

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

For Release June 6, 1977

McGarvey 202/343-5634

## ST. CROIX GROUND LIZARD LISTED AS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

The St. Croix ground lizard (Ameiva polops) of the U.S. Virgin Islands has been determined to be an endangered species by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The rulemaking, published June 3, 1977, in the Federal Register, also listed two islands determined to be critical habitat for this rare species.

Only about 300 of the 7-inch reptiles remain on a total of 15 acres on two tiny islands off the coast of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. Eleven of the acres are on Green Cay which supports about 200 of the lizards. Of the four acres on Protestant Cay where the remaining population lives, two acres have already been developed and the other two could be further altered by construction which is presently under consideration. Development on Green Cay, now completely undeveloped, could also reduce the available habitat for the species, biologists say.

The mongoose, a badger-sized carnivore introduced in the last century to the islands from India to control rodents, preys on the lizard and has been a major cause in the species' decline. Although there are no mongooses on the two islands where the lizard now occurs, mongooses and feral house cats were responsible for wiping out the lizards on Buck Island and St. Croix and could easily do the same if introduced on Protestant or Green Cays. St. Croix now supports a mongoose population estimated to be as high as one per acre in some areas.