



**26th U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE MEETING  
Report of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee  
Fort Lauderdale, Florida, October 21, 2011**

**Hafa adai, Talofa, Aloha, Hola and Good Day**, - It is 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 Washington D.C. in February 2011.

**AIC Member Updates** - We welcome two new members: Damaris Delgado, POC for Puerto Rico, and Joseph Artero-Cameron, POC for Guam. We also welcome the new Chair of the AIC, Fran Castro and the Vice Chair, Paige Rothenberger.

We wish to express our appreciation for the outstanding leadership and commitment to coral reef conservation of the outgoing Chair, Vangie Lujan of Guam, and outgoing Vice Chair, Aida Rosario of Puerto Rico. We also wish to recognize the dedication and important contributions of Chantal Collier of Florida, who previously served as Vice Chair, and who will be moving to a new position in the near future.

**National Ocean Council and National CMSP Workshop Update** - Two members of the AIC were appointed to the National Ocean Council's Governance Coordinating Committee. Lelei Peau and Paige Rothenberger Five AIC members participated in the June, Washington National CMSP Workshop including Lelei Peau, Evangeline Lujan, Fran Castro, Paige Rothenberger, and Damaris Delgado, Puerto Rico.

**Micronesia Leaders Create a Regional Shark Sanctuary** - Leaders from 5 Micronesian jurisdictions passed a resolution supporting shark conservation and the establishment of the world's first Regional Shark Sanctuary by December with assistance from Hawaii legislators and the PEW Commission.

The resolution authorizes a regional ban on the possession and sale of shark fins in the the Federated States of Micronesia the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. The shark sanctuary established in Micronesia, will cover an area of more than 3 million square miles,

**The Caribbean Challenge** - The Bahamas, Jamaica, Grenada, the Dominican Republic, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines launched the Caribbean Challenge, committed to protecting nearly 20 percent of their regional marine and coastal habitats by 2020.

**U.S. /Hawaii Bid for 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress** - In October 2012, following the World Conservation Congress in Jeju, Korea, the International Union for

Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the world's oldest and largest global environmental network, will initiate the process to select the host site for the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC). This would be the first time the meeting would occur in the U.S.

**Natural Disasters Response** - The AIC remains concerned that there is no process in place to deal with responses to support coral reef recovery and resilience following natural disasters.

**Watershed Restoration Partnership Initiative** - The Guánica Bay Watershed Management Plan is the first in a coordinated research and demonstration program to meet the management and conservation objectives of both USDA and NOAA. The project also directly addresses goals and objectives of the USCRTF concerning land based sources of pollution and increasing partnerships for coral reef conservation.

Expanding this initiative to the Pacific region, in February 2011, the USCRTF selected Ka'anapali, West Maui, as the priority Pacific watershed and American Samoa nominated the Nu'uuli Watershed, including Malaeimi and Tafuna, to be considered as the "plus-one" watershed for this USCRTF Initiative.

**Governor Sunia Summer Scholarships** - The AIC would like to recognize the efforts of key steering committee members to improve and revitalize this important recognition of Gov. Sunia and his contributions to coral reef management and conservation. We wholeheartedly support the new approach with the field experiences provided by this fellowship.

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

##### **American Samoa**

In addition to the watershed site selection previously mentioned, a Biogeographic Assessment of the Samoan Archipelago was completed in July by NOAA, in collaboration with various local agencies and departments. The assessment will be used for initiatives including MPA network designs and regional strategies such as the Two Samoas Environmental Collaboration.

##### **CNMI**

Hosted coral watch training with support from The Nature Conservancy and NOAA's Pacific Islands Regional Office to introduce climate change, coral bleaching and reef resiliency to the community and are working to develop a bleaching response plan for Saipan, Tinian and Rota, including outreach protocols and resources for release during bleaching events to educate the public.

This past summer, in collaboration with NOAA and PacIOOS, we have installed the first CREWS (Coral Reef Early Warning Station)/Integrated Coral Observing Network (ICON) station built outside of the Caribbean.

