

Superintendent's Report – March 2014

Engaging Partners and Visitors:

The sanctuary has engaged in partnerships to connect tourism with supporting the local economy and resource protection. These include an MOA with National Park-American Samoa; collaborating with the cruise ship industry; developing village-based ecotourism experiences; and connecting with local businesses. Additionally, the Ocean Center has accommodated over 13,000 visitors; hosted the "Festival of Sites" led by residents to highlight sanctuary special places and generate income while giving tourists a preview of Samoan life; and featured the new film "*Penina Tutasi – Amerika Samoa*" to increase exposure and awareness of the sanctuary.

Swains Island Expedition:

Jean Michel Cousteau and Director of National Marine Sanctuaries Dan Basta participated in an expedition to Swains Island. Also participating in the mission was a team of maritime archaeologists led by Dr. Hans Van Tilburg of the ONMS Maritime Heritage Program. Additionally, Research Coordinator Dr. Wendy Cover conducted a biological assessment of the outer reef and reef flats. These surveys are the first since Swains Island was added to the sanctuary and provided a broader picture of the state of the reefs in this remote and unique island system.

Ocean Swimming/Ocean Science (OSOS):

OSOS has been propelled into its second successful year. The curriculum, which began in 2012, teaches students ocean safety, swimming, marine science, and how to be effective ocean stewards. OSOS strengthens agency collaborations (with American Samoa DOE and American Samoa Aquatic Agency) and provides a valuable service to the Territory, local communities, and future marine resource managers. As American Samoa has a high incidence of drowning fatalities annually, this program also addresses an important need for swimming instruction while raising awareness of conservation issues. OSOS has educated over 125 students.

Sanctuary Wellness Program:

In May 2013, the Tae Bo Fitness Program was launched to uphold healthy minds and bodies, while connecting the community with the importance of protecting special places encompassed within the sanctuary areas of American Samoa. This innovative program brings together resource protection and community needs through fitness in an area of the world that has some of the highest percentages of obesity, diabetes, and threats to natural resources. Tae Bo sessions involve about 60 people from partner agencies and the general community. Every meeting brings opportunities for alliances to protect sanctuary resources.



Festival of Sites

Photo: NOAA/NMSAS



Jean Michel Cousteau

Photo: NOAA/NMSAS



NPAS SAR Training

Photo: NOAA/NMSAS

Search and Rescue Training:

The National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa was invited to participate in a National Park American Samoa Search and Rescue (SAR) training exercise. The training included a classroom component that covered standard operating procedures and a field exercise in the National Park of American Samoa. The field exercise addressed operations, communications, field searches, first aid, and victim transport. The SAR training provided an excellent opportunity for both programs to work together as team to better prepare for future joint rescue responses within the National Park or areas adjacent to the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa.





COTS Removal efforts

Photo: NOAA/NMSAS



Sanctuary Divers in Ta'u

Photo: NOAA/NMSAS



Lauli'i Elementary School

Photo: NOAA/NMSAS



NOAA Coral Reef Watch Meeting

Photo: NOAA/NMSAS



Coordinated Crown-of-Thorns Starfish Removal – American Samoa:

Sanctuary Team members are coordinating with representatives from the National Park American Samoa, American Samoa Coral Reef Advisory Group, and Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources on an upcoming crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS) removal effort at priority reefs and sanctuary management areas in American Samoa. Planning has included pre-operation tow-board and drop surveys to identify areas with the highest densities of COTS so removal efforts can achieve maximum success as well as team roles and agency participation for all phases of the effort. The mission involves local, regional, and national collaboration and also includes team members from the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, and NOAA Dive Center.

Pacific Regional Tourism Strategy:

The sanctuary team participated in the Pacific Regional Tourism Strategy (PRTS) 2015-2019 Stakeholder Consultation Workshop at the Tradewinds Hotel in Pago Pago, American Samoa. The workshop was sponsored by the American Samoa Visitors Bureau, South Pacific Tourism Organization, and Pacific Regional Tourism Capacity Building Program.

The PRTS will provide a strategic framework to support the development of the Pacific tourism sector for the next 5 years. The strategy has established an agreed Vision for the development of the tourism sector at a regional level and will formulate the objectives, key strategies, and priority actions to facilitate achievement of the Vision. The Vision for the tourism sector in the Pacific Region, endorsed by