

# ST. JOHN SOURCE

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## St. John Land Conservancy Adds Lovango Donation to Preserved Lands

More than an acre of undeveloped land on the easternmost tip of Lovango Cay has been donated to the St. John Land Conservancy, according to the organization's president and cofounder, Rafael Muilenburg.

"We want this lovely and pristine piece of land to be set aside for our community for public enjoyment, both scenic and otherwise, by current and future generations," Muilenburg said Tuesday. "Keeping some of our land in its natural state is part of what makes these islands so beautiful."

The St. John Land Conservancy is a nonprofit charitable land trust founded in 2011 with the mission of providing an independent conservation alternative to the V.I. National Park, which the organization collaborates with to protect mostly coastal properties outside the park's authorized boundaries.

The SJLC's first major conservation success, 3.6 acres at East End's Haulover Bay, was ultimately donated to the national park because of the contiguous park boundary at Haulover. But other potential conservation projects, such as the Lovango donation, lie outside of areas where the park can accept new lands.

The Haulover property had been expected to be developed with condos, but after efforts by Muilenburg and his wife, Thia, to find a "conservation buyer," it was bought in 2011 with the help of SJLC cofounder Lauren Mercadante. The property was turned over to the V.I. National Park in 2015.

Also in 2015, the organization was contacted by "a generous donor" regarding property on Lovango, Muilenburg said.

In a press release issued by SJLC on Tuesday, the recently acquired Lovango property was described as "absolutely gorgeous and pristine, and part of a scenic corridor for boating traffic."

"It is personally satisfying for me to be helping preserve part of an island I spent four years living on as a kid," added Muilenburg in reference to Lovango, a small cay located to the northwest of St. John

According to SJLC's press release, the organization has been working over the last year to expand its board, its network of supporters and its online presence. In addition to the Lovango property, other land donations are currently in process, and Muilenburg noted that such donations can give substantial tax benefits to the donor. The SJLC is also seeking donations of funds for purchasing certain threatened properties with high conservation value.

The organization's all-volunteer board includes the Muilenburgs, Dave Prevo, Gary Ray, Mary Vargo, Matt Craft, Marty Beechler, Michael Gorenstien, Kelly Larkin and Athena Swartley. Other founding members of SJLC include Lauren and George Mercadante.

The SJLC welcomes the involvement of the community in all respects, including through the assistance of local volunteers, through donations of land or funds, and through spreading the word about SJLC's work. Interested community members are invited to attend a "meet the SJLC Board" cocktail party at Bajo el Sol in Mongoose Junction on Saturday from 5:30 to 7:30 pm.

Readers can learn more about SJLC and get in contact with the group through [www.stjohnlandconservancy.org](http://www.stjohnlandconservancy.org) <sup>[1]</sup> and on its Facebook page.

Local news

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[1] <http://www.stjohnlandconservancy.org>