

Reconstruction of Recreational and Natural Areas for Social Enjoyment Is Underway

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FEMA has awarded nearly \$5.7 million for natural reserves and lighthouses around the island.

Guaynabo, Puerto Rico – Aldo Escabi is a frequent visitor to the Cabezas de San Juan nature reserve in the municipality of Fajardo. He enjoys the contact with nature and the landscapes, since from there he can appreciate the old structure of the lighthouse, different small islands and even the island municipalities of Vieques and Culebra.

For Escabi, it is important to preserve the nature reserve's facilities because “they foster a sense of adventure and raise awareness among new generations about how to protect our natural resources.”

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) allocated nearly \$5.7 million for damage following Hurricane María to repair diverse recreational and natural areas that will support the preservation, tourism and economic development of its communities.

“Puerto Ricans frequent local events and excursions that allow us to enjoy diverse cultural offerings throughout the country, especially this holiday season. The agency continues to support municipalities, agencies and nonprofit entities in order to rebuild these spaces for the physical and emotional health of the communities, while supporting local merchants,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator, José Baquero.

Las Cabezas de San Juan is part of the group that has funding from the agency. The Puerto Rico Conservation Trust has approved over \$701,000 for repairs to the lighthouse building, observation deck and boardwalk, including mitigation measures to protect the facilities from infiltration, soil erosion and wind. The



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Page 1 of 4

nonprofit has already completed repairs to the administration office, visitor's pavilion and other areas with over \$24,000 in additional obligations. Construction on the lighthouse and observation platform is underway, while repairs to the boardwalk are in the planning process.

While in Fajardo, residents and visitors can also enjoy sunbathing and the warm waters of the Seven Seas resort, which is currently in the auction process to be able to rebuild gazebos, a camping area and trailers, lifeguard towers and lighting, among other work, after an allocation of nearly \$2.7 million.

Further south, the Punta Tuna Lighthouse in the municipality of Maunabo will also get improvements. The impact of Hurricane María caused damage to this 150-year-old historic building and FEMA granted nearly \$660,000 to paint walls and ceilings. The infrastructure will also be repaired to match all aspects, including design, color, equipment, and labor.

Furthermore, to the north of the island in Vega Baja is the Tortuguero Lagoon, which offers open spaces with gazebos and seven miles of trails for community recreation. The agency allocated nearly \$486,000 to the municipality to repair the nature reserve from water damage to its buildings and hiking trails.

According to Vega Baja resident Ramses Rivera Sánchez, visiting the lagoon brings a sense of peace and helps to recharge one's batteries. "Spending a day in this place is to experience happiness and respite from the daily routine." Rivera Sánchez explained that the reserve was greatly affected with the passage of Hurricane María and understands that its preservation is important because, in addition to being the habitat of many species, it fosters physical activity and community togetherness. "It is important to take action to remodel these facilities. There is a lot of potential to take advantage of for the well-being of the entire community and the country."

And, if historic buildings, music and crafts are on the agenda for the day, Old San Juan will provide that cultural offering at Plaza Dársenas and Paseo La Princesa. Ludiscari Negrón is one of the area's artisans and has been offering her products in the plaza and the promenade for 25 years. Her clientele is varied: visitors from all over the world and residents, particularly the elderly who share with her their struggles and tales of overcoming adversity.



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Meanwhile, María Santiago, a 15-year resident of the urban center, reaffirms the importance of the repairs because of their historical relevance. The musical activities for senior citizens at Paseo La Princesa and the artisan events are part of her most significant memories. She also enjoys walking the promenade and drinking coffee in the plaza.

FEMA allocated over \$1.1 million to the Tourism Company for lighting, painting and repairs to the cement walls and water fountain of the Plaza and Paseo, among other already completed work.

For his part, the Executive Director of the Central Office for Puerto Rico Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3) Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, noted that “as part of the assistance we offer, COR3 disbursed approximately \$958,000, per the subrecipients' request, through the Working Capital Advance pilot program get work underway at the Seven Seas beach in Fajardo, the Punta Tuna Lighthouse in Maunabo, and the Tortuguero Lagoon Nature Reserve in Vega Baja. We will continue to work as a team to ensure that these projects are completed in compliance with applicable regulations.”

To date, FEMA has allocated over \$31.5 billion for nearly 10,900 projects to address Puerto Rico's recovery.

For more information about Puerto Rico's recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339, fema.gov/disaster/4473 and recovery.pr. Follow us on our social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and Twitter @COR3pr.

SEVEN SEAS BEACH, FAJARDO, PUERTO RICO



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FAJARDO, Puerto Rico (June 21, 2023) – Residents and visitors can also enjoy sunbathing and the warm waters of the Seven Seas beach in Fajardo, which will benefit from rebuilt gazebos, a camping area and trailers, lifeguard towers and lighting, among other work, after an allocation of nearly \$2.7 million. Photo FEMA/Eduardo Martínez



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