



A 44-Year History of  
Environmental Planning for  
Island Development

*As remembered by Judith A. Towle*

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Historical Narrative  
of the Evolution, *Raison d'être*, and Contributions  
of Island Resources Foundation

Personal Reflections by  
Judith A. Towle  
Co-founder and Vice President for Four Decades

## THE PRECURSOR: WHAT CAME FIRST

This historical account of the evolution of Island Resources Foundation (IRF) as a Caribbean-based, small-island-focused, and environment-themed institution is not unlike the narrative that could be told of many mid-sized, not-for profit NGOs, both in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Perhaps what sets IRF's beginning apart from many mission-driven NGOs is that, at its gestation, it exhibited no pivotal organizing design or plan. Rather, IRF's early evolution reflected a series of seemingly unrelated serendipitous events that first brought its founders—**Edward and Judith Towle**—to the Caribbean in the late 1960s, not unlike many transplanted expatriates in pursuit of tropical suns and a following sea. Certainly the Towles did not have expectations that they would join an emergent movement then developing in the isles of the Caribbee, a movement generally referred to at the time (when it was referenced at all) as "*conservation*" but which would later morph into a focus on "*eco-development*" and finally "*environmental sustainability*."

There was a predecessor institution to Island Resources Foundation and this was the Caribbean Research Institute (CRI) at the then College, now University, of the Virgin Islands

in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). In 1967, IRF founder, Dr. Edward Towle, commenced his tenure at the College as director of its research arm, the Caribbean Research Institute, a decided diversion from Towle's earlier career paths as a naval officer, academician, and Smithsonian curator. CRI was the training ground for Ed and for what would later emerge as Island Resources Foundation. Here he learned how to build an institution in the Caribbean. But even more importantly, it was while affiliated with CRI that Ed was introduced to the few individuals and fewer still institutions pursuing conservation goals in the insular Caribbean of the mid-to-late 1960s. The former historian fortuitously, almost accidentally, stumbled on this new challenge, which would then direct the course of the remainder of his life.

It was an opportune moment and one that gave credence to the old adage that "timing is everything." With funding support from American philanthropist, Laurance Rockefeller, and led by a handful of concerned but relatively unorganized advocates, the Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA) had been established in 1967 as a collaboration of governments, NGOs, and individuals united in the pursuit of conservation goals in the Caribbean. In 1968, less than a year after his arrival in St. Thomas, Ed was elected president of the CCA, no doubt, at least in part, because his unbridled enthusiasm for new causes was seen by the CCA's organizing board to be what was needed to ignite the undertaking and move the association forward.

Towle's presidency of CCA, from 1968-1974, put him on the frontline of this new movement and became the platform for his immersion in the early years of Caribbean conservation. CCA provided an unexpected opportunity to travel the region, meet leaders, form friendships, and learn quickly about the Caribbean. Without Ed's tenure at CRI and, even

more importantly, his concurrent assumption of the presidency of CCA, there likely would not be an Island Resources Foundation. To wit: the CCA presidency enabled Ed to take hold of essential knowledge about the Caribbean with remarkable speed and to acquire a new tool bag of risk-taking skills, something that would serve him well during the four decades of IRF's history. After all, who but a risk-taker—especially one who was the new kid on the block, the white novice in an historically black region—would assume that he could take on the untried conservation movement and help to make it work?

## “SMALL ISLANDS” AS AN ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE

Today, islands have almost become an industry unto themselves—*island studies*, *island associations*, *island stakeholders*, *island issues*, *small island states*, *islands and climate change*, *UN year of small islands*, and on and on. But back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as *Island Resources Foundation* was taking shape first as a concept and then as an institution, that was not the case. One emerging paradigm during this period was “*small is beautiful*,” which became well known in 1973 after publication of a collection of essays by British economist E.F. Schumacher; thereafter, it was often used to denote technologies that were “appropriate.” But even the “small is beautiful” movement seldom focused on small islands, which at the time were very much places where “appropriate technologies” should have been—but were not being—employed.

Ed Towle was among the first to link insular attributes to island imperatives. As early as 1971, he was depicting islands “as an endangered species,” and championing non-traditional, non-continental-derived resource management methodologies and practices for insular places; in other words, Towle was championing *appropriate technologies for small islands*. What was to become an organizing principle for *Island Resources Foundation* is an oft-quoted statement Ed first made in the early 1970s:

Within a small island, no problem or area of study can stand by itself, no piece of life remains isolated; every living and non-living thing forms an integral part of a structured whole. Similarly, an island chain is a delicate and fragile network, representing a set of highly interdependent relationships—*island to island*, *system to sub-system*, *island to sea*.

