



**28th U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE MEETING  
Report of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee  
Washington, D.C. February 23, 2012**

**Hafa adai, Talofa, Aloha, Hola and Good Day** - It is again my pleasure, on behalf of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC) to present this report on our activities, accomplishments and emerging issues since we last met in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in October 2011.

**National Ocean Council, Regional Ocean Partnerships** – Both the Pacific Islands and Caribbean regions have received funding to develop and establish regional ocean partnerships. The Pacific Regional Ocean Partnership, with leadership from Lelei Peau, is planning to hold a workshop in May to agree on objectives, and regional priority areas for collaboration to establish the partnership.

The Caribbean region, with leadership from Paige Rothenberger, is finalizing a memorandum of understanding between the Governors of Puerto Rico and the USVI.

**Strengthening Partnerships with USEPA** – The AIC will be meeting with EPA's Office of Water, Oceans and Wetlands tomorrow to explore ways to increase collaboration and strengthen partnerships with EPA to address watersheds, land based sources of pollution, stormwater management, improving compensatory mitigation for coral reefs, and enforcement and compliance.

**Natural Disasters Response** - The AIC supports the focus on this issue to develop a process to deal with responses to support coral reef recovery and resilience following natural disasters. We recognize the federal budgetary challenges and support the proposed network and response plan.

**USCRTF Watershed Partnership Initiative** –The Faga'alu Watershed has been nominated by American Samoa, as the 'plus-one' site for the USCRTF Watershed Partnership Initiative. This watershed was identified as a top priority site by CRAG and NOAA CRCP in American Samoa's Coral Reef Management Priorities document, and has ongoing coral reef management activities, significant biological value, and engagement of the local community, who are in the process of finalizing a Community-based Management Plan.

The West Maui region from Ka'anapali to Honolua has been a focus area of the USCRTF Hawaii LAS-LBSP since its inception in the early 2000s. The West Maui Watershed Initiative is enabling several federal partners to jump-start previously

identified early actions and implementation activities. NOAA and DLNR are developing the Ka'anapali-Kahekili Watershed Management Plan that will recommend actions to reduce and treat pollutants at specific locations across the terrestrial portions of Ka'anapali's two sub-watersheds, Honokowai and Wahikuli. Scheduled for completion in December 2012, the management plan will be incorporated into the larger DLNR/USACE West Maui watershed plan.

**Governor Sunia Summer Internships** - The AIC would like to express our appreciation to USDA/NRCS and USFWS for hosting the Governor Sunia Summer Internships for 2012. We also wish to acknowledge the hard work of the Sunia Internship Team:

- Kathleen Dobler, Sheryl Woo, Shirley Nakamura and Gail Ichikawa of USDA/NRCS in Hawaii; Edwin Almodovar in the Caribbean region
- Nikki Lamp, USFWS in Atlanta, Silmarie Padron, USFWS,
- USCRTF Steering Committee Co-Chairs - Beth Dieveney and Liza Johnson, and
- Karen Koltes, DOIA/OIA

This is an excellent example of how key steering committee members can work in partnership to improve and revitalize this important initiative to build capacity in the jurisdictions. We look forward to hearing about the experiences of the Sunia Summer 2012 interns, and encourage other federal agency partners to support the partnership in future years.

**Micronesia Challenge update** - In 2011, The Micronesia Conservation Trust (MCT) supported the development of community based climate change adaptation tools for the Micronesia region. To design the most appropriate and useable products, consultants reviewed existing CC adaptation materials, spoke with various climate experts, and held a regional workshop with regional natural resource managers, community members, and climate change experts. The following products were developed: *Adapting to a Changing Climate Outreach Toolkit* - designed to provide community members and stakeholders with an understanding of climate change concepts and adaptation strategies; and revised PIMPAC management planning guidance, which now includes a climate change lens.

Training workshops were held in Majuro, Pohnpei, Palau, and Chuuk, with future workshops scheduled for Kosrae and Yap. Workshops can be held in CNMI and Guam once funding is identified.

The 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the MC Measures Working Group was held from 6-9 February 2012 in Palau, with twenty-four participants from around the region. The meeting focused on marine ecological indicators and substantial progress has been made in the region since the previous marine measures meeting in 2010. Participants discussed the results from testing a Regional MPA Monitoring Protocol and reached consensus on a variety of regional indicators and methods approved a process for regional database management.

## **U.S. Caribbean**

**Coral Assembly** – The Caribbean office of The Nature Conservancy convened a Coral Assembly in December 2011 in San Juan, where coral reef stewards from Puerto Rico, USVI and the British Virgin Islands met to improve regional management and protection

of coral reef ecosystems. The assembly brought together coral reef managers, scientists, researchers, local community groups, NGOs and policy makers from the three jurisdictions to discuss the state of coral reef ecosystems, shared goals, objectives and challenges. This has created a network and community of practice for regional coral reef managers. An online platform to extend discussion and collaborations is being developed and strategies to address shared priority needs will be developed. The two-day meeting was designed to learn and share ideas that will lead to more effective long-term coral reef management and protection.

