

island resources

F O U N D A T I O N

June 2016

Dear Friends, Supporters and Colleagues,

At the end of June, 2016, after a 44-year run, we will be sunsetting Island Resources Foundation (IRF) and its operations as a Caribbean-based, small-island-focused, and environment-themed organization. In September of 2014 the Trustees of the Foundation decided that the imminent retirement of Judith Towle and me, combined with the emergence of a new generation of environmental leaders and institutions in the small islands of the Caribbean and a changed financial environment for NGOs in the region, made it reasonable and appropriate to terminate the operations of the Foundation.

Since that time we have been developing tools to perpetuate the legacy of the Foundation to the widest possible community of stakeholders concerned about the future of small island systems. A key element in focusing our attention for this process has been Judith Towle's *Narrative History of Island Resources Foundation* (enclosed). You all know Judith as the founding vice-president and administrative heart of IRF since "before the beginning" in the late 1960s.

One of these legacy tools is a new version of the Foundation's web site—IRF.ORG—which includes an extended version of IRF's history and programmatic activities, as well as an appreciation of the role of our founder, Dr. Ed Towle, in both IRF and in the development of a Caribbean conservation conscience in the latter 20th century. In addition to documenting the historical framework of the Foundation, the new web site will ultimately incorporate tools to allow users to access virtually all IRF documentary products since 1972, as well as historical documents from the *Dr. Edward L. Towle Island Systems Environmental Collection*, which currently includes over 10,000 documents and other materials highlighting conservation in the insular Caribbean, housed at the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in Tortola.

WHAT DID WE DO AND WHAT DID IT ACHIEVE?

We applied appropriate technology, based on island-systems science, to the sustainable development needs of small islands.

Island Resources developed innovative, small-island appropriate technology. For example:

- Our [first regional science project](#) tagged 1,200 green turtles over the course of six annual expeditions to Aves Island (near the Saba Bank) in the 1970s, helping scientists to map potential conservation zones for the two Caribbean green turtle communities.

- One area of special scientific impact was a series of sediment and erosion studies carried out since the 1990s by graduate students mentored by long-standing IRF research associate Dr. Lee MacDonald of Colorado State University. Dr. Carlos Ramos-Scharrón, one of MacDonald's students who later joined IRF's staff, produced his Ph.D. thesis based on this topic, as applied to conditions on St. John, USVI, and subsequently spent two decades working to develop tools that enable planners to avoid or mitigate erosion and sediment releases in small island ecosystems.
- We assembled, evaluated and interpreted complex scientific information and then disseminated it in accessible formats. For example, IRF's numerous island profiles, natural resource habitat surveys and species assessments have been used for national and island-specific biodiversity research, protected area planning and monitoring, and environmental impact studies for infrastructure and private development projects.
- IRF's coastal water quality studies, particularly in the US Virgin Islands in the 1970s, developed information that often pre-dated systematic government monitoring programs.

We advocated for the study of islands as systems.

The study of Island systems was a new concept when we started, but the Foundation quickly connected the academic dots with the projects and management needs we were seeing in the field. Early in the Foundation's history (1974), Dr. Towle and his colleague John McEachern wrote [*Ecological Guidelines for Island Development*](#) for IUCN—the first published use of this key concept—incorporating natural resources and human social and economic systems in the modern management of small islands. A subsequent high point in the success of this advocacy was the publication of the *Island Systems* Chapter in the 2005 United Nations Environment Programme's Millennium Assessment.

We required institutional capacity building for local organizations in all our projects.

In the late 1980s, the Foundation began a decade-long USAID and private-sector-funded NGO development program, coordinated by Dr. Bruce Horwith and Kevel Lindsay from an IRF office in Antigua. It should be understood, however, that increasing the effectiveness of indigenous organizations was a feature of virtually all IRF projects. An example is seen in the extensive involvement of local experts and environmental organizations in the researching, writing and editing of the 15 country, biodiversity, or island-specific environmental profiles published by IRF from 1991 to 2015. Most of the local organizations who were our partners are still functioning and providing leadership for the environment in the Caribbean. From its inception Island Resources

Foundation was a mentoring institution for emergent environmental leaders, public sector institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

We were a pioneer in applying integrated coastal area planning concepts to small island conditions.

