



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet

Marshall Islands 2025



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

| Program | FY 2024 Final |
|--|------------------|
| Community Forests and Open Space | \$0 |
| Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management | \$100,000 |
| Forest Legacy | \$0 |
| Forest Stewardship | \$0 |
| Landscape Scale Restoration | \$0 |
| State Fire Assistance | \$30,000 |
| Urban and Community Forestry | \$0 |
| Volunteer Fire Assistance | \$0 |
| Total | \$130,000 |

NOTE: This funding is for all entities within the state, not just the State Forester's office.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) consists of 29 atolls, five solitary islands, and approximately 1,225 individual islands and islets. The network of islands contains 70 square miles of dry land situated about halfway between Hawaii and Australia. All the Marshall Islands are low in elevation; the average height of land above sea level being 7 feet. In July 2021, the population was estimated to be 78,831 people. More than two-thirds of the population lives on the atolls of Majuro and Ebeye.

The Marshall Islands contain five unique vegetation types: atoll forest, mangrove forest, coastal vegetation, saltwater aquatic vegetation (seagrass growing in coastal tidal flats), and cultivated vegetation (agroforests). Most of the interior, atoll forest was converted to agroforestry over the millennia since settlement by the Marshallese people. Marshallese agroforestry is a mix of trees, woody shrubs, and herbaceous species, managed for food and other forest products, notably breadfruit, coconut, pandanus, and bananas. Since Western contact, many areas have been managed as coconut plantations (70% of the landcover) and additional species have been introduced and integrated into the agroforest (especially fruit trees).

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce (MNRC) consists of many Divisions and programs, including the Division of Agriculture, which is responsible for developing and implementing forestry programs. The RMI Forester works for the Division of Agriculture and collaborates with diverse partners, such as the College of Marshall Islands and the Coastal Management Advisory Group. The Coastal Management Advisory Group performs the duties of the Coordinating Committee and Urban and Community Forestry Council. The MNRC works together with various partners and stakeholders to increase efficiency in the implementation of forestry programs.

Program Goals

- **Protect Forest from Harm:** Prevent the introduction and further spread of injurious pests and diseases into and within the Marshall Islands. Assist communities in planning for and reducing forest health risks, such as diseases that impact crop trees.
- **Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forest to Increase Food Security:** Increase local food crop production through extending knowledge and skills in better agroforestry systems. Strengthen access to nutritious foods for vulnerable households and individuals through support of local food crop production.
- **Conserve Working Forest Landscapes:** Maintain and enhance the economic benefits of trees and forest by programs such as the sawmill program where senile coconut palms are utilized and replanted with healthy trees. Protect and enhance water quality through coastal reinforcement efforts.

Key Issues

- **Biodiversity:** Conservation of biodiversity in the Marshalls concerns terrestrial native species (especially endemic species and migratory birds) and traditional cultivars. Invasive species, including food crops and ornamentals, has led to a continued loss of biodiversity. The management of pests, insects, and disease is a critical concern. For example, the coconut rhinoceros beetle (CRB) has caused widespread loss of the coconut, which is an economically and culturally important species.
- **Food Security and Sustainable Livelihood:** The loss of traditional agroforestry practices and a lack of awareness of nutritional values are growing threats in the Marshall Islands. Agroforests are a source of subsistence goods and commercial products. Many Marshallese suffer from malnutrition and diabetes that could partially be addressed with increased agroforest production. Marshallese family incomes are low; agroforest production can reduce the need for purchases and bring in cash income.
- **Coastal reinforcement:** Coastal forests are those on the beach crest above high tide mark. Their root systems reinforce the beach "berm" or crest. Coastal forests have been thinned and removed in many urban and rural areas, so their restoration and maintenance in their natural state is a "no-regrets strategy" and a first line of defense against the effects of sea level rise.
- **Urbanization and a lack of urban planning:** Urbanization is a result of migration and the adoption of Western patterns of living. The increased clearing of forests in urban centers is a growing concern, especially in the capital city seeing the greatest loss of trees. The development of the airport resulted in more coastal loss. A large proportion of the population is now concentrated on a few urban islands, resulting in reduced forest cover and a loss of cultural benefits from the forest.
- **Climate Change:** The impacts of climate change are resulting in an increase of drought and a rise in sea-level, which has led to saltwater intrusion, subsequently impacting the ability to grow certain root crops, trees, and medicinal herbs.
- **Resource Management:** Threats include increased pollution and solid waste management, overuse of water for crops, and loss of soil due to excessive land clearing, mowing, and burning.

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

| Selected Facts | Value | FY 2024 Accomplishments | Value |
|---|--------|--|--------|
| Population | 41,665 | Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance | 10 |
| Acres of Forest Land | 34,835 | Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans | 0 |
| Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land | 29,295 | Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans | 0 |
| Number of NIPF Landowners | 1,000 | Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted | 0 |
| Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection | 0 | State Fire Communities Assisted | 0 |
| Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection | 0 | Coop Forest Health Acres Protected | 0 |
| Number of Rural Fire Departments | 0 | Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions | 0 |
| Cities and Towns | 33 | Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance | 1 |
| Forest Based Employment | 0 | Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance | 19,664 |
| Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank) | 0 | Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance | 0 |
| State Forestry Budget (All Sources) | 0 | | |

Program Highlights

Cooperative Fire Protection

Following the new grant that was awarded to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce (MoNRC) from the USFS Cooperative Fire Protection in 2023, the Ministry received additional funding via grant modification. The purpose of the modification was to extend the duration of the program due to its delayed commencement. The program was delayed due to the timely hiring process of the Public Service Commission (PSC) as well as securing potential candidates for the posts allocated in the project. The

MoNRC is working to get the posts filled in so the project can commence.

The aim of this program is to educate communities about composting the waste material instead of burning to prevent further damages to the communities and also to incorporate the traditional agroforest conservation practice to maintain protection. This project pursues strategies identified in the Marshall Islands "Forest Action Plan" under 'urbanization'. The strategy is hazardous fuel reduction education to the schools and communities (pg. 36).

Forest Health Protection

Coconut is the lifeline of the Marshallese people. The tree charms visitors to our shores, as well as commands the respect of the Marshallese that depend on it for their livelihood. Known throughout the Pacific as the "tree of life," every part of it is used, from its tallest frond down to its rooted trunk – from the sweet, delectable juice and fresh meat of its fruits to its husks that fuel fires, the fronds that make baskets, and the trunk that go into building homes and furniture. In smaller neighboring atolls where crop cultivation is not possible, coconut is one of the main staple foods, ensuring food security for island inhabitants. However, the health of our coconut trees has come to focus and needs immediate attention. Following the State of Emergency that was declared by the RMI Government (ended in April 2024), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce continues to conduct ongoing sanitation and monitoring operations to contain the Coconut rhinoceros beetle (CRB) infestation on Majuro. As of January 2025, the current count of CRB caught in both panel and net traps is 2,668, consisting of all life stages. The main priority goal is to safeguard the outer islands as they are the most vulnerable due to the dependence on copra for their livelihood. The Ministry was able to recruit two CRB personnel in November 11, 2024, CRB Coordinator and CRB Technician. Both CRB personnel will overlook all the activities under the Forest Health Grant. One key activity was setting up CRB prevention measures such as SOPs to Air crafts and Sea vessels that are delivering goods and materials to the outer islands. This key activity was possible with technical assistance from Dr. Andrea Blas, University of Guam.

Forest Stewardship

Coconut is one of the most important food trees in the country, providing sustainable livelihoods and economic viability to many farmers. Therefore, the Forest Stewardship Program has been collaborating with the Marshall Islands Conservation Society, the USDA Forest Service and the University of Hawaii on a project focused on coconut resources. This collaboration led to the production of spatial and summary data of the coconut tree locations (counts) and heights for up to 7 atolls with the Ridge-to-Reef project and up to 9 additional atolls which were prioritized by Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce – Division of Forestry. The team will be working together to produce the maps and share with community members especially in the neighboring islands as well as processing imagery using existing custom software for coconut and pandanus, which will include developing techniques to use satellite imagery to detect coconut health and pest conditions at the landscape-level. With the data from the imagery analysis, management will include removing the 'senile' (meaning no longer productive) coconut trees and replanting healthy trees.

Revegetation Tree Nursery and Mutation Breeding/Tissue Culture

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Revegetation fund was awarded to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce in 2023 to contract agriculture researchers for the purpose of focusing particularly (but not limited to) on how the implementation of the tissue culture projects be conducted using randomized field trial methodologies and techniques. The building of the tissue culture laboratory facility is still in progress and it was made possible through the collaboration and mutual understanding agreement with the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) Land Grant Program located at the CMI-Arrak campus facility. The facilities are expected to be established and operating within the second quarter of FY 2025. The tissue culture laboratory facility will not only propagate breadfruit trees but will aim to produce other important tree crops of the Marshall Islands via in vitro, such as pandanus and coconut trees.

Urban and Community Forestry

The Urban and Community program still continues to support the community forests in the Marshall Islands through planting, education, and outreach. Throughout this year, educational and community outreach has been ongoing. The Forestry team were able to promote the awareness and appreciation of the Marshallese trees and forest to some of the High Schools here in Majuro. The team worked closely with the school principals and teachers to conduct presentations regarding importance of forestry and

traditional plants to the Marshall Islands and the types of propagation methods used by the Forestry team.

With the ongoing activities in the communities, the Division of Forestry invited key partners and implementers who oversee coastal protection and SLR- related issues to arrange a survey assessment team to visit Maloelap Atoll in response to the resolution, which was introduced by Maloelap Atoll Mayor during the Marshall Islands Mayor Association (MIMA) Leadership Conference. The resolution seeks assistance from relevant agencies to assist in minimizing coastal erosion which the local government states is a major threat, especially to a few homes along the coastal areas.

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