



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet

Northern Mariana Islands 2025



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2024 Final
Community Forests and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$85,000
Forest Legacy	\$0
Forest Stewardship	\$20,104
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$0
State Fire Assistance	\$0
Urban and Community Forestry	\$24,418
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$0
Total	\$129,522

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 2024 Accomplishments	Value
Population	47,329	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	173
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	0
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	2
Forest Based Employment	5	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	13,986
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	0	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	895
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	158,400		

Program Highlights**Forest Health Protection**

The Cooperative Forest Health Program (CFHP) focuses on the maintenance of forest and tree health, and the detection and management of invasive and detrimental species that threaten the CNMI's forests resources. Most of the CFHP resources were focused on Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) monitoring, management, and public education on the island of Rota where CRB have been found since October 2017. Monitoring efforts revealed that CRB populations continue to increase in the southern part of Rota, demonstrating a critical need for CFHP resources and funding. As of now, the main priority is containing CRB on Rota and preventing it from impacting the coconut trees on other islands.

CFHP staff conducted educational outreach at various schools and community events such as the Marianas Tourism Education Summit "Green Spaces, Memorable Places", benefiting over 300 students from grades 4-12 and over 90 students from Saipan Southern High School who learned about the devastating effects of CRB, Little Fire Ant (LFA) and invasive vines. At the 2024 BECQ EAM "Root for Earth", 120 students visited the CNMI Forestry booth, where the staff passed out flyers with information on CRB and invasive plants to share with their friends and neighbors in their communities.

The CFHP continued to monitor CRB and LFA on Saipan. Traps have been installed to detect their presence and the level of their infestation. The staff continued to perform monthly field visits at these sites which include wholesale companies, ports of entries such as Saipan Charlie Dock at Lower Base, and at Saipan International Airport, including Air Mac Cargo and United Cargo. No signs of established LFA or CRB have been found on Saipan.

Forest Stewardship

The program has served 173 landowners, approximately half visited our nursery in person, where they received posters and a tour of our growing and diverse nursery stock, asked questions of the staff, and received advice on tree selection and placement. One memorable event was a local grandfather and grandmother with two small grandchildren who felt inspired to drop in to select some trees to plant with their grandchildren that day. The emotion was palpable as the children were visibly excited to have the opportunity to plant with their grandparents and participate in the selection. The grandparents were grateful that CNMI Forestry was willing and able to provide the trees for a memorable time with their grandchildren. The staff was nearly moved to tears by the visit as we knew this family could not afford to buy trees from a local nursery, and their moment to share their love for planting with their grandchildren could have been lost forever.

The remainder of the landowners were visited in person by our staff to provide selection and placement advice for their individual needs and teach them how to correctly plant. Another memorable moment came when we scheduled a planting for an elderly widower who needed a border between his house and the street that also provided some shade for his chair on the porch, where he spent many hours a day. He stood with a smile as staff dug and prepared the holes and planted 7 Foxtail Palms. He eagerly watered the trees before we could do it for him and waved with both hands, thanking us as we drove away.

Landscape Scale Restoration

The Talakhaya Watershed Revegetation Project on Rota enhances water quality by reducing soil erosion from badlands. The establishment of nitrogen-fixing *Acacia confusa* is a first step in stabilizing gullies and transforming barren lands to a mono-type secondary acacia forest. The transitioning efforts is a slow and laborious process, and has proven successful with a handful of species such as the *Artocarpus mariannensis*, *Hernandia labyrinthica*, *Pouteria obovata*, *Premna obtusifolia* and approximately 640 wildlife food and beneficial trees established such as *Elaeocarpus joga*, *Streblus pendulinus*, *Premna obtusifolia*, *Pipturus argenteus*, *Intsia bijuga*, *Melanolepis multiglandulosa*, and *Guettarda speciosa* to name a few. Moreover, a combination of over 250 rare seedlings of *Osmoxylon mariannense*, *Serianthes nelsonii*, *Heritiera longipetiolata*, *Tabernaemontana rotensis* and *Maesa walkeri* were planted to increase the population in the wild.

