjoyment? This *Environmental Profile* is intended to help guide those choices and decisions by presenting **information**—perhaps the most precious resource of all.

* The spelling of Jost Van Dyke (with an upper or lower case “v” in Van) was not consistent in the various sources we consulted, including Government reports and topographic/nautical maps. For this report, we have elected to capitalise the “V” throughout.

PREFACE

Environmental Profiles

The potential utility of Environmental Profiles in the Eastern Caribbean was first acknowledged during a seminar on Industry, Environment and Development sponsored by the Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA) and the University of the West Indies in August of 1986. Seminar participants confirmed the need to produce Profiles for each country in the Eastern Caribbean region, with particular attention given to a profiling process that would strengthen existing institutions and make maximum use of qualified local personnel and indigenous organisations. Additionally, Environmental Profiles were recognised as an effective means to help ensure that environmental issues were adequately addressed in the development planning process and would lead to greater advocacy of environmental considerations in public policy decision making.

Environmental Profiles were first produced in the Eastern Caribbean as part of a project implemented from 1987-1990 by the Caribbean Conservation Association with the technical assistance of the Island Resources Foundation (IRF). This effort was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and resulted in publication in 1991 of six Environmental Profiles for the countries of Antigua and Barbuda,

Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. A synthesis of the six Profiles was provided in *Environmental Agenda for the 1990s*, also published jointly by Island Resources Foundation and the Caribbean Conservation Association in 1991.

Two years later, with funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), CCA and IRF undertook preparation of two additional Environmental Profiles, this time for the islands of Anguilla and Montserrat (published in 1993). No Environmental Profile has been produced for the British Virgin Islands (BVI), although UNDP had indicated a willingness to support a BVI Profile at the time it undertook funding for Anguilla and Montserrat.

These comprehensive Profile documents represent the most comprehensive environmental overviews prepared to date for each of the target islands. Although much of the data included is now outdated, the eight Profiles continue to be used extensively by natural resource managers, researchers, students, policy makers and development planners throughout the Caribbean.

The Jost Van Dyke Environmental Profile

In 2007, a partnership was established between the Jost Van Dykes (BVI) Preservation Society (JVDPS), a recently revived community-based organisation on the BVI island of JVD, and the Island Resources Foundation, a 35-year-old environmental NGO serving the insular Caribbean. A primary objective of the partnership was to develop an Environmental Profile of Jost Van Dyke, the fourth largest of the inhabited British Virgin Islands.

The two organisations recognised that the Jost Van Dyke community faced a growing challenge to balance its economic growth with sustainable use of its natural resources. However, they also acknowledged that there was little scientifically based information available for the community to employ in evaluating the short- and long-term impacts of growth.

A project was proposed that would bring a fresh approach to community awareness and understanding of the local environment. Phase 1 of the initiative would focus on development of a Jost Van Dyke Environmental Profile, including the surrounding islands of Little Jost Van Dyke, Sandy Cay, Green Cay, and Sandy Spit.

Phase 2 would draw upon Profile findings (1) to disseminate new information, in several formats, to JVD residents, stakeholders, visitors, and the BVI Government and (2) to initiate a long-term programme of education, outreach and environmental monitoring by the JVD Preservation Society.

Subsequently, an application was submitted by the Society to the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) for funding of a new project, now entitled "Jost Van Dyke's Community-based Programme for Advancing Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development". The project was approved by OTEP in March 2008 and formally announced at a community meeting in Jost Van Dyke in May 2008 by His Excellency, Governor David Peary.

This *Environmental Profile*, constituting Phase 1 of the approved project, provides a description of the natural and historical resources of JVD and its nearby neighbouring islands. It assesses the current condition of this targeted environment and identifies natural features, species, sites, and ecosystems that require special protection.

Additionally, it reviews BVI and JVD institutions, legislation, policies and programmes for the environment as these apply to Jost Van Dyke and its neighbouring islands.

This document also identifies the major environmental issues, conflicts, and problems that currently affect the quality of life in Jost Van Dyke and assesses

options for improving the long-term environmental health of Jost Van Dyke and the smaller islands of Little Jost Van Dyke, Sandy Cay, Green Cay, and Sandy Spit.

Intended Audience

A focus audience of intended Profile users was identified early on by project planners. With this focus in mind, the JVD Environmental Profile was prepared to serve as:

- A primary reference document and information resource for the residents of Jost Van Dyke, including the Primary School.
- A planning resource for the Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society as it identifies and develops its future programmes and activities.
- An additional reference source for BVI government planners, technicians, resource managers, researchers, educators, and policy decision-makers, and for private-sector developers and consultants, NGOs, donor agencies, and the general public,

Intended Outcome

As we commenced the project, it seemed to be an opportune moment to examine not only the island's environmental resource base—upon which future economic growth will be established—but also to identify

and assess priority environmental issues and concerns and place these in a forward-looking context that supports sustainable growth. There seemed to be considerable value in taking a retrospective look at and reporting on environmental change on this emerging and promising island.

Moreover, a process that provides easy access to data, findings and recommendations will increase their visibility to a wider audience of resource users, stakeholders, and island leaders. In the long-term, project participants believe this effort will enable the community of Jost Van Dyke to apply broader environmental concepts and issues to daily life, civil discourse, and decision making about JVD's future.

Jost Van Dyke has been referred to elsewhere as a "microcosm" of the larger British Virgin Islands. In this context, the lessons learned about its environmental future through the profiling process might well provide a fresh approach to understanding environmental change in the BVI Territory as a whole and to improving channels of dialogue among those in search of workable solutions.

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