In the mid-1970's, Island Resources authored the technical documents supporting the early Coastal Zone Management Program for the US Virgin Islands. Years later (1995) at the request of UNEP's Caribbean Environmental Programme in Jamaica, Dr. Towle incorporated Island Resources' experiences in [Guidelines for Integrated Planning and Management of Coastal and Marine Areas in the Wider Caribbean Region](#), extending the concept to island needs in tourism policy, fisheries management, marine pollution control, disaster management, impact assessment, and watershed management. As with other programs of the Foundation, integrated coastal area planning encompassed both natural resources and human activities.

We demonstrated how to apply science-based environmental policy tools to public decision-making in Caribbean small islands.

IRF projects aimed to translate scientific and technical data for the use of policy makers and community leaders in order to advance biodiversity and ecosystem conservation along with support of human livelihoods. We worked hand-in-hand with local governments and local organizations over multi-year timeframes using local as well as regional and international experts. The scope of such integrated science-policy work often focused on protected areas, species and ecosystem conservation, and environmental impact assessment initiatives. One such example was to assist with the transfer of the island of Sandy Cay in the British Virgin Islands from private ownership to protected area management status, an initiative that extended over eight years. IRF technical assistance to strengthen and update protected area policy, legislation, management, and enforcement in the British Virgin Islands resulted in a new national parks law, which was enacted by the BVI Government along with supporting regulations and procedures for management, planning and administrative oversight.

We have long been the most prolific environmental information networker in the Caribbean.

This tradition and practice began in the earliest days of the Foundation when Dr. Ed Towle's "care packages" of clippings, reports, and hard-to-find publications pertinent to small island conservation issues were sent to scores of friends and colleagues throughout the Caribbean on an almost daily basis. In tribute to this tradition, in a 21st century context, IRF established and currently maintains approximately 20 e-mail groups and blogging activities for some 3,000+ participants.

LESSONS LEARNED BY IRF, USEFUL TO ITS SUCCESSORS

We adapted to the flexible, multi-objective management style we found in island organizations.

We learned that adaptive management, based on shared values of equitable development and transparent implementation, needed to be combined with an opportunistic marketing approach. In the small islands of the Caribbean, resources to support most organizations and especially community-based conservation and development programs are extremely variable in focus and size over time, and when opportunities present themselves, they must be seized.

The small-to-mid-sized Caribbean NGO must work hard to establish and maintain effective working relations with a variety of groups, both within and outside the Caribbean. This is a costly process, and it results in a relatively high overhead that will require extra fund raising efforts.

Nevertheless, Island Resources has demonstrated that modest goals, carefully nurtured and executed, can have a significant impact over time, particularly for an organization that remains attentive to emerging issues and trends and maintains a capacity to build partnerships that can extend its reach and legitimacy.

Openness and shared trust and confidence with partners, stakeholders and donors are essential.

Island Resources built an organization that promoted openness, mutual trust, and confidence, which in turn enhanced the pride and loyalty of staff, associates, partners, stakeholders and donors. This created a congenial institutional framework that was conducive to progress and sustainability — and made work more fun!

We were creative in identifying a diverse portfolio of financial resources to prolong our longevity.

IRF's success was not marked by dramatic change or spurts of heightened activity. Rather success was denoted by incremental and steady growth, although with some marked periods of highs and lows in our funding base. We were never dependent on a single or few funding sources, as demonstrated in a [financial history produced by the Foundation in 2014](#). Such balanced growth helped the Foundation adapt to change, remain creative and experimental, and endure for four decades.

However, in the Caribbean, it is no longer clear that this kind of steady growth for small-to-mid-sized environmental NGOs will be the norm, given the changing role of and limited resources available to small regional institutions. The new norm promotes partnerships among large intergovernmental organizations and international NGOs, usually working through island government agencies.

HOW WILL THE IRF LEGACY BE CARRIED FORWARD?