Putting this insular paradigm to use, Ed emerged as a leading advocate for the uniqueness of small islands. With his colleague, John McEachern, he wrote the first-ever study on the subject of small island development and the environment (for IUCN in 1974 under title of *Ecological Guidelines for Island Development*). To quote from that document:

*Islands of every kind and however remote are currently experiencing strong development thrusts founded chiefly on tourism, on extractive enterprises, on their use as global air and steamship transportation nodes, and on the increased demands for local resources generated by rapidly growing insular populations. An unwanted by-product of this development has been a dramatic deterioration of island environments, accompanied by a decline in the insular quality of life as measured by welfare indicators other than the traditional economic ones ....*

*While the stresses and pressures of population growth, unrestrained development and modern technology are partly responsible for this decline in island environmental quality, serious shortcomings are also becoming apparent in the matter of resource planning, allocation and management [appropriate] for island systems.*

*The principal deficiency has been the omission of environmental values in planning and development strategies [emphasis added]. The question ... therefore is how to incorporate ecological principles to a far greater degree in the modernization of island communities now being shaped by local forces and by development agencies involved in or responsible for island administration and growth.*

Today these paragraphs seem all too familiar—they were groundbreaking for the early 1970s.

From this fresh perspective about small islands and the environment was born IRF's central mission based on a simple premise:

*Islands are special places, their environments are unique and vulnerable, and the Foundation's mission would be to assist small islands (especially those in the Caribbean) to meet the challenges of social, economic and institutional growth while protecting and sustainably managing their environments.*

To this mission — *environmental planning for island development* — Island Resources Foundation would devote more than four decades of research, educational outreach, information sharing, technical expertise and capacity building.

## ESTABLISHMENT: NOVEMBER, 1970

Some may assume the date shown on this section's header to be in error, as IRF has traditionally evoked 1972 as the date of its establishment. However, two years earlier, Ed Towle and two of his CRI colleagues signed incorporation papers for a non-profit organization to be domiciled in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Its name: **ISLAND RESOURCES FOUNDATION**. Initially, this new entity was planned as an affiliate of the Caribbean Research Institute, but one which could absorb Caribbean-wide programming that was increasingly of lesser concern to the USVI-focused College of the Virgin Islands, where CRI was housed. The 1970 Articles of Incorporation for IRF were broad and expansive in their scope and reach, some might say relatively unfocused except for a concentration on small islands.

The 1970 legal framework remained on paper for several years, until 1972, when Ed and Judith Towle determined to breathe life into the happenstance foundation that up to that point only existed as a legal document. First, Judith signed on as the Foundation's initial employee in 1971; a board of three trustees was assembled consisting of the Towles and Dr. Norwell Harrigan of the British Virgin Islands (BVI); and eventually, in 1972, Ed resigned his position at the Caribbean Research Institute and became IRF's first president and CEO.

A conceptual prospectus was prepared for Island Resources Foundation by the Towles in 1972. It read in part:

Throughout the world, insular communities, with limited areas, are experiencing the pressures of a growth and development phenomenon which has rarely been equaled on larger land masses. Attracted by the undeveloped, pristine nature of islands and by their recreational qualities and economic opportunities,

more people from continental areas are focusing on offshore oceanic and coastal insular areas, threatening to alter the very qualities that make islands viable as ecosystems and as communities.

Start-up funding was provided by American philanthropist Laurance Rockefeller and by two giants in the Caribbean travel industry: American and Eastern Airlines. The support of two major airlines perhaps warrants an explanation. As one of the earliest in the region to call attention to the inter-relationship between tourism and the environment, Ed Towle was invited in 1971 as the first-ever environmental speaker at the annual meeting of the Caribbean Hotel Association in Trinidad, followed in 1972 with a similar first-time address before the Caribbean Travel Association, with a presentation entitled "Tourism and the Environment: The Taxonomy of a Symbiotic Relationship." In each address, Towle encouraged the travel industry to join with the emerging environment sector to develop collaborative efforts to ensure the enhancement and survival of the "remarkably attractive, highly fragile island environments of the West Indies."

