

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Greens challenge permit for troubled Virgin Islands refinery

[Kelsey Brugger](#), E&E News reporter

Green groups are petitioning EPA to yank a federal permit at Limetree Bay refinery, a facility in the U.S. Virgin Islands that the Trump administration allowed to restart despite its troubled past.

The \$1.6 billion refining project, which was shuttered in 2012 and restarted this week, was brought back to life through the Trump EPA's well-documented "customer" service approach to fossil fuel companies. The complex is located in a predominantly Black and Latino and low-income area of St. Croix, and its primary owner, ArcLight Capital Partners LLC, has ties to former President Trump ([Greenwire](#), Dec. 22, 2020).

Critics say it is a prime example of environmental injustice that ran rampant under Trump.

Now they hope President Biden will reverse the decision.

"Limetree Bay refinery continues to be an environmental monster that Trump officials brought back to life," said Miyoko Sakashita, oceans program director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "The Biden administration needs to take another look at this menace to local residents and marine life."

The environmental groups, including the Center, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the St. Croix Environmental Association and the Sierra Club, are calling on the Environmental Appeals Board to review the federal permit EPA issued in December at the end of Trump administration.

"The Permit would allow Limetree to undertake large-scale refining operations at a facility that was shut down for over eight years and to emit harmful air pollutants into the surrounding environment that is home to vulnerable communities and over two dozen threatened and endangered species," the petition reads.

The groups argued that the facility should never have received a "plantwide applicability limit" permit, given that it was shut down for so many years. They also are asking for review of a number of metrics, including emissions caps, environmental justice impacts and effects on endangered species.

The petition details facts surrounding the case earlier reported by E&E News. Those include that Limetree executives in 2018 started having biweekly meetings with EPA officials to discuss plans for "expansion/modification" of the facility, even though it had been shuttered for six

years. Former EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler directed his staff to "fully cooperate" in the effort, the petition reads.

EPA declined to comment on the appeal. The company did not respond this morning to a request for comment.

Press reports have in the past year detailed incidents of odors and unscheduled flare-ups at the facility, which delayed the reopening. The company had hoped to reopen in January 2020 to benefit from a cheaper international low-sulfur fuel standard.

Last month, Reuters reported, BP announced it would delay oil shipments to the refinery until its problems were addressed.

In November, Limetree Bay Ventures LLC replaced its chief executive officer with Jeffrey Rinker, who commented this week that he was "thrilled to commence operations and begin producing quality fuels for our customers."

"In these difficult economic times, we are thankful to be able to support growth in the local economy and be a source of significant local employment for many years to come," he said.

The refinery's reboot comes after years of economic peril on the island due to the decline in tourism and construction business and, now, the coronavirus pandemic.

Jennifer Valiulis, executive director of the St. Croix Environmental Association, asserted that the future of the island "should not be as a pollution haven for a dying industry that has caused a climate crisis."

Reporter Corbin Hiar contributed.