



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet Northern Mariana Islands 2024



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2023 Estimate
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$75,000
Forest Legacy	\$0
Forest Stewardship	\$100,000
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$0
State Fire Assistance	\$60,000
Urban and Community Forestry	\$70,000
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$0
Total	\$305,000

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

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is in the Western Pacific that comprises the fourteen northern islands of the Mariana Archipelago. These islands total 464 sq km, ranging in size from the smallest island of No'os (Farallon de Medinilla) at less than 1 km² to the largest island of Saipan at 119 km². The CNMI is divided into four municipalities: Rota, Tinian (including Aguigan), Saipan, and the Northern Islands which comprises the northern nine islands. CNMI's population of 51,649 is concentrated on the southern islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, with the vast majority (approximately 90%) of people and most of the CNMI's economic activity occurring on Saipan. Approximately 75% of all forests in the CNMI are found on the larger, populated, southern islands. Forest types range from the tropical native rainforest, mixed forest, tangantangan forest, agroforest, grasslands, and wetlands. CNMI is home to the rare limestone forests, most of which are located on Rota and still contain areas dominated by native forest cover.

The forest resources of the CNMI are managed by the Forestry Section under the Division of Agriculture (DOA) within the CNMI DLNR. Besides the main office on Saipan, the islands of Tinian and Rota each have their own Forestry Section within DLNR under the Office of the Mayor. The Forestry Section is responsible for providing for the protection, management, and improvement of the forest resources of the CNMI, including those on both public and private land. The CNMI Forestry Mission Statement is "to promote best land management practices while sustaining a healthy diversity and productivity on limited and fragile forest and grassland resources for present and future generations". CNMI Forestry programs carry out this mission through conservation, protection, and enhancement practices while keeping the present landscape provisions in the process.

Program Goals

- Knowledge (education and outreach)- Extend the wide range of information and tools necessary for effective stewardship and specific actions to protect CNMI's forest resources from ridge to reef. Educate the community on conservation through outdoor education programs, strategic partnerships, and dissemination of educational guides and material.
- Community Stewardship- Empower communities to participate in community planting events and forest health efforts. Support native tree giveaways, community tree planting events, and landowner incentive programs.
- Invasive Species Control - Develop an invasive species detection, prevention, removal, and monitoring plan for all priority forests and wetland areas. Minimize the spread of pests into healthy tree stands. Improve biological, mechanical, and chemical control of invasive species through the implementation of the Invasive Species Action Plan. Educate community on endemic, non-native, and introduced, endangered, and invasive plant species in the Marianas
- Fire Prevention, Control, and Suppression - Management of fires will work to reduce the number and scale of wildfires through education, research, and response preparation. Increase awareness and education of the community about how wildfires are affecting the watershed in schools, businesses,

and villages. Provide training opportunities to assist wildfire suppression activities. Promote citizen reporting and increase patrol/post-fire watch during the fire peak season.

- Native Forest Restoration- Expand native seedlings inventory and restore affected areas with native vegetation. Work with local nurseries to propagate native plants for ornamental and wildlife use. Provide native plants and shrubs to residents, schools, businesses, and develop mitigation measures.
- Capacity Building- Identify additional critical habitat and forest areas. Provide regular training for CNMI Forestry staff in community engagement techniques. Expand in-house training to strengthen resource capabilities.