American and Eastern Airlines responded, and for several of IRF's early years (indeed, for many decades in the case of American Airlines), they provided critical support for the fledgling Island Resources Foundation.

IRF would always find its talent and its forte in the execution of funded programs. This was the approach of its founders, and over time Foundation principals realized the organization's enduring strength lay not in a broad membership base or in building an endowment or in pursuing unrestricted funding in support of centralized goals. Rather, IRF found its strength primarily from the identification and execution of funded programs that reinforced its core mission.

The Foundation did build a small but enthusiastic membership base over time, which largely grew out of an endangered species research program led by IRF scientists who, from 1971 to 1976, conducted annual research expeditions to study, monitor, and tag green sea turtles nesting at Aves Island, an isolated, then uninhabited Venezuelan island in the eastern Caribbean that was a major nesting site for this endangered species. To raise funds for the research, IRF initiated a “name your turtle” program that allowed donors to name a tagged turtle and follow the animal’s progress in Caribbean waters. When this research initiative ended, the Foundation had assembled a base of donors, and the Aves Island contributors eventually morphed to a larger group of persons interested in the Foundation’s work who, in turn, became IRF’s initial universe of members.

IRF’s first headquarters was in St. Thomas at the Johnny Harms Lagoon Marina on the island’s eastern end. Harms, who is credited with first promoting sports fishing in the USVI, was long a friend and supporter of IRF, especially during its earliest years. In 1983, IRF moved to an adjacent property where it was housed in a “wooden cottage” style building that reflected traditional West Indian architecture and was expressly constructed for IRF’s occupancy. In that same year, the Foundation opened a small auxiliary office in downtown Washington, DC, and, from 1990-1999, IRF supported a second auxiliary office based at the National Museum in St. John’s, Antigua; the later facility existed largely in support of IRF’s NGO strengthening program. Finally, in the late 1990s, in partnership with the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in Tortola, IRF established a registered office in the British Virgin Islands and, in 1997, donated its extensive and respected library on Caribbean environments to the College.

## THE EARLY YEARS: 1972 — 1980

Like any child learning to take its first steps, the Foundation officially came to life in 1972 with perhaps more uncertainty and a few more tumbles than anticipated. During that first decade, what we called our survival decade, IRF was nothing so much as it was *eclectic*—it was at times all over the programming map as the organization’s principals sought to define its identity more clearly, focus its ambitions more realistically, and support its programs more sustainably.

IRF began close to home, in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It developed a partnership with the territory’s new Department of Conservation and Cultural Affairs, one of the first—if not the first—environment-focused departments or ministries of government in the region. Before the department had sufficient staff, IRF served as its surrogate research arm, while also partnering with the government’s Planning Office (1976-77) to design the territory’s brand new coastal zone management program, the first in the eastern Caribbean. IRF prepared a comprehensive marine resource assessment and coastal classification system for the U.S. Virgin Islands and developed the initial CZM planning guidelines.

Nowhere in the 1970s was environmental stress induced by change more evident than in the coastal zone of Caribbean insular environments where competing human interests interacted directly with the dynamics of natural ecosystems. Recognizing the need for improved management strategies for coastal environments, the Foundation began to carry out a series of projects that initially focused on water quality and pollution control, fisheries development, and marine resource utilization, but which eventually led to the Foundation’s more integrated contributions to coastal area planning in the wider Caribbean in the 1980s and 1990s.

At the same time, Island Resources Foundation was among the earliest advocates for environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures for Caribbean islands, in a region that was rapidly developing but with few standards or controls for understanding how development was impacting the environment. EIAs prepared by the Foundation in the 1970s for Caribbean public sector infrastructure projects (including airport construction, mass transportation systems, harbor dredging, dock construction, sand mining and petroleum transport facilities) were among the first in the region.

With support from the United Nations Development Programme, the Foundation undertook the region's first environmental survey (1973-74) of selected Caribbean islands (eight in all), reporting on key problem areas requiring special management approaches well before these issues were more generally appreciated. In 1976, the Foundation was commissioned by the British Virgin Islands Government to carry out a more comprehensive environmental survey of the BVI including preparation of attendant guidelines for future development options in the territory.

During this period, IRF began to reach out to Caribbean governments to provide assistance for park planning, training, research and ecotourism programs. Earliest initiatives concentrated on the Dominican Republic, Dominica, Anguilla, Jamaica, and offshore islands in Venezuela and Panama as these and other Caribbean states began to formulate how to protect natural resources within protected area frameworks. Cultural heritage was also on the Foundation's agenda during its early years, including a 1976 inventory of over 100 historical sites and landmarks in ten Caribbean islands.

