



Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP)

The NRCS Caribbean Area Team is committed to providing emergency assistance to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) via the **Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP)**. NRCS achieved significant progress implementing EWP in the Caribbean Area despite delays caused by COVID-19, which imposed a total lock down in the islands from March 16—May 31, 2020.

EWPP helps conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property. In the Caribbean Area, EWPP is clearing and repairing waterways impacted by hurricanes Irma and María in September 2017, and tropical storms Dorian (2019) and Isaias (2020). Through EWPP, NRCS partners with land stewards, land owners and local government agencies to assess and implement debris removal and streambank stabilization in pre-defined areas. Partners include municipalities, conservation districts, the PR Dept. of Natural and Environmental Resources, and the VI Dept. of Public Works.

EWP Status Update:

In the first two months after hurricanes Irma and Maria, NRCS teams of 16 detailees from across the U.S. and local staff assessed over 1,000 potential EWPP project sites. Of these, NRCS approved 489 exigency project sites for debris removal, 127 non-exigency sites for streambank stabilization, and two dam repairs in Añasco.



NRCS team Yara Ortiz (front left), Manuel Matos (back left) and Mario Rodriguez (right) inspect a potential EWPP site in Cabo Rojo post TS Isaias with clients Milton and Martin Toro (back right)] August 2020.



Añasco dam damaged by hurricane María.

NRCS has additional EWPP work pending for tropical storms Dorian and Isaias. Three sites impacted by TS Dorian have been approved and funds allocated; we will begin working with the sponsors to start the contracting process in FY 2021.

Six sponsors have been identified and potential sites have been defined for recovery work post TS Isaias. Reports on damages and cost estimates will be completed by February 2021.

To date, NRCS has completed 250 exigent sites, 170 were completed by other partners, and 4 were eliminated, mostly due to lack of accessibility to the site (damaged bridge). Work is underway by others to complete the remaining sites by the end of 2020 for an allocation of about \$18.6M. Design work on the two dams is underway and work on the stabilization projects is expected to follow early in 2021, representing an additional \$20M allocation.

In FY 2020, NRCS issued **26** agreements and signed 6 Federal contracts, completing 77 DSRs. We also signed the Añasco Dams IDIQ contract, obligating \$481,250 in technical assistance to repair the dams.



Success Story:

On June 11, 2020, NRCS Engineer Luis Heriberto Rosado visited Aibonito to check on EWPP project #PR-AIB-004 and verify its operation after the heavy rains of June 9th. Manuel Torres and his wife Brenda Liz Rosario, who live next to the project site, met Eng. Rosado and told him how very grateful they were for the debris removal work that NRCS spearheaded. The couple said that, had it not been for the sediment removal from the stream and cleaning of the pipeline under the road, the water rise caused by the recent rains would have flooded their front yard as it has on previous occasions (top left). Even though the water rose over the highway due to the limited size of the existing pipe, the restored capacity of the downstream channel prevented the flood from reaching the Torres Rosario family’s property (bottom left). They gladly shared their photos (left).

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