

# A Project with Many Benefits: USACE Pioneers Wood Reuse While Advancing Infrastructure Development

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Caribbean District**

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Caguas, Puerto Rico – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Caribbean District is making history in Puerto Rico’s timber industry by becoming the first federal agency to incorporate responsible tree disposal management into its construction contracts. This groundbreaking initiative is part of the replacement work for the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Avenue Bridge.



“Instead of being sent to landfills, as has been common practice, wood obtained from removed trees in the Franklin D. Roosevelt bridge construction area is now sent to a sawmill for repurposing,” highlighted Colonel Charles Decker. “With this initiative, USACE is laying the foundation for responsible wood management on the island, promoting the reuse of a valuable resource in our construction projects.”

With a federal investment of \$150.7 million from the Bipartisan Budget Act, USACE and its contractor, Ferrovial Construcción, LLC, are working to replace the Franklin D. Roosevelt Bridge structures with a wider two-span design. This improvement aims to enhance water flow and reduce debris accumulation. The project also includes widening and deepening the existing channel through the construction of two drilled shaft walls, demolition of the current structure, installation of riprap scour protection, and new stormwater inlets for improved drainage.

## A Partner in Responsible Wood Management

Leading the sustainable wood management efforts in USACE’s project is Puerto Rico Hardwoods, an organization with over a decade of experience in developing a sustainable timber industry on the island. Their approach is rooted in sustainable forestry management and the repurposing of natural resources.

“Wood is a renewable and sustainable resource. Puerto Rico has a higher forest growth capacity than other regions and produces some of the most highly valued woods worldwide,” explained Andrés Rúa, co-founder of Puerto Rico Hardwoods. The company, which was awarded the Wood Innovation Grant by the U.S. Forest Service, is dedicated to preventing trees from being discarded in landfills and, instead, transforming them into high-value pieces in collaboration with Puerto Rican cabinetmakers and artisans.

The Corps of Engineers project has facilitated the utilization of species such as mahogany, terocarpus, almond, acacia, guanacaste, and American guama. “Wood has immense value,” emphasized Thrity Vakil, president and co-founder of Puerto Rico Hardwoods. “Our cabinetmakers and artisans create unique pieces for Puerto Ricans to enjoy, many of which even reach international markets. We are bringing Puerto Rican wood to the world.”

## Additional Benefits

The replacement of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Bridge in San Juan is not just about improving river flow through a deeper channel. It also ensures that the new bridge meets the latest construction codes, making it more resilient to extreme weather events, seismic activity, and other environmental challenges.

In addition to its engineering benefits and trailblazing initiatives with the reuse of the wood, the project is expected

to have a significant economic impact. It is projected to generate 200 direct jobs and 500 indirect jobs while contributing to the local economy through \$7.8 million in municipal fee payments. The construction project is expected to extend for four-and-a-half years.

By pioneering responsible wood reuse in construction, USACE is setting a precedent for government management of this natural resource in Puerto Rico—proving that infrastructure projects can be innovative, solution driven and environmentally conscious.