**Climate Change workshop** - In November 2011, a DNER and EPA led conference was held on climate change in San Juan PR. It brought together stakeholders from federal agencies, local territorial agencies, academia and local communities to look at climate change issues in the US Caribbean. Participants from the USVI, PR and wider Caribbean were able to listen to and share ideas on tackling climate change in our islands. Agencies were able to outline what opportunities were in place for coastal communities to build climate issues into future program planning. The meeting brought experts in the field of climate change impacts and projections for the U.S. Caribbean, strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to show how measures can be taken in PR and the U.S. VI to increase resilience in the face of a changing climate

#### **Updates from Coral Jurisdictions:**

**American Samoa** - The Faga'alu Watershed has been nominated by American Samoa, as the 'plus-one' site for the USCRTF Watershed Partnership Initiative. The watershed is identified as a top priority site by CRAG and NOAA CRCP in 'American Samoa's Coral Reef Management Priorities' document, and has ongoing coral reef management activities, significant biological value, and engagement of the local community, who are in the process of finalizing a Community-based Management Plan. The official selection will be decided at this meeting of the USCRTF.

American Samoa EPA is collaborating with Dr. Trent Biggs at San Diego State University on a study of land based sources of pollution in the Faga'alu Watershed. The goal of the project is to identify key sources of sediment and nutrients in the watershed, which will help prioritize management efforts designed to reduce impacts to the nearby coral reef.

The Amouli village planning committee met with partners from NOAA-PIRO, CRAG, and Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources in January, 2012 to further develop the village Climate Change Resiliency Plan. The draft plan will be finalized in February, followed by a review process, and a presentation of the final plan to the village council. The main purpose of the Plan will be to assist the community to take actions to adapt to predicted climate change impacts.

Governor Togiola T.A. Tulafono will host the 28<sup>th</sup> meeting of the USCRTF in American Samoa from August 20 through 23, 2012. This meeting will mark his final participation as a member of the Task Force. Governor Togiola remains the longest standing active Governor in the USCRTF, with unparalleled attendance at all USCRTF meetings throughout his extended tenure in office. He will be remembered for his strong leadership in the field of coral reef management, particularly regarding the USCRTF Climate Change Resilience initiatives.

**CNMI** - In October, 2011, CNMI launched an awareness campaign to encourage the business community in the Garapan area to voluntarily install BMPs around their establishments to slow the flow of runoff. Garapan is the tourist district of Saipan and heavily populated and frequently visited by both tourists and residents. It is also the path where major runoff travels during heavy rains. Thus, the marking of the stormdrains to discourage the community from dumping trash into the drains which are located several hundred feet away from the beaches.

Also in October, 2011, the CNMI's Coral Program launched an e-learning interactive website for the community to learn more about CNMI's coral reefs. It is also a tool that can be used by schools, nonprofits, our summer internship program and other user groups to learn how to monitor the reefs and why we must monitor.

### **Florida**

In January 2012, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) published a paper showing that, compared with historical accounts of cold-water-induced mortality, long-term Coral Reef Evaluation and Monitoring Program (CREMP) results suggest that the 2010 winter mortality was one of the most severe on record in the Florida Keys. The level of coral mortality on patch reefs is of particular concern because corals in these habitats had previously demonstrated resistance against stressors (e.g., disease and warm-water bleaching) that had negatively affected corals in other habitats (e.g. shallow and deep forereefs) in the Florida Keys during recent decades.

Additionally, the FWRI's Monitoring and Mapping of Threatened Acroporids project is in its second year of demographic and synoptic monitoring and bathymetric mapping in southeast Florida, and coordinated efforts are beginning in Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands. In Fall 2011, FWRI documented substantial impacts to Acroporids from bleaching and disease, coupled with consistent evidence of predation, throughout the Florida Keys and the Dry Tortugas. Due to federal funding cuts, the future of the project is uncertain.

Recently, a meeting of scientists and managers was held to integrate and coordinate efforts to monitor reef fish populations using the same approach across the entire Florida Reef Tract. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Coral Reef Conservation Program and NOAA's CRCP have been working together to build partnerships and identify funding to implement fisheries-independent monitoring in the northern third of the Florida Reef Tract, a priority information gap in the southeast Florida region. The Reef Visual Census methodology has been used by NOAA Fisheries and the University of Miami for over 30 years in the Florida Keys to assess reef fish populations. Now the same approach that is being used in the National Parks and National Marine Sanctuary to the south will be applied to the northern portion of the Florida Reef Tract. The sampling design is currently under development and the first assessment will begin in summer 2012. NOAA CRCP has recently identified the RVC methodology as the approach that will be also used to monitor reef fish populations in the U.S. Caribbean as part of the National Coral Reef Monitoring Program.

