

Meeting Highlights
U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
American Samoa
August 2007

Full meeting summary and meeting materials (agendas, presentations, etc.) are available on the Task Force web site (www.coralreef.gov). For more information contact Beth Dieveney (beth.dieveney@noaa.gov; 301 713-3155 x129) or Roger Griffis (roger.b.griffis@noaa.gov; 301 713-3155 x152).

General Summary

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) held a public meeting in Pago Pago, American Samoa August 20-25, 2007. The purpose of the meeting was to learn about and take action on key issues related to coral reef conservation. The meeting also provided an opportunity for Task Force Members to share recent accomplishments, existing challenges, and needs in addressing coral reef research and conservation issues locally and globally. Much of the content and discussion at this meeting focused around the theme: *Science and Culture Bridging Management*.

Highlights of the week include:

- The USCRTF adopted **four decision items** proposed by the USCRTF Steering Committee:
 - Actions on Coral Reef Ecosystems and Climate Change,
 - Renew and Strengthen Support for the Local Action Strategy (LAS) Initiative,
 - Recognition and support for the United States All Islands Coral Reef Committee Strategic Action Plan and Charter (2008-13), and
 - Approval of a USCRTF 2008 International Year of the Reef Action Plan
- **Two expert panels** presented key findings during the USCRTF business meeting on:
 - Coral Reef Ecosystems in a Changing Climate
 - Conserving Coral Reef Ecosystems: A Regional Approach
- The USCRTF and associated members hosted **four workshops** in association with this meeting:
 - Federal Grant and other Funding Opportunities for American Samoa
 - Translating Traditional Knowledge for Coral Reef Management
 - Application of Economic Valuation Studies
 - A Manager's Guide to Coral Bleaching
- American Samoa made **three major, territorial-wide announcements**:
 - Governor Tagiola Tulafono released an Executive Order on Climate Change
 - The Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources announced a fishing ban on all large fish within territorial waters.
 - The territory government committed to implementing a plan to develop a network of protected areas in cooperation with regional partners to help protect coral reef ecosystems.
- USCRTF members announced a number of significant new actions including release of a report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency entitled "**Climate Change and Interacting Stressors: Implications for Coral Reef Management in American Samoa**".

- **Public comment** was given by six individuals and organizations. Additional written comments were submitted prior to the meeting.
- The USCRTF presented **six awards** to regional and local individuals and organizations.

Coral Reef Ecosystems in a Changing Climate: Panel Presentations & Decision Item

Climate change and its impacts on coral reef ecosystems was a priority issue addressed at this meeting. The focus on this issue is largely due to the leadership and call to action by American Samoa Governor Tagiola Tulafono at the 16th USCRTF meeting in November 2006. In response, the USCRTF hosted an expert panel on climate change which highlighted global as well as local and regional Pacific issues related to coral reefs and climate change and provided case studies of how regional bodies and other jurisdictions have addressed these issues.

At the August 2007 meeting, the USCRTF considered and endorsed a resolution, ***Resolution 18.1: Coral Reefs and Climate Change***, which calls for increased action to address the causes and consequences of climate change on coral reef ecosystems and the communities and economies that depend on them. It also establishes a USCRTF climate change working group. The new climate change working group is charged with developing best practices to help local resource managers minimize the impact of climate-induced stresses like coral bleaching while better educating the public about the impacts of climate change on the health and survival of reef resources. Components of the decision also called for developing bleaching response plans for each U.S. state and territory with reefs, and assessing what expertise and resources federal agencies have to mitigate risk and damage. The USCRTF further called on members and partners to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and affirmed the role that regional networks of marine protected areas can play in protecting ecological connectivity among islands in the face of potential future losses that may result due to climate change.

In addition, the American Samoa Governor announced the passage of a territorial Executive Order addressing climate change. The Executive Order takes a proactive approach by mandating the American Samoa government agencies and departments make short- and long-term commitments to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Conserving Coral Reef Ecosystems: A Regional Approach

This session explored ways to build social and ecological networks to promote regional ecosystem management for coral reef ecosystems. Discussion highlighted the need to be adaptive when conducting regional approaches to ecosystem management, recognizing that the region and therefore the governance structure, the partners, agencies, and experts involved will change depending on the issue being addressed.