As the decade of the 1980s commenced, Island Resources Foundation found that it had begun to narrow much

of its focus to concentrate on what would become two recurring program themes:

- **Environmental Planning and Impact Assessment**, with an emphasis on coastal and marine resource development.
- **Natural Resource Protection and Research**, an area that would emerge in IRF's future as biodiversity conservation and research.

Additionally, by the end of the 1970s, an overarching approach to program execution had been firmly embedded in IRF rhetoric and pursuits, namely, **the Foundation's tenacious emphasis on the *application of sound science to environmental problem solving.***

## STAFF, ASSOCIATES, TRUSTEES AND INTERNS

As the Foundation's reach and scope expanded, so did its staff. From two employees in 1972, the Foundation's permanent *staff* would number between 10 and 20, dependent on project activity, and included biologists and ecologists, geologists and historians, planners and economists, system analysts and international development specialists, community organizers and institutional specialists.

Additionally, IRF came to rely on an interdisciplinary roster of IRF-affiliated *associates* who consulted with the permanent staff within their disciplinary specialties, helped to keep the Foundation informed regarding island affairs, and remained available for assignment on appropriate IRF projects. Numbering approximately 75 professionals with island residency or island-specific experience, the Foundation's Research and Program Associates helped to expand the reach and opportunities available for the organization's ongoing work.

From its inception, the Foundation's *governing board* has comprised individuals whose background and skills included experience not only in environmental sectors but also in international development and business management. In so doing, the Foundation recognized the need to address environmental concerns within a broader framework of economic and social development. These concerns were reflected in the composition of the Foundation's board of trustees for more than four decades and were perhaps best illustrated in the 1970s when George A. Spater, then president of American Airlines, and Dr. Harold J. Coolidge, a founding member of the IUCN and the WWF-US, both served on the IRF board at the same time.

Beginning in 1973, Island Resources Foundation launched a program of sponsored *internships*, successfully placing over 50 student interns from North American and Caribbean academic institutions. IRF interns (primarily at the graduate-student level) were generally assigned to the Foundation's offices in St. Thomas, Tortola, Antigua, and Washington, DC, although approximately a dozen interns were also placed with IRF institutional partners in the Caribbean, primarily environment-focused NGOs.

Throughout its history, Island Resources Foundation built an organization that promoted openness, mutual trust, and confidence, which in turn created pride and loyalty among the organization's staff, program associates, recurrent consultants, trustees, members, supporters, Caribbean partners, island stakeholders, and even some donors. Such *esprit de corps* enhanced the Foundation's reputation, energized IRF's leadership, and created a congenial institutional framework that was conducive to progress and sustainability.

## THE DECADE OF THE 1980s: TWO DEFINING PROGRAMS

In the 1980s two programs stand out in the narrative of Island Resources Foundation's development, in terms of level of funding, uniqueness, and impact.

The first was development of *environmental profiles* for eight eastern Caribbean countries and territories.

The background for these studies dated to the mid-1970s when the Congress of the United States directed the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide a statement of baseline environmental conditions and institutional capacity for all AID-recipient countries. These statements would be called **Country Environmental Profiles**. Subsequently, in 1986, the Caribbean Conservation Association in Barbados and the University of the West Indies sponsored a conference at which participants acknowledged the need for environmental profiles, specifically in the eastern Caribbean. Finally, by 1987, USAID's mission in Barbados had launched a program to provide environmental profiles for each AID-funded country in the eastern Caribbean.

The ensuing Profile Program was implemented by the Caribbean Conservation Association, with Island Resources Foundation selected to provide the technical skills needed to prepare the documents. The profiles—for Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines—were funded by USAID, prepared by IRF, and published by CCA and IRF. Shortly thereafter, the United Nations Development Programme in Barbados approached CCA and IRF to undertake a similar project for two UK territories in the eastern Caribbean—Anguilla and Montserrat.

The eight profiles were groundbreaking for their time. An unprecedented assemblage of institutions, government agencies, NGOs, and individuals were involved in a first-of-its-kind effort to comprehensively examine and assess priority environmental issues in the eastern Caribbean. Unique to the process, particularly for the years in which the documents were produced, was the requirement that the lead technical assistance organization (IRF) was partnered in each island with an indigenous NGO and a designated government agency, a collaboration that IRF insisted on when drafting the program's operational framework.