A variety of legacy tools are being created by the Foundation, some of which are already operational and all of which will be carried forward even after IRF's formal closing. These include:

- Over the past year, IRF has focused considerable energy on re-building the IRF.ORG web site to increase its effectiveness as a research and archival tool for those seeking information about the environment and sustainable development in the insular Caribbean. In partnership with the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in Tortola, British Virgin Islands, the Foundation hopes to support HLSCC to digitize the thousands of documents previously donated by IRF to the College and currently housed at its Learning Resource Centre as a discrete collection. Eventually, all documents in the [Dr. Edward L. Towle Island Systems Environmental Collection](#) will be scanned, converted to searchable PDF formats, and indexed within a newly created digital cataloguing system devised by IRF.
- The Foundation will be establishing a long-term *Island Resources Foundation Legacy Fund* at the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands to provide opportunities for the funding and support of programs that continue the overall goals and mission promoted by IRF for more than four decades. Initially, the Fund will be employed to support the library digitization project described above.
- I have volunteered to continue the "moderator" services I have been providing to dozens of e-mail groups supported by the Foundation since 1995. We will be consolidating some of the lists, but will continue to engage and inform those who see value in using simple text tools to keep up-to-date on Caribbean environmental and related issues. We shall also be spinning off these lists to new moderators as opportunities arise.
- Very recently, through the timely intervention of Bill Moody, a long-time friend of the Foundation associated with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, IRF has been holding discussions with the Rockefeller Archive Center, which has expressed interest in archiving the unique reference materials, administrative records, and products of Island Resources Foundation as part of their strategy of becoming a global archive and research center for international philanthropy.
- Finally, the Foundation will be providing initial funding for a new fund, named *The Potter Fund for NatureTech.Solutions*, to advance my own special interests derived from serving as IRF's second president. *NatureTech.Solutions* will be a web site and periodic grant program that will seek out and reward innovative technology products developed by Caribbean residents that improve environmental resource management and decision-making in small islands.

Applications could cover a wide range of issues, to be defined by the participants themselves. Stay tuned!

WITH IRF CLOSED, WHERE WILL WE BE AND WHAT WILL WE BE DOING?

Judith Ann Towle, IRF Founding Vice President. After more than four decades of professional pursuits in the Caribbean (30 of those years as a resident), I do not plan to leave the region entirely behind, even as I exit my role with IRF. One area I anticipate pursuing is that of Caribbean philanthropy, recognizing that recent legal and regulatory frameworks in the region are constraining, rather than promoting, civil society and the non-profit sector. I also hope to identify an opportunity to write about the earliest years of the environmental movement in the Caribbean beginning in the mid-1960s. I now realize that I am one of the few participants still around who can remember those early years, and, as an historian, I appreciate the importance of remembering the past in order to guide the future. Contact me via e-mail at <jtowle@irf.org>; cell phone at 1-202-744-2358.

Bruce Potter, IRF Outgoing President. I am going to retire, while “finishing” and maintaining the new IRF.ORG web site, including the Blog attached to that site and additions to the digital library. I will also continue to moderate IRF's many e-mail groups and, with support from IRF, I will be starting a new web site and grant program called *NatureTech.Solutions*, described above. E-mail me at <bpotter@irf.org>; cell or text at 1-443-454-9044.

Jean Pierre Bacle, IRF Natural Resource Analyst. Entering the 4th quarter of the game, I will be pursuing small-sized natural resource projects in the Caribbean and elsewhere as opportunities arise. Between projects, activities will revolve around freelance writing and perfecting skills in nature photography. Traveling and hiking will be more frequent, along with my obsessive training targeting the competitive sport of duathlon—i.e., cycling and running. Contact me via e-mail at <dcbacle@gmail.com>; cell at 1-703-887-5383.