Data collected from the PacIOOS sensor will provide data to NOAA's National Data Buoy Center, where they will make it into the National Weather Service's operational stream, for use in global models and by researchers around the world. The real time oceanographic data will help us further understand and predict the impacts of climate change.

## Florida

**Exotic Species - Lionfish and Tubastrea** - Lionfish arrived in South Florida in the early 1990's and are a threat to the integrity of native ecosystems. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) and Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) hosted Lionfish Derbies in May and August 2010, in which nineteen teams of divers caught 1206 lionfish. The derbies promoted awareness, encouraged the fishery, and allowed researchers to collect samples for studies of genetics, growth, and impacts to native marine life. Research is also being done on an emerging threat, the exotic coral *Tubastraea coccinea*.

**Buoy Maintenance - Tortugas, Anchor Installations, Assist Partners** - The FKNMS Buoy Team maintains a system of more than 790 mooring and marker buoys. Their work this summer resulted in 13 new mooring buoys available in the Tortugas Ecological Reserve, and a 98% buoy system in-service level.

**ESA Section 6 Monitoring and Mapping of Threatened Acroporid Corals** - The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is collaborating to provide cross-jurisdictional, comparable population and spatial distribution data for *Acropora* spp, as well as mapping critical habitat within the Florida Keys. Synoptic and demographic *Acropora* surveys are being conducted across The Florida Reef Tract, as well as in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

**Patch Reef Locations in the Florida Keys** -The FWC is currently determining the location, size, and benthic cover for patch reefs in the Florida Keys. Results include an increase in the estimated of number of patch reefs in the Florida Keys by 75%. Initial estimates of mean live cover are 20%, with the most dominate genera being *Montastrea* and *Siderastrea*.

**The Future of SEFCRI** – Through the vision of the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative, 127 of 140 Local Action Strategy (LAS) projects have been completed. The next steps include working with stakeholder groups who will use the data, results and recommendations from the LAS to identify management alternatives, potentially including zoning strategies, for southeast Florida's reefs, to develop effective, balanced, comprehensive management with an associated management plan for improved resource protection.

## Guam

**Military Buildup FEIS/Compensatory Mitigation Funding** - Guam continues to be very concerned by the pending military build-up risk to coral reef resources. This includes direct large scale dredging and the associated mitigation, increased user impacts (recreational and fisheries impacts), stormwater management and terrestrial development. The aggressive timelines, shrinking budgets and limited local and federal capacities pose great risks and challenges to the island.

## Watershed Update

- Impacts of Land Based Sources of Pollution - Piti/Asan Watershed Management Plan draft completion is scheduled for October 2011.

- The CRI-funded Masso Reservoir Restoration Native Tree Planting Project was completed in March 2011.
- Manell/Geus Conservation Action Planning workshop completed the conservation action plan and targets the completion of the watershed management plan by 2012.

### **Miscellaneous**

- Guam's Micronesia Challenge Strategy has been updated to include a "Cultural Resources" category for areas with historic or cultural significance. A regional MC marketing campaign was launched earlier this year.
- Regarding Invasive Species & the Military Build-up, University of Guam & Hawaii Sea Grant Programs have formed a regional partnership to expand the Reef Chip, a taxonomic gene array that can be used to identify marine algae from throughout the Pacific.

### **Hawai'i**

A participatory CMSP mapping workshop was held to create maps of ocean uses in the Honolulu – Waikeolu region on Maui. Data, maps and analytical products will be made available in December of 2011 to local community groups, state and federal agencies, NGOs, and to others, for use in the ongoing priority site planning efforts. Over 80 participants received hands-on training in tools used to build a coastal/marine spatial framework.

Implementation of an invasive exclusion fencing project on the island of Hawai'i is underway through the LBSP-LAS. Work is estimated to begin in winter 2011.

Hawai'i has continued the use of mechanical removal suction devices ("Super Sucker") in conjunction with sea urchin bio-control experiments to control alien algae on coral reefs in Kaneohe Bay.

The Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) team released 544 hatchery raised juvenile urchins onto this small patch reef. Since initial addition of urchins in January 2011, the algal coverage decreased from 28% to 10% when more urchins were added.

### **Puerto Rico**

A CMSP document was prepared by the PR Coastal Zone Management Program and shared with coastal municipalities and interested stakeholders.

Efforts to restore the Guánica Lagoon are being conducted as part of the Guánica watershed restoration partnership.

We have some initiated successful coral restoration projects, with over 50 vessel groundings. Over 20,000 corals and coral fragments having been salvaged and reattached, with a 90% survival rate. We are also cultivating and farming over 3,500 threatened corals.

The following are the key accomplishments for long-term monitoring of elkhorn coral population dynamics:

- Large-scale surveys were conducted for Elkhorn coral at six sites.

- A geo-referenced map modeling the distribution of potential habitat for Elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmata*)
- Three sites within Natural Reserves (MPAs) have been monitored using the NOAA demographic protocol since October 2007, and 9 permanent stations around Puerto Rico are being monitored.

#### **Republic of the Marshall Islands**

- Recently created the world's largest shark sanctuary (768,547 square miles) with the most restricted regulations – no keeping of any sharks caught and no by-catch allowed. Also fines of up to \$200,000.
- Coral monitoring data training has been completed, including data collection and analysis.
- Continuation of the Reimaanlok process, a community based conservation initiative, and development of a field guide to be used in conjunction with this process.
- A moratorium has been created on sea cucumber harvesting with a national management plan being developed.
- A climate change adaptation workshop was held using the NOAA/PIMPAC community based procedures.
- Received funding from DOI for continuation of the marine conservation certificate program.
- Western Pacific Coral Reef Institute (WPCRI) funded project for surveys and data on Majuro and Rongelap under the "Long Term Monitoring of Coral Reef Resources in the Republic of the Marshall Islands" project.

#### **U.S. Virgin Islands**

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) has recently finished installing 18 marker buoys to delineate the boundary and management zones of the St. Croix East End Marine Park. A coastal use assessment project is being initiated for the St. Thomas East End Reserve (STEER) and support for expanding this participatory mapping exercise to two other priority geographic areas on St. John has been proposed. TNC has secured funds to assist USVI MPA managers with the creation of a Sub-Regional MPA Plan for increased and more collaborative management between the federally and territorially-managed MPAs, thereby meeting the needs of individual MPAs while advancing system-wide effectiveness.

Territorial *Acropora* coral nurseries were established and have produced >3000 individual coral fragments for out-planting. TNC is spearheading development and implementation of a VI Reef Resilience Program in order to promote the necessary environmental conditions for Territorial reefs to recover and thrive.

Efforts to improve coastal water quality are ongoing. DPNR is updating numeric water quality standards and is working with the VI Coral Reef Advisory Group to get input throughout the process. On St. John, with ARRA funds numerous BMPs to address terrestrial sedimentation and runoff have been installed in Coral and Fish Bay watersheds which are yielding storm water retention and mitigation benefits. On St. Croix, a year-long watershed planning effort has just been completed for six watersheds that drain into the St. Croix East End Marine Park and adjacent Buck Island Reef National Monument.

FINAL, October 20,2011

**In conclusion**, the Committee recommends the following actions by the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force:

- Request USCRTF letters of support for the Micronesia Shark Sanctuary, Caribbean Challenge, and U.S. /Hawaii Bid for 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress.
- USCRTF accept the nomination of the Nu'uuli as the "plus-one" Watershed from American Samoa for the Watershed Partnership.
- Guam requests the USCRTF review the Guam military build-up, and encourages members to identify ways in which they can assist in addressing coral reef issues.
- USCRTF approve the improved Governor Sunia Summer Scholarships.
- We also wish to reiterate, that while we are all aware of the importance of outputs to meet elements of CRCP goals and objectives, the POC's remain concerned that there be a focus on outcomes, and an effort to meaningfully evaluate successes that matter to our stakeholders, specifically more corals and fish on our reefs.

Sincerely

Fran Castro  
Chair