### **Guam**

In 2011, a multitude of awareness campaigns were conducted on Guam to encourage everything from purchasing local products and recycling, to preventing wildland fires and providing opportunities for the public to explore our natural resources.

Long-term monitoring projects, including shallow water benthic assessments in Tumon Bay, East Hagatna Bay, and Western Shoals in Apra Harbor, began. Water-quality monitoring devices are expected to also be deployed at these sites later this year to document the changes that might be taking place over the next decade.

**Hawai'i** - The Nature Conservancy held workshops in 2011 to develop a Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for South Kohala, Kahekili, Molokini, and Kaho'olawe which engaged stakeholders to identify priority conservation targets, threats, strategies to conserve the targets, and measurable indicators to evaluate the strategies.

A Hawai'i Coral Reef Initiative (HCRI) funded project is focused on removal of the introduced predatory grouper, roi, (*Cephalopholis argus*) in Puako, west Hawai'i. Baseline surveys before removal were made in 2010-2011. The purpose of the project is to test the ecological effects of the predatory grouper on a native reef-fish assemblage in Puako and assess the outcome of the project by collaborating with local fishers to remove >90% of the roi from patch reefs.

The Office of Planning submitted to the Governor a statewide climate change policy for Hawai'i, which was included in the administration's bill package for 2012. The bill proposes to amend the Hawai'i State Planning Act by adding a climate change adaptation priority guideline. The proposed guideline is intended to improve the planning process in Hawai'i, increase the effectiveness of government and private actions, improve coordination among different agencies and levels of government, provide for wise use of Hawai'i's resources, and guide the future development of the state in the area of climate change adaptation.

**Puerto Rico - Guánica/Río Loco watershed** -NRCS, FWS, NOAA and other agencies have continued to implement activities to protect the Guánica watershed. Interagency meetings have been conducted to continue partnering and helping each other to achieve common goals, including discussions on how to restore the Guánica Lagoon, while simultaneously allowing the Land Authority to use a mitigation bank in the area. The Department of Agriculture and Land Authority have committed to support conservation efforts.

The House of Representatives presented a bill for designation of Isla Verde Marine Reserve. A public hearing was held in February 2012 and all entities supported the designation.

**U.S. Virgin Islands** - More than a decade of monitoring data from the VI's Territorial Coral Reef Monitoring Program shows that our reefs are continuing to decline due to threats from both global and local stressors. There is a clear onshore to offshore trend in both sediment loading and declining coral health. Indications of stress such as tissue loss, disease incidence and mortality associated with bleaching and disease are more common in our shallow reefs which are more heavily impacted by land based sources of sediment and pollution.

The status of our coral reef ecosystems and the economic challenges facing our community highlight more than ever the need to balance sustainable resource use with economic development, to address locally-managed stressors to coral reef health and to

continue to build effective, collaborative relationships between managers, scientists and resource users.

Through the support of, and in collaboration with the CRCP, an economic valuation of USVI coral reef ecosystems was completed. Both direct and indirect values were calculated for uses such as commercial and recreational fishing, coastal protection, tourism, property values and residential recreational and cultural value. Values were calculated for each island district as well as for the entire territory, and the total economic value of healthy USVI coral reef ecosystems is conservatively estimated to be \$202 Million annually. This information is vital to support and inform management actions and policy recommendations in the current economic climate.

A sub-regional MPA Network Planning effort is underway in collaboration with the National MPA Center, NFWF and TNC. The goal of this project is to develop a shared vision and management goals across the Territory's MPAs that are members of the National System (list) and to create a formalized framework for collaborative management across the network

The USVI continues to focus on threats that are locally manageable through watershed-based management of land based sources of pollution and sediment. The plan created for six St. Croix watersheds that feed into the St. Croix East End Marine Park and Buck Island Reef National Monument has been used to leverage support from NRCS, and develop public-private partnerships between government resource management agencies, local non-profits and homeowner's associations, to address two priority restoration projects: 6.4 km of badly eroding residential dirt road networks estimated to contribute hundreds of tons of sediment into park waters annually. A similar watershed management plan is being developed for the area above the St. Thomas East End Reserve.

**In conclusion**, the Committee acknowledges the following:

- AIC expresses thanks to USDA/NRCS and USFWS for hosting the Governor Sunia Summer Internships for 2012 and encourage other federal partners to participate and support the program in future years.
- AIC thanks EPA for the opportunity to meet tomorrow to strengthen partnerships and collaboration.
- AIC appreciates the support of federal agencies to resolve the natural disasters response issues.
- AIC wishes to express our appreciation to Governor Togiola as the longest standing active Governor in the USCRTF and gratitude for his leadership in coral reef management and especially climate change initiatives.

Sincerely

Fran Castro  
Chair