

Eliciting stakeholder values for coral reef management tasks in the Guánica Bay watershed, Puerto Rico

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The EPA is developing a valuation protocol for southwest Puerto Rico that will support the US Coral Reef Task Force's (USCRTF) Partnership Initiative in the Guánica Bay/Rio Loco (GB/RL) Watershed. The GB/RL watershed is located in southwestern Puerto Rico and includes the urbanized areas of Yauco and a portion of the Lajas Valley agricultural region. A number of critical issues have been identified in the GB/RL watershed related to the impact of land based sources of pollutants on the near shore coral reefs of Guánica Bay, including upland erosion in the coffee growing regions, reservoir sedimentation and downstream transport, in-stream channel erosion, loss of a historic coastal lagoon, legacy contaminants, and the adequacy of sewage treatment. Implementation efforts of the partnership are expected to significantly improve water quality in the watershed, improve the quality of the nearshore coral reefs, and support economic recovery in the area.

The valuation procedure will include structured stakeholder/expert workshops in southwestern Puerto Rico. In the initial phase we will seek to understand the importance of the issues to stakeholders and how proposed management actions could impact their well-being. Multiple community objectives will be derived from stakeholder concerns and performance measures will be chosen from stakeholder-generated concepts and professional judgment. Next, means to achieve the objectives will be examined, including those already under consideration by the USCRTF partners. The final phase will convene stakeholders and decision-makers to evaluate the relative importance (priority) of the objectives. Valuation can be a useful method for engaging stakeholders in environmental management decisions. The emphasis on values and achieving them will unite and inform stakeholders while encouraging their involvement in present and future management tasks.