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# Media Advisory

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## **Interior Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Kia'aina to Speak at Climate Change Conference in Puerto Rico, Meet USVI Officials**

*Will Underscore President's Climate Change Initiatives in lead up to Historic Paris Climate Talks, Discuss Range of Topics with U.S. Virgin Islands Officials*

WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Kia'aina will visit both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands this week from November 17 – 20. Her trip starts in Puerto Rico where she will provide remarks at the Climate Change in the Caribbean 2015 Conference for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Following the conference, Kia'aina will travel to the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“I look forward to learning about mutual efforts that can be undertaken between Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Caribbean region on climate change initiatives and sharing the President's adaptation strategies and Interior's efforts on community resiliency,” said Assistant Secretary Kia'aina. “Similar to the Pacific islands, it will take collaborative effort by all to combat the adverse impacts of climate change on island communities.”

Ahead of the 21st gathering of the Conference of Parties (COP21) in Paris focused on climate negotiations, Kia'aina will address the Opening Plenary Session of *Climate Change in the Caribbean 2015: Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands*, a conference at the Inter American Law School in San Juan, co-sponsored by the Law School and the Caribbean Landscape Conservation Cooperative, an interagency initiative of the U.S. Forest Service's International Institute of Tropical Forestry.

The conference will highlight recent success stories in responding to, and preparing for, the effects of climate variability and change in the Caribbean, focusing on Puerto Rico and the USVI. The sessions will also review new advances in Caribbean climate science and promote tools and strategies that support climate adaptation and mitigation activities.

Following the conference, Kia'aina will head to St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, to meet with Governor Kenneth Mapp, his Climate Change Task Force, and other officials on issues ranging from climate change, to energy, the USVI 2017 centennial preparations, self-determination, and the Salt River Marine Education and Research Center.

Kia'aina will also meet with the USVI Executive Director of the Water and Power Utility and Commissioners of Education and Agriculture to review various capital projects and discuss needs for critical infrastructure investment. She will visit the 5 Megawatt solar array at Estate Donoe that is comprised of 17,960 solar panels and see the culmination of the multi-million dollar project to convert the utility's generators to use propane in the production of electricity. Other stops in the Virgin Islands include schools, and agriculture infrastructure on the western end of St. Thomas. The Assistant Secretary will be accompanied by Office of Insular Affairs Policy Director Basil Ottley.

Climate change can dramatically affect water supplies in certain watersheds, impact coastal wetlands and barrier islands, cause relocation of and stress on wildlife, increase wildland fires, further spread invasive species, and more. President Obama's [Climate Action Plan](#) outlines an array of actions his administration is taking to use existing authorities to reduce carbon pollution, increase energy efficiency, expand renewable and other low-carbon energy sources, and strengthen resilience to extreme weather and other climate impacts. Under the President's plan and Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell's leadership, the Interior Department has launched a series of [initiatives](#) to help local communities assess and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and strengthen their resilience to these impacts.

*The Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas carries out the administrative responsibilities of the Secretary of the Interior in coordinating federal policy for the territories of American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and administering and overseeing U.S. federal assistance to the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau under the Compacts of Free Association. The Assistant Secretary executes these responsibilities through the Office of Insular Affairs.*

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