The Lao Lao Bay (LSR) Landscape Scale Restoration and Re-vegetation Project on Saipan incorporates local leadership and community stewardship to adaptively manage 14 acres of private land. The project provides watershed protection, wildlife and forest conservation, and for community farming. The watershed drains into near shore coral reefs and habitat for endangered turtles and coral species. The area has steep terrain, highly erodible soils, and a history of land clearing have left large areas of barren lands. Mariana Islands Nature Alliance and other nonprofit organizations have been conducting tree planting activities. About 300 native trees species and some erosion control plants including *Laniti*, *Putting*, *acacia*, *vetiver* grass and at the beach area *Banal*, *Talesai*, and *Daogk* trees. They were selected for their soil-holding capabilities on steep slopes or moist soil conditions to prevent erosion and runoff that would harm the coral reef. We are partnering with four private landowners in revegetating their private lands.

Nursery Facilities

The CNMI received Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) grants in FY2023 and 2024. The island of Saipan was first to be awarded \$75,000 for the construction of two new 60'X24' A-frame structures with shaded cloths tied to the pipes using wiggle wires, and nursery tables the length of the facilities. The facilities will be equipped with overhead water sprinkler system, germination and propagation station. The facility poles would be mounted to concrete footings and the entire structure can be dismantled when a storm is approaching. Another 54'X24' structure will be build with flat top canvas to keep the staff dry and serve as workstation. The perimeter of the 6,375 square feet nursery will have a chain link fence. The new facilities will take three to four months to complete.

The island of Rota also received \$75,000 for its damaged nursery facility caused by Super Typhoon Mangkhut in 2018 to undergo repairs and upgrades, including purchasing a zero-turn riding lawn mower and a vehicle in dire need of replacing aging transportation fleet. After many years of hardships with unreliable vehicles, a new 2023 four-door Nissan Frontier 4WD pickup truck will be servicing all our program needs. The vehicle is safe and reliable, especially when travelling on unpaved roads, muddy or slippery during the rainy season. Some places where staff get seeds and cuttings are on top of the hills where a four-wheel vehicle is the only vehicle that can travel to these places.

Smarttrees Pacific

The IIJA funding for Forest Action Plan implementation has funded Smart Trees Pacific (STP), based in Hawaii, which has been vital to CNMI Forestry's operations. To date, a crew of five (5) local dedicated crew members on Saipan and four (4) on Rota have worked diligently to find and collect native and endemic seeds and seedlings from our jungles to propagate in our nurseries for planting projects across the CNMI. STP is involved in every aspect of nursery operations, out planting, and continuing stewardship projects. Also, STP assists and leads in educational outreach and most importantly, training of future stewards from elementary school students to our elders. This training empowers our community to actively participate in our reforestation efforts. From the inception of our partnership, STP continues to

provide crucial expertise from the mainland to train us, our colleagues in the Mayor's Office, Commonwealth Utilities Commission, Parks and Recreation, and Public Works to effectively care for our trees in our reforestation effort. The expertise of STP and the growth of their local staff have become a crucial asset to the people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, our islands, and our mission to reforest the land after World War II and numerous devastating typhoons. Through STP's dedicated service, we are bringing back our trees, making substantial progress in our food security goals, beautifying our islands for future generations, and aiding our economy.

Urban and Community Forestry

The CNMI Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) program seeks to facilitate the effective management of forests in an urban environment, including towns, villages, boulevards, parks, schools, churches, government areas, residential areas, commercial areas and historical sites. This year on the island of Saipan, the program has gained more support and encouragement from local leaders. For instance, the Governor and Lt. Governor declared an Arbor Day/Month proclamation; which was read aloud by Forestry Interns Ms. Robyn Lee and Mr. John Kintol, our two UCF Forestry Interns. This internship program benefitted both the students and CNMI Forestry by providing professional development opportunities and increased capacity. In addition the program hired David Combs as the program's first full time CNMI Partnership Coordinator, a key role in implementing the program. This year, the program also networked with home and landowners to procure rare tree seedlings in their communities, critically contributing to the goal of procurement, germination, and growth of seedlings for planting efforts. Additionally, the program obtained valuable input from village elders on the reforestation of the islands with fruit trees, medicinal trees, and traditional rare/endangered trees in addition to trees for beautification in the tourist areas.

On Rota, In partnership with the Municipality of Rota's 1000 Fruit Trees Initiative, the goal of incorporating fruit-producing trees in public spaces was launched. This campaign of having fruit trees in parks and roadways, have garnered tremendous support and commendations. This community planting initiative have realized the establishment of 655 trees, fruit-bearing plants accounting for more than half, including mango, guava, Malaysian apple, avocado, citrus, star fruit, sour sop, Surinam cherry, star apple, Pacific almond, and breadfruit.

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