The second major IRF program in the 1980s, continuing into the 1990s, was the Foundation's *Institutional Strengthening Program for Eastern Caribbean Environmental NGOs*. This nine-year initiative (1986-95) was at the time the largest regional program specifically targeting the role of the non-profit sector in Caribbean environmental affairs. It represented an overdue policy recognition of a longstanding Foundation assertion that non-governmental organizations had a major role to play in the management of the region's environment.

An ambitious institutional support program was launched by IRF in the mid-1980s with start-up funding from the World Wildlife Fund-US and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Long-term support was later facilitated through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Agency for International Development. For almost a decade, from its office in Antigua, IRF provided targeted technical assistance, in-country training, small grants, and institutional planning support for emerging conservation NGOs, a then mostly unrecognized sector in the eastern Caribbean. By its end, the program had confirmed that these organizations had important roles to play as agents for sustainable development and as institutional stakeholders for building consensus about national development goals.

Melding the management processes for these multi-island, multi-disciplinary projects was a major challenge for the Foundation, but by implementing careful data management and program accountability, IRF was able to maintain credibility with donors and leverage benefits for participating island organizations and government agencies.

Thus, by the end of the 1980s, Island Resources Foundation had added two new programmatic themes to its institutional focus:

- **Environmental Policy and Law**, highlighted by preparation of Country Environmental Profiles but eventually to include conflict resolution and environmental arbitration, economic analysis of natural resource development, policy innovation for insular resource management, co-management strategies for natural resource protection, and evaluation of environmental institutions, legislation and programs.
- **Institutional Development**, with an emphasis on skills building for islanders and collaborative capacity building for island institutions, highlighted by the Foundation's NGO Strengthening Program.

Additionally, in the 1980s, IRF assumed leadership—as a founding member and coordinator—of the Virgin Islands Resource Management Cooperative (VIRMC), a unique collaboration of public and private sector institutions who recognized the need for a cooperative approach to the management of natural resources in the wider Virgin Islands, including the British Virgin Islands. With funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the U.S. National Park Service, and joined by collaborating VIRMC institutions, IRF

oversaw a five-year research program focused primarily on the marine resources of the Virgin Islands Biosphere Reserve. Thirty research studies were carried out by 33 investigators from nine VIRMC-affiliated institutions.

## INFORMATION — THE LIFEBLOOD OF IRF

Island Resources Foundation was built on the premise that knowledge is power and that information is the basis for informed decision-making about the environment in small islands. Therefore, with the launching of Island Resources Foundation in the early 1970s, its founder, Dr. Edward Towle, determined that the institution would create a library of information, comprised primarily of non-traditional, so-called gray (unpublished) literature, and that this information would be available within an open-access framework. The subject matter of IRF's library—small island systems, insular environments, and sustainable development in the Caribbean—were all relatively new subjects for the region in 1972. And because initially these were pre-Internet, pre-Google, even pre-personal computer years, the extensive service function provided by the library Ed created, as well as his conscientious cultivation of a broad distribution network, fulfilled a growing regional need at a level that was unique for its time.

As the Foundation's library became better known among neighboring Caribbean islands, regional institutions, government agencies and international bodies, and as the Foundation developed its own publication series, exchange arrangements became possible, which also added to the Foundation's ability to acquire new materials for its collection.

Eventually, the IRF library in St. Thomas (with an auxiliary library in Washington, DC) totally outstripped the organization's ability to properly house it at the Foundation's facility in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Ed began to explore options for the future development of this valuable collection and to address the immediate problems of housing and access.

The solution lay in a new partnership between Island Resources Foundation and the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in Tortola, British Virgin Islands. In 1997, the Foundation donated its library to the College and transferred it to Tortola, where it is currently housed at the College's Learning Resource Centre as the **Dr. Edward L. Towle Island Systems Environmental Information Collection**.

By 2015, the College and Island Resources Foundation mutually recognized that accessibility was again an issue as digital library collections were becoming the norm. The two institutions created a new partnership, this time to digitize the Towle Collection, eventually to scan all documents, convert each to a searchable PDF format, and index the collection within a newly created digital cataloguing system.

