

FEMA Provides Funding for the William Miranda Botanical Garden in Caguas

Release Date: April 25, 2024

The repairs will extend beyond the buildings to help replant trees, plants, and protect the habitat of the garden's wildlife

Guaynabo, PUERTO RICO - The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has allocated approximately \$4 million to the William Miranda Marín Botanical Garden in Caguas, directed at the recovery, and strengthening of the facility due to damage caused by Hurricane Maria. These funds will support the restoration of infrastructure and provide tools for risk mitigation in this important natural and cultural resource.

“This allocation will restore an invaluable natural resource, strengthen the fabric of the community, and protect an important habitat where even pre-Columbian archaeological sites are preserved. Projects like these go beyond minimal repair and reaffirm our commitment to current and future generations,” said José G. Baquero, Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator.

The Botanical Garden is located on the grounds of the former San José sugar mill, an important agricultural stronghold founded by the Spanish in the Turabo Valley between the 19th and mid-20th centuries.

According to Gil Calderón, executive director of the Botanical Garden, this is the only place in Puerto Rico where evidence of the combination of the three main ethnic groups that make up the Creole (European, African, and Taíno) has been found.” For this reason, the site is divided into four main zones representing each of these ethnicities and one dedicated to the Creole, where one can find flora and fauna representative of these peoples and cultures.

Calderón emphasized that they continue focused on their vision for the Botanical Garden: “Our vision is to be a world-class ethnobotanical garden, a leader in tourism, culture, nature, and agritourism attractions in Puerto Rico. To be the best alternative for sustainable tourism in the Caribbean. On the other hand, our



FEMA

Page 1 of 3

mission is to be internationally recognized as a premier center in terms of research, education, and interpretation of natural, cultural resources, and sustainability strategies.”

Part of the work already completed with the funds assigned by FEMA includes the repair and replacement of various elements, from lamps and posts to security and communication systems that operate through monitors to provide information to visitors. Likewise, water pipes, lighting systems, and roof panels were replaced.

Other repairs will be carried out in the administrative offices, concession stands, the butterfly house, and the Casa Jíbara, the visitor center, and recreational areas. Funds will also be allocated to repair bridges and the artificial lake and for improvements to the security area in the garden.

The Botanical Garden offers a variety of educational and cultural activities for the community, such as family day trips, educational tours for pet owners, and gallery nights. In addition, they make their facilities available for municipal events and non-profit entities.

Also, they host a variety of vendors that stimulate the local economy, such as food and beverage services. They even have a Reintegration Garden, where funeral services are provided with an ecological focus by reincorporating ashes into nature.

Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, the executive director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction, and Resilience (COR3), said, “this important project for the socioeconomic development to the people of Caguas joins other 300 permanent works that range from the design acquisition to construction stage, with investments amounting to \$69 million. For the reconstruction of the Caguas Botanical Garden, the municipality has at its disposal the request for the first advance of the Working Capital Advance pilot program, which corresponds to 25% of FEMA’s obligation for the initial phase of this work’s development. At COR3, we can reaffirm our commitment to continue assisting the municipal team leading the process of the hundreds of reconstruction projects.”

The funds for the Botanical Garden include over \$482,000 for risk mitigation measures that will reduce the Garden's vulnerability to future climate events. These measures include securing air conditioners and water tanks, installing



FEMA

Page 2 of 3

surge protectors, and other bioengineering strategies to improve bridge drainage.

To date, FEMA has allocated over \$32.6 billion for about 11,000 projects that will address the recovery of Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria.

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](https://Twitter.com/COR3pr).



FEMA

Page 3 of 3