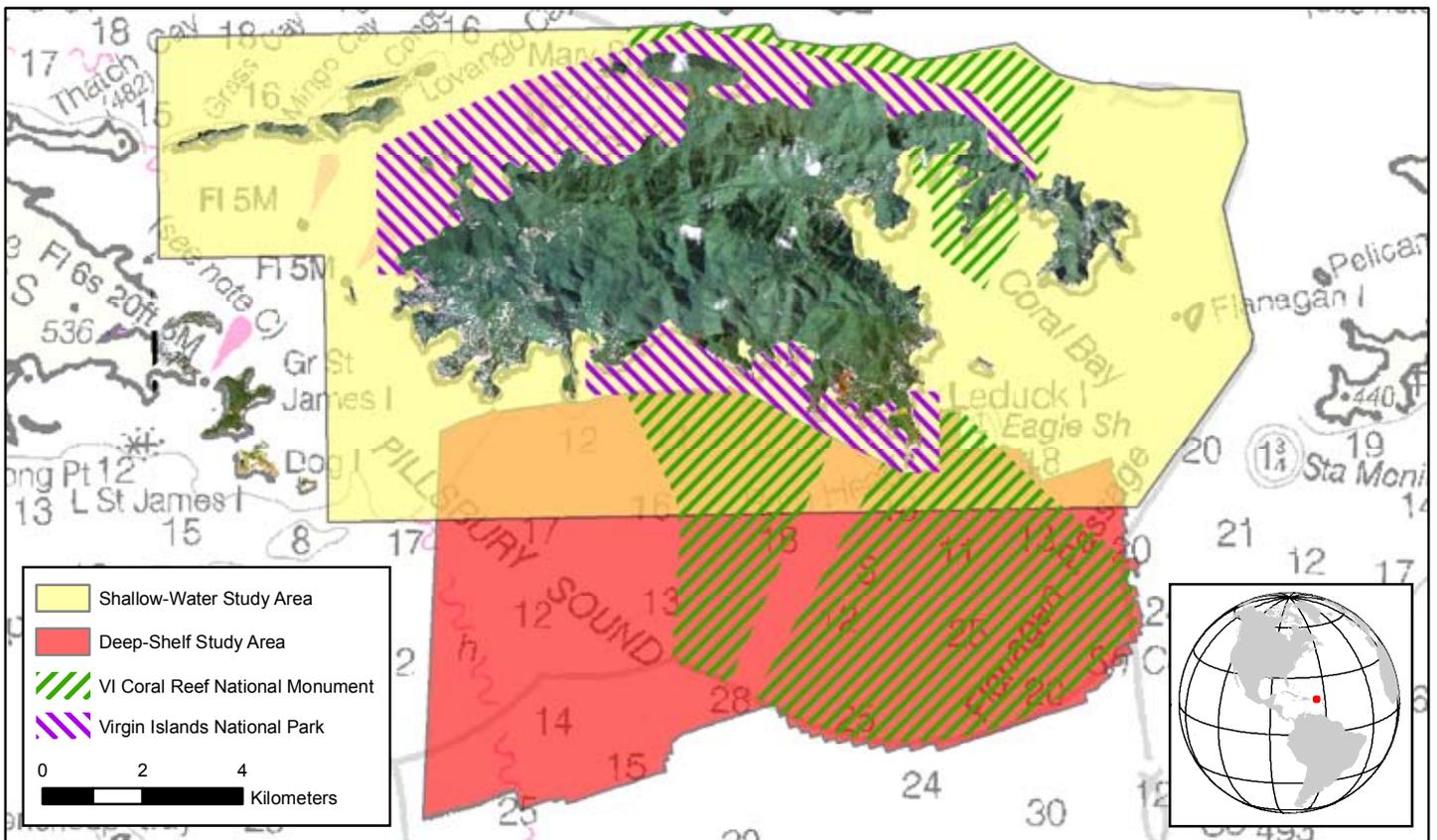


INTRODUCTION

NOAA's Center for Coastal Monitoring and Assessment - Biogeography Branch has developed analytical protocols used for mapping benthic habitats throughout all U.S. jurisdictions, States, and Territories, including the U.S. Caribbean. NOAA, in partnership with the U.S. National Park Service (NPS), has generated spatially resolved benthic habitat mapping products of the coral reef ecosystems surrounding St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands. The synthesis of existing geospatial data and collection of new data provides the most contemporary compilation of remotely sensed and *in situ* data within the network of NPS-managed marine ocean parks. These products provide a fine-scale assessment of the status, abundance, and distribution of marine habitats of St. John. This effort equips NPS with increased technical capacity for ocean exploration, management, and stewardship. Potential applications include use as a spatial framework for sampling design, improved assessment of human-use impacts, and other marine spatial planning activities.



Overview of St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands with U.S. National Park Service management boundaries and mapping effort extents.

As part of President Bush's U.S. Ocean Action Plan, the NPS developed an Ocean Park Stewardship Action Plan to focus organizational and scientific capacity on conserving marine, estuarine, and Great lakes resources. The Plan strives to prevent the loss of productive fisheries, habitats, and wildlife, and continue to conserve ocean resources and recreational activities for park visitors. NPS manages and protects more than 250,000 acres of coral reef in ten National Park units, two of which are located in St. John, USVI. The Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument includes 12,708 acres of submerged lands within 3 miles off the coast of St. John. These waters contain some of the most biologically rich and economically important coral ecosystems in the U.S. Caribbean, supporting a diverse and complex system of coral reefs, shoreline mangrove forests, and seagrass beds. Additionally, the Virgin Islands National Park includes 5,650 acres of submerged federal lands to protect and conserve a rich, but fragile coral reef seascape. As part of the ocean stewardship effort, the Ocean Park Stewardship Action Plan calls to improve scientific capacity in order to better understand ocean ecosystems and human influence. This includes providing improved products and characterizations to better inform resource managers of current resource inventories and benthic habitat distributions.

The NOAA/NPS joint study to map the benthic habitats of St. John has resulted in a suite of products. The project deliverables include:

- Primary data sources, including satellite and airborne imagery, ground validation field data, and accuracy assessment field data,
- Derived datasets, including GIS files of benthic habitats and shoreline,
- Classification manual,
- Description of the specific methods used to create the habitat maps, and
- Assessment of the thematic accuracy of the maps.