Case studies presented largely focused on the Pacific region with particular attention to the connectivity between American Samoa and Samoa. In the Micronesian region, which includes the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, a regional effort for marine and terrestrial habitat protection has been launched. The Micronesian Challenge aims to protect 30% of nearshore marine areas and 20% of terrestrial habitat by 2020. This effort, while working

locally in each jurisdiction, recognizes and takes advantage of the biological, cultural and social connectivity of the Micronesian region.

For the Polynesian region, data was presented highlighting the ecological connectivity among and between the Samoa/American Samoa archipelago and Fiji. Based on ocean current and larval transport data, American Samoa needs to look ‘upstream’ to Samoa for partnerships. Fiji is an important regional partner for managing sea turtle populations migrating between essential habitats in Rose Atoll, American Samoa and Fiji. Networks of protected areas that include a range of ecosystems and habitats are needed to fully protect the resources.

In the course of strengthening regional and global partnerships, these jurisdictions, in both Micronesia and Polynesia – ecologically, biologically and culturally connected – are taking a regional approach to management and information sharing but are implementing plans and management strategies at the local level.

Following this session, the Director of the American Samoa Division for Marine Wildlife Resources announced a ban on fishing of all large fish within the territorial waters of American Samoa.

All Islands Committee Meeting and Pacific Regional Collaboration Discussion

The All Islands Coral Reef Committee hosted a session on Pacific regional collaboration for the International Year of the Reef and marine conservation in general. International representatives at this meeting included: Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Program (SPREP), Secretariat of the Pacific Community, UNESCO, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and representatives from New Caledonia, Fiji, New Zealand, Samoa, and others.

Navassa Island Update

Navassa, a reef surrounded-island in the Caribbean Sea approximately 35 miles west of Haiti, has been a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge since 1999, and is the only remote insular U.S. possession in the Western Atlantic. This update on Navassa, its resources, and management concerns was requested due to concern over illegal fishing around Navassa and possible over exploitation of fish resources. Navassa has a history of unauthorized entry on land and illegal fishing (reports of taking federally-protected species), primarily by Haitian nationals in the very limited near-shore coral reef waters. Biologically this fishing is a concern as research indicates a decline in certain fish species and Navassa has no nursery seagrass or mangrove areas which may limit production and replenishment of fish stocks.

Navassa Island is only one example highlighting the resource issues and management challenges facing remote insular areas. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service committed to expanding this discussion and working with the USCRTF and partners to address the challenges of monitoring, enforcement, and management issues at this and other remote U.S. insular coral reef areas.

Workshop: Traditional Knowledge and Marine Management Practices

In keeping with the meeting's theme, Science and Culture Bridging Management, this meeting featured an in-depth session on enhancing coral reef ecosystem management strategies through incorporation of traditional knowledge. The session included presentations by traditional village leaders, government managers, and educators on the importance of working within the traditional governance structures to best conserve and manage their marine resources. Traditional practices highlighted were from Samoa, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau, and throughout the Pacific. The case studies presented revealed similarities in key areas related to conservation and fishing practices, the importance of working within the traditional village structure and customs, the need to target key social and cultural groups within a community, and integrating scientific and research mechanisms through working with local educators and gaining the trust of the local people.

A set of recommendations focusing on three areas: Resource Management, Education and Outreach, and Capacity Building were presented to the USCRTF for consideration. Key recommendations include:

- Provide support to allow involvement of traditional leaders in conservation efforts and develop strong relationships with village communities.
- Pursue co-management with governmental agencies and villages.
- Consider fisheries by-laws that apply equally to all citizens, that have been prepared in accordance with relevant provisions of the Fisheries Legislation, and that have been accorded legal recognition in the Court of law.
- Identify, document, and support implementation of sustainable traditional fishing techniques that respect the environment.
- Embrace the local community structure and traditions in developing enforcement programs. Traditional rules, fines and punishments should be consistent with local laws and customs.
- Provide support to carefully document and conserve cultural protocols, heritage sites, and their traditional stories.
- Identify and document traditional management techniques. Share traditional knowledge and management practices with the younger generations.
- Fund and develop textbooks and other educational products that contain traditional knowledge and reflect local conditions.
- Encourage volunteerism as a valuable asset in capacity building in local communities.

