

Facilities for Family Entertainment Reconstructed with FEMA Funds

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Guaynabo, PUERTO RICO — To have family entertainment spaces where people can enjoy safe places to gather, especially during the holiday season, is part of Puerto Rico's integral recovery. That's why the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) obligated \$3.1 million to repair the Southern Coast Boardwalk in Juana Díaz, and the floating dock and gazebos in Ceiba.

"These recreational areas provide spaces for families to share. They benefit their residents as well as all local and international visitors who enjoy their cultural and gastronomic offering, in addition to promoting the economy of the municipalities," said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José Baquero.

According to Carimelys Alvarado, the Culture, Arts and Tourism director for the municipality of Juana Díaz, the boardwalk located in the Camboya community has great tourist value, as well as merchants and fisherfolk who contribute directly to economic development. Besides having gastronomic alternatives, they also host musical and family events. The boardwalk was established in 2000 and it welcomes up to 500 people during the weekends.

"This is one of our great contributions to the economy, culture and tourism. As natives from Juana Díaz, this project was like a diamond for us. I remember the inauguration, when we got goosebumps because our coast is so important. This project marks an emphasis on our economic development," Alvarado said.

For the merchants, the repairs have meant receiving more customers, encouraged by how beautiful the facilities are now. This was confirmed by business owner Rubén Figueroa Ortiz. "This boardwalk repair has benefited us a lot, especially the businesses. Now we have a higher attendance. I am the oldest merchant here, with many years of service, and I feel very proud to have this opportunity right now," he added.



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Some of the already completed repairs with an allocation of nearly \$2.9 million include the replacement of aluminum panels, repairs to the asphalt surface, concrete piers and sidewalks, exterior electrical outlets, lighting fixtures and stairs, and the installation of a concrete retaining wall in the waterfront boardwalk area.

Mitigation measures were carried out with nearly \$937,000 within the same allocation. For example, a geotextile filter fabric was added to prevent internal erosion; the piles were reinforced to make them resistant to strong waves and protect them from corrosion; and the wooden decking was replaced with PVC to increase its durability.

The director of the Juana Díaz Recovery Office, José Plata, said that this project is one of the most important that the municipality has been able to complete after the impact of the hurricanes, “especially for the community, as part of its culture and traditions.”

On the other hand, in Ceiba, the dock and the gazebos located at the Villa Pesquera on Los Machos Beach offer a sustainable alternative to maximize space for fisherfolk without damaging marine ecosystems, according to the director of the Municipal Office of Emergency Management, Eddie García.

“Its innovative design allows it to adapt to the water level, reducing the environmental impact. In addition, it combines aquatic activities with a perfect setting for social and cultural events. You can enjoy a restaurant and kiosks with fresh seafood, typical Puerto Rican food and live music, as well as kayaking, paddleboarding and recreational fishing,” García added.

The high-density plastic floating dock built in 2015 extends into the ocean and receives between 75 and 500 visitors per week. Both were severely damaged and dismantled by high winds and storm surge during Hurricane María.

With an obligation of nearly \$226,000, the municipality has already completed repairs to the pier and the 16 wooden gazebos in front of the beach ?dated from 1995? are in the planning phase. Part of the work included the replacement of the pier, the access and the replacement of the gazebos’ bases and roofs. As part of the hazard mitigation measures, the gazebos will be reinforced with anticyclonic anchoring and additional anchoring for the roofs at a cost of nearly \$2,000.



One of its regular visitors is Ana López, who uses the dock ramp for her boat. López describes it as “a meeting point for the fishing community and a unique tourist attraction that promotes the responsible enjoyment of natural resources, while strengthening the area’s cultural and economic identity.”

Meanwhile, the executive director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3), Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, said that “recreational and sports facilities are an important element in the communities, as they promote the training of our athletes and foster the economic development of various sectors. These projects in Juana Díaz and Ceiba are in addition to another 1,236 works with investments totaling \$446.6 million that are under construction in the 78 municipalities. Meanwhile, citizens already enjoy 970 completed works around the island representing \$187.5 million. We reaffirm our commitment to continue assisting them in the execution of another 832 recreational facilities that are in the design or construction acquisition stage.”

FEMA has allocated over \$34.5 billion for Puerto Rico’s recovery from Hurricane María. Of this total funding, about \$1.4 billion are earmarked for nearly 2,200 park and recreational facility projects throughout the island.

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.