Key Issues

- Development pressures: Urbanization has led to a decline of native forest and natural resources by fragmenting forests and creating large openings in the vegetative cover. This can result in increased damage to homes and farms from natural disasters such as typhoons and floods. Through forest restoration, issues such as soil erosion, nutrient depletion, and water shortages can be minimized. Forestry programs provide native plants and shrubs for restoration as development mitigation measures.
- Climate change and extreme weather conditions: CNMI has experienced three tropical cyclones since 2015 that resulted in federal disaster declarations. Watershed protection and management can help mitigate the impacts of extreme weather. The forestry program is supporting a native wetland and limestone forest plant nursery to propagate native plant species for site restoration and mitigation projects.
- Coconut rhinoceros beetle (CRB): The coconut palm is a critical species in CNMI as it provides food for local consumption, fronds for construction of infrastructure, and is an important source of economic activity representing the culture and aesthetics of CNMI for tourists and locals alike. CRB, which leads to the decay and ultimate death of coconut trees, is currently found on Rota and is considered a high priority species to eradicate and avoid the spread of CRB to other islands.
- Mucuna Pruriens: The CNMI is combatting this non-native species vine that has several negative impacts to the environment and to the safety of our island's citizens. The species was introduced to the island of Saipan in the CNMI about thirty years ago and since then has spread throughout the island uncontrollably. In its matured state, Mucuna Pruriens emits toxins which causes severe itching and triggers allergic reactions.
- The Little Fire Ants, which have not been detected in the CNMI. However, they are found on the island of Guam, just 47 miles from Rota and 73 miles away from Tinian and Saipan. It is also known to be detected in the island of Yap, which supplies betelnuts to the CNMI on almost every flight coming from Guam.
- The Ralstonia Solanacearum, a disease that infects and kills ironwood trees, was recently found on Saipan. A team from University of Guam conducted testing to determine if the disease also exists on Saipan had found that the disease has infected 8 Ironwood trees along the coastal shoreline west of the island, and that more testing will be needed to determine the extent of the problem.
- Other Invasive species include scarlet gourd (*Coccinia grandis*), chain-of-love (*Antigonon leptopus*), paper rose (*Operculina ventricose*), bitter vine (*Mikania micranthra*), bitter gourd (*Momordica charantia*) and wood rose (*Merremia tuberosa*) are of particular concern as they are visibly rapidly spreading across many islands. They can potentially smother and kill the host trees, bringing down the canopy so that forest is converted to scrub-shrub or grassland habitat. They also reduce light avail

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2023 Accomplishments	Value
Population	47,329	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	50
Acres of Forest Land	60,207	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	0
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	4,000	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	0
Number of NIPF Landowners	400	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	0
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	0	State Fire Communities Assisted	10
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	0	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	0
Number of Rural Fire Departments	8	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	0
Cities and Towns	135	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	0
Forest Based Employment	5	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	0
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	0	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	0
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	158,400		

Program Highlights**CNMI Nursery Facilities**

The CNMI was awarded \$150,000 under the BIL program to rehabilitate its nursery facilities on the island of Saipan and Rota.

Each island was awarded \$75,000. The facility on Saipan was damaged by Super typhoon Yutu and the one on Rota was damaged by Typhoon Mangkhut, which hit the islands in late 2018. The Invitation to Bid is about to be announced for the facility on Saipan and construction should resume within a month or two. In addition to the cost of construction, funds will also be used to purchase supplies and equipment for these facilities, including a vehicle for Rota that is desperately needed. Once completed, the staff would finally have a safe and decent place to grow and outplant more plants for both islands.

Forest Health Protection

The Cooperative Forest Health Program continued to perform suppression efforts in combating invasive and detrimental species threatening the CNMI's Forest Ecosystem. They maintained close contact with specialists throughout the Pacific Region to better anticipate risk of introduction of new invasive species. The program also continued to monitor invasive species on Saipan and Rota. Surveys were conducted for invasive vines and plants occurred over 200 acres on Saipan. Trapping for little fire ant and coconut rhinoceros beetle occurred on Saipan (117 acres) near ports of entry.

Forest Health has continued to assist the coconut rhinoceros beetle management team in Saipan for monitoring and biosecurity and on the island of Rota for management and suppression (Tweksberry Beach, Talakhaya, Gagani, Ok'guk, and Guaaok).

The Forest Health Coordinator continued to maintain open dialog with her counterparts from other countries and organizations to strengthen pest recognition, protection and prevention of detrimental species from being introduced or imported into or exported out of the CNMI.

Education and outreach reached over 150 students at Mt. Carmel School and Agape International School. Over 200 students visited displays at the Environmental Expo sponsored by Bureau of Environmental Coastal Quality.

Forest Stewardship

The Forest Stewardship staff were busy with presentations during this period. . They did a presentation on the roles and importance of forestry to nearly 90 K-6 graders during the Chamorro Month Proclamation (Proklamasion Mes Chamorro) at the Sinapalo Elementary School campus on the island of Rota. They also helped sixteen 3 rd -5th Chamorro class students in planting 12 native seedlings to commemorate the event and to promote the benefits of placing local trees. The students were given the proper planting tips and tree maintenance. Poster copies of the rare, invasive, medicinal, poisonous, fruit-producing, and

shade trees were distributed to students for their guide and reference.