Kevel Lindsay, IRF Caribbean Biodiversity Expert. My commitment to the Caribbean is stronger than ever. Moving forward from 2016, and working together with lifelong colleagues, I plan to continue efforts to understand the biogeography of Caribbean bats, build support for native plant conservation, and eventually to build a regional biodiversity NGO to take on the collective role of helping to preserve the Caribbean's native flora and fauna, to bring together regional environmental interests and to inspire future generations of Caribbean conservationists. Contact me via e-mail at <kcl927@yahoo.com>; or on my Facebook page or any of the three groups I administer: [Wild Caribbean](#); [Virgin Islands Native Plants Conservation](#); and [Antigua and Barbuda Bats: Research, Conservation & Management](#).

Carlos Ramos-Scharrón, Ph.D., IRF Researcher (Watershed Sciences) to 2015. My relationship with IRF dates back to 1997 and my years as a graduate student at

Colorado State University. From fulfilling practical needs like lending me its beat-up jeep for field work to allowing me to disclose the results of my research behind IRF's aura of respectability and true commitment, the Foundation has been a consistent presence in my career. Now, as an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas-Austin, I hope to continue the IRF legacy through my teaching, research and environmental advocacy, in the insular Caribbean and beyond. Contact me via email at [<cramos_scharron@yahoo.com>](mailto:cramos_scharron@yahoo.com)

Lianna Jarecki, Ph.D., IRF Trustee and Conservation Biologist. Living now in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, I continue to work with BVI conservation and education interests while slowly transitioning my focus to a wider geographic scale. I have developed close ties with U.S.-based environmental organizations, including the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Southern Environmental Law Center. Going forward, I hope to contribute to promoting biodiversity research by providing communities with hands-on scientific edutainment. In my spare time, my family and I go to Costa Rica where we plant native trees, grow coffee, ride horses and occasionally attempt to surf. Contact me via e-mail at [<liannaj@gmail.com>](mailto:liannaj@gmail.com) and cell at 1-919-360-6853.

Barbara Lausche, J.D., IRF Trustee and Expert on International Conservation Law. I will continue to support the mission and legacy of IRF through the activities and associations built over the years. This includes my position as Director of the Marine Policy Institute at Mote Marine Laboratory (Sarasota, Florida, and the Florida Keys). In addition, where opportunities arise, I will provide direct technical assistance and promote protected areas and connectivity law and policy for marine and coastal biodiversity and ecosystem conservation in the Caribbean. And, finally, I hope to continue to interact and work with many of the colleagues I came to know through IRF who have also become dear friends. My e-mail is [<blausche@comcast.net>](mailto:blausche@comcast.net) and home phone is 1-941-371-1691.

LaVerne E. Ragster, Ph.D., IRF Trustee and Former University President. My four decades of association with the Island Resources Foundation runs the gamut from student intern to research associate and finally to Trustee on the Board. It has been an honor and pleasure to grow as a professional and learn from interactions and collaborations with the IRF family. Moving forward, I plan to continue to take advantage of opportunities to assist the US Virgin Islands and other Caribbean states to respond effectively to climate change through rational and grounded adaptation initiatives. My e-mail is [<lragster@uvi.edu>](mailto:lragster@uvi.edu).

Michael E. O'Neal, Ph.D., IRF Senior Research Fellow. I am honored to have had an affiliation spanning several decades with the extraordinary institution that IRF has been and, with that affiliation, the development of valued friendships and collegiality. Over the past few years I have personally been involved in an ongoing study of international, multigenerational business families. I am especially interested in the sustainability of small-and-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly the sustainability of family businesses in the Caribbean where—challenged by generational succession issues and

limited managerial and financial resources—the sustainability of family firms has important development policy implications. I look forward to continuing to stay in touch with IRF colleagues and may be reached via email at <moneal@surfbvi.com>and via GoogleVoice at 1-305-328-9055.

Thank you for your support over the years. It's been the honor of a lifetime to have been able to work with and for you all. I will be maintaining the IRF Newsletter e-mail group, and those of you who are a part of that group will continue to receive periodic postings. We can use that or the blog at IRF.ORG to converse about issues of mutual concern. In closing, I note that IRF is leaving the scene not because its work is done. Rather the challenges continue, and we hope to pass our knowledge and experience to others who will renew and even strengthen environmental problem-solving in the Caribbean well into the twenty-first century.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a thick, dark stroke.

Bruce G. Potter
President