

Scientists to explore USVI reefs as part of 12-year project

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U.S. scientists are launching an expedition to study the underwater habitat around the U.S. Virgin Islands as part of a 12-year effort to map and help conserve Caribbean coral reefs.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says the mission will help identify fish populations as well as help people better understand and protect the region's resources.

Officials say scientists aboard the 187-foot (57-meter) Nancy Foster research vessel will focus mostly on the southern coast of St. Croix and the northwest coast of St. Thomas. They also will study deep-water areas believed to contain a large number of snappers.

The 11-day mission began Saturday.

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