Workshop: Application of Economic Valuation Studies

This working session targeted our state and territory partners that have or are in the process of conducting economic valuation studies of their jurisdiction coral resources. Recommendations from this workshop include:

- Continue to support natural resource damage assessment provisions in the Coral Reef Conservation Act reauthorization,
- Develop guidelines for the use of economic valuation information using case studies,
- Conduct workshops on the value of coral reefs for local legislators and management decision-makers,

- Work with localities that have developed marketing and outreach materials with valuation data to identify best practices and lessons learned, and
- Share valuation information and approaches throughout the region and work collaboratively to develop messages about the value of Pacific coral reefs.

Workshop: Responding to Climate Change: A Workshop for Coral Reef Managers

More than 40 international experts in coral reef management from American Samoa, Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, Fiji, and the mainland U.S. met to learn about climate change impacts on coral reefs and tools to prepare for, and respond to, coral bleaching events. Through presentations, interactive discussions and exercises, and in-water field activities, the workshops provided participants with the skills and tools they need to adapt their management programs to address the growing threat climate change poses to coral reefs, such as predicting where coral bleaching will occur, measuring coral reef resilience and assessing the socioeconomic impacts of coral bleaching. Participants shared strategies and local management actions and participated in exercises that planned draft coral bleaching response plans and hypothetical Marine Protected Areas that emphasize resilience to climate change. Workshop content was based on a USCRTF supported publication *A Reef Manager's Guide to Coral Bleaching*.

Field Trips and Site visit opportunities

A visit to **Sailele Village Community Fisheries Project** provided an opportunity to visit a traditional fishing village and learn about the resource issues and management strategies utilized in the American Samoa Community Based Fisheries Management Program.

The field trip to the **Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary** highlighted the cultural and ecological importance of this protected area. The trip included a hike along the natural heritage trail (collaboration between Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the National Park of American Samoa) and a snorkel in the Sanctuary which harbors at least 271 species of fish and 200 species of coral.

A trip to **Aunu'u Island** focused on aspects of watershed and wetland ecology and management projects. Several management projects were highlighted that include planting vetiver grass to control erosion; restoration of a landfill site to its former native vegetation, the puzzlenut mangrove tree; and a site visit to and discussion of plans for constructed wetlands to address the problems of wastewater treatment on this small island.

Resolutions & Decision Items Endorsed by the USCRTF

The USCRTF considered and endorsed four decision items at this meeting.

Resolution 18.1: Call to action on Managing Coral Reefs in a Changing Climate

Resolution 18.2: Call for Local Action Strategies – Phase II defined and launched 'phase two' of a highly successful Local Action Strategy initiative, which created three-year plans for local action that implemented hundreds of targeted conservation projects worth millions of dollar

Resolution 18.3: Endorsement of the All Islands Committee Strategic Plan recognized a new strategic plan and charter for the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee, which represents the Governors and Executive branches of the states, commonwealths, territories and Freely Associated States possessing coral reefs.

Decision Item: International Year of the Reef CRTF Action plan

The USCRTF endorsed the action plan for International Year of the Reef and will continue to develop a vision for launching a Renewed Call to Action.

Awards

The USCRTF presented **six awards** to regional and local individuals and organizations:

- Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP)
- Lelei Peau, Chair, U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee and Deputy Director, American Samoa Department of Commerce
- American Samoa Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG)
- Dr. Karolyn Braun, Marine Science Teacher, American Samoa Community College
- Tavita Togia, Terrestrial Biologist, National Park Service of American Samoa
- Ivoga Ballard and Rodney, Farm Producers
- Dr. Peter Craig, Marine Ecologist, National Park Service of American Samoa