## YEARS OF TRANSITION: THE 1990s

The decade of the 1990s witnessed a transition in the leadership of Island Resources Foundation. Founder and longtime president, Dr. Edward L. Towle, retired in 1998, thereafter assuming the chairmanship of the board of trustees. The presidency was taken up by **Bruce G. Potter**, who had joined the Foundation's staff in 1994. A former U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer and later staffer for Latin America and the Caribbean at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, DC, Bruce also brought to the Foundation an extensive background in economic planning, disaster management, institutional development, and information systems management in both the public and private sectors.

With Bruce's ascendancy at IRF, a new programmatic area was created and then expanded over the course of two decades:

- **Environmental Information Management**, concentrating on the development of information management models and strengthening the availability of information resources for informed decision making.

Under Potter's leadership, the Foundation became a leader in the development of emerging information management technologies that actively encouraged improved environmental decision making for small island states. With Bruce as coordinator and more than 30 electronic mail groups under his management, IRF began to concentrate on building regional and global networks among islanders to facilitate communication and information exchange. E-groups were established in response to constituent requirements and covered diverse subject matter from Caribbean biodiversity to geographic information systems to sustainable tourism.

Potter's contributions to the field will be continued with the establishment in 2016 of the **Bruce G. Potter Nature Tech Fund**.

In the early 1990s, IRF launched a program of research and capacity building for Caribbean biodiversity initiatives, a logical extension of the Foundation's decades-long commitment to Caribbean conservation and natural resource assessment. The program was shaped by research, education, habitat and species protection, and information sharing. Leadership was initially provided by the director of IRF's NGO Strengthening Program in Antigua, **Dr. Bruce Horwith**, and was later carried forward by IRF scientists, **Kevel Lindsay** and **Jean-Pierre Bacle**. The program extended and enhanced decades-long IRF initiatives in conservation and natural resource protection, thereby creating a reprogrammed area of concentration:

- **Island-specific Biodiversity Research and Conservation**, designed to provide technical expertise in biodiversity for highly stressed insular environments, species, and habitats.

Another long-term initiative commencing in the 1990s concentrated on a series of research studies in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to develop erosion models and sediment control practices for land-based activities that impact fragile coral reef systems in Caribbean islands. The program, which extended to 2015, was directed by IRF geologist and watershed management scientist, **Dr. Carlos Ramos Scharrón**. During the 1990s, IRF researchers also created guidelines for sediment control practices in the insular Caribbean, including best management practices for land use activities that impact coastal ecosystems (published by the United Nations Environment Programme for the Caribbean in 1994).

Many program initiatives from earlier decades were extended in the 1990s, for example: park and protected area planning with the preparation of a comprehensive management plan for the Bird Island Marine Reserve in Antigua and an assessment of the Montego Bay Marine Park and Blue Mountain National Park in Jamaica.

IRF continued to focus on integrated coastal area planning keyed to small-island conditions, especially island states with expanding tourism sectors and increasing vulnerability to natural disasters. In the 1990s, the Foundation developed management plans for 18 "areas of particular concern" as designated under U.S. Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management legislation. In 1996, IRF developed comprehensive guidelines for integrated coastal area planning in the wider Caribbean, which were published and disseminated by the United Nations Environment Programme's Caribbean office in Jamaica.

Throughout its history, Island Resources Foundation has been a contributor to global initiatives designed to enhance the development options of small islands. IRF's second president, Bruce Potter, expanded the Foundation's longstanding interest in educating international agencies and donor institutions about the uniqueness of insular environments. Under his leadership, IRF partnered with global island initiatives such as the Global Islands Network ([www.globalislands.net](http://www.globalislands.net)), an early worldwide, internet-based information consortium intended to provide easy access to available information on sustainable island development.

## SOURCES OF SUPPORT

During its four-decade tenure, Island Resources Foundation funded its program activities primarily through a combination of externally funded grants and contracts, collaborative partnerships, and private sector contributions.

With project-specific funding totaling just under \$10 million, primary program support and donors have included 14 U.S. Government agencies, 9 Caribbean governments, more than a dozen international and Caribbean regional agencies, and more than 50 private sector institutions, including corporate sponsors, philanthropic foundations, and other grant-making, non-governmental organizations.

## THE HOME STRETCH: 2000 — 2016

As the new millennium began, Island Resources Foundation continued to develop, fund, and implement projects within its primary program areas, including:

- Preliminary planning for the proposed Nevis Peak National Park.
- Completion of a five-year Conservation and Management Plan for the protection of bat species in the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- Preparation of a biodiversity inventory and status assessment for the Wallings Forest Protected Area and the Codrington Lagoon National Park in Antigua and Barbuda.
- Development of environmental and socio-economic baseline studies for proposed park sites in St. Kitts and Grenada.

Yet, even as these and other activities moved forward, the Foundation was beginning to slow down. Increasingly, programs focused on Foundation undertakings in the British Virgin Islands where IRF had maintained an office since the late 1990s, with IRF founder and vice president, **Judith Towle**, directing operations. Two major projects were initiated in this British overseas territory commencing in the early 2000s.

The first was an eight-year project which brought IRF full circle back to its initial donor in 1972—**Laurance S. Rockefeller**. The American entrepreneur and conservationist owned a 14-acre island in the British Virgin Islands known as Sandy Cay, which he had maintained for over 30 years as a private park with open access to all. As part of his planning to donate the island to the BVI, Rockefeller sponsored a comprehensive program to facilitate the donation. First, he engaged Island

Resources Foundation to prepare an ecosystem survey and a long-term management plan for the island. But Rockefeller did not stop there as he wanted to ensure that Sandy Cay would be managed and protected in perpetuity as a unique natural area as it had been for more than three decades under his stewardship.

Thus, in partnership with IRF and in collaboration with the National Parks Trust of the [British] Virgin Islands, Rockefeller funded an eight-year multifaceted program of sustained and targeted assistance for BVI institutions, laws and policies that supported conservation and protected area management. The so-called Sandy Cay Program, co-directed by Edward and Judith Towle, would be Dr. Towle's last IRF project; both he and Laurance Rockefeller would die before the island was formally transferred to the National Parks Trust in 2008. The Sandy Cay Development Program represented the culmination of IRF's four decades of resource assessment, capacity building, and planning guidance on behalf of park and protected area development in the Caribbean.

The second major BVI program during the Foundation's final years was a long-delayed initiative to provide environmental profiles for the multiple islands of the British Virgin Islands archipelago. Directed by Judith Towle, the BVI project extended and completed the environmental profiling work carried out by the Foundation from 1987-1993. At that time, profiles were prepared by IRF for two other UK overseas territories—Anguilla and Montserrat—and now it was the BVI's turn. IRF's objective was not only to provide a current-state description and assessment of the BVI environment, but also to substantially expand the environmental information base for the territory and to make that information easily accessible. Five major publications were prepared, with a stand-alone profile for each of the major islands (Jost Van Dyke, Virgin Gorda, Anegada, and Tortola) and a fifth profile

highlighting the natural history of 17 of Tortola's sister islands. In all, the BVI environmental profile series comprised well over one thousand pages of text and data, and all are now available online as PDF documents.

Nevertheless, by 2015—with the death of founder Edward Towle in 2006, the relocation of IRF principals from the Caribbean to the continental United States, and a downsizing in funding for broader-based, geographically diverse programs in the region—it was increasingly clear that the role of Island Resources Foundation in the wider Caribbean was changing. At the time of its establishment in the early 1970s, IRF was one of the very few institutions addressing environmental change in the Caribbean; 43 years later, it was one of many.

In 2014, IRF trustees began to explore options for the Foundation's future. It was understood that Island Resources Foundation had made important contributions—one need only identify the number of times that the words "*unique*," "*initial*," "*first of its kind*," "*groundbreaking*" and "*early leadership*" have been used in this narrative to understand how the Foundation has stood at the forefront of environmental research, capacity-building, policy innovation, and island-centric initiatives. Furthermore, those institutions and individuals associated with the Foundation over the decades have enjoyed a richness of opportunity and experience.

Nonetheless, the board came to the conclusion that the Foundation's contributions had run their course, and it was time for those associated with IRF to bequeath the future to a new generation of environmental scientists and advocates. To this end, Island Resources Foundation ceased its operations in June 2016 and closed its offices in St. Thomas, Tortola, and Washington, DC.

As I end this narrative, I would like to cite a line oft-quoted by my late husband, Dr. Edward Towle (which in turn was a paraphrasing of a quotation from the eighteenth-century English poet, Alexander Pope):

*In everything respect the genius of the place.*

To this pronouncement, Island Resources Foundation has remained true ... always respecting the genius of small islands, their environments, their people and their fragile beauty.