The staff also presented about the Rota Rare Plants & Deer Survey, Talakhaya Watershed Restoration, Urban Forestry, and Invasive Species projects to over 50 elementary student campers of the Maga Lahi 4-H Camp at the Teteto Beach Park with visiting campers from Guam, Tinian and Saipan. This awareness garnered about 156 contact hours. Poster copies of the rare, invasive, medicinal, poisonous, fruit-producing, and shade trees were distributed for their guide and reference.

Forestry staff also did a presentation on career placement and opportunities available in the field of forestry to junior and senior high school students and members of the public at the Department of Labor's sponsored Job Fair at the Rota Mayor's Office. Posters were also distributed to the people present at the fair.

The staff also presented at the annual Rota Natural Resource Management Conservation Forum at the Northern Mariana College CREES Conference Room with respect to the ongoing Talakhaya Watershed Restoration and the Rota Rare Plants Project. Participants included members of the public, government officials and NGO natural resource partners. The forum was filmed for public viewing.

Smart Trees Pacific

The Friends of Hawaii's Urban Forest dba Smart Trees Pacific ("STP"), a Hawai'i non-profit corporation, has contracted five people on Saipan and four on Rota to benefit the CNMI forest program with its mandates to operate and maintain the nursery; collects and plants seedlings; performs general maintenance work at the nursery. The contractors are also required to prepare sites and plant seedlings in predetermined forest areas; prunes and thins out forest trees according to instructions to improve growing conditions; performs soil erosion prevention activities, as well as to performs related duties as needed. Since the contractors were recruited last August, they have been working very hard, performing an excellent job and are definitely an asset to the forest program, even when they only work 20 hours per week.

TALAKHAYA WATERSHED REVEGETATION PROJECT

The project seeks to enhance water quality by reducing soil erosion from badlands. The current establishment of the nitrogen-fixing *Acacia confusa* is a critical step in order to transform barren lands to functional forestlands. Exclusionary fencing provide adequate protection for a number of beneficial trees such as the *Artocarpus mariannensis*, *Hernandia labyrinthica*, *Pouteria obovata*, *Premna obtusifolia*, *Drypetes dolichocarpa* from deer herbivory. The Talakhaya is a Priority Watershed and the main source of potable water for the island. The area is also a designated Wildlife Conservation Area and monitored for any hunting activity. Moreover, the Department of Fire provides effective wildland fire deterrence during dry season, with no occurrences over a decade, and allowing for restoration work to continue and thrive.

Urban and Community Forestry

The Urban and Community Forestry program continued to increase community resilience and stewardship through successful tree planting and educational opportunities across CNMI. This year, the program participated in the Bureau of Environmental Coastal Quality Expo. A total 160 elementary students came to learn about forestry, with teachers and students receiving posters and informational leaflets explaining forestry work and forest benefits. At the Pak Pak Beach in San Antonio, Saipan, the program also led a planting event with Mariana Islands Nature Alliance (MINA) staff and 10 students from Saipan Southern High School, planting a total of 20 *Thespesia populnea* and *Calophyllum inophyllum* seedlings. On Tinian, the Resident Director of Lands & Natural Resources and forestry staff led an island-wide planting effort in alignment with the Tinian Mayor's Office's "Beautify Tinian" Project, planting 10 *Cocos nucifera* and 10 *Bougainvillea* flower seedlings at the Tinian Marianas Park. Further south on Rota, over 65 government employees, including the Mayor of Rota, Rota Legislative Delegation members, and Resident Department Heads celebrated CNMI Earth Day 2023 at Sinapalo II village by planting 47 Pomegranate and Sugar Apple fruit-producing seedlings along the highway. For the island's continued parks and shorelines beautification and enhancement efforts, a total of 153 native tree varieties were planted at Tweksberry Beach Park, West Harbor/Marina, and Tatachog, Sonton, Guata & Ugis shorelines. The program also hosted community tree planting events at Sinapalo Elementary School, Veterans Memorial Park, and Atdin Amot Chamorro (Chamorro Medicine Garden), planting Flower Ornamental

trees (6), Improved Native Varieties (24), and Medicinal trees (6). In all events, staff taught participants about site preparation, potting mediums, fertilization, plant spacing, tree guard installation, and pruning through visual presentations and hands-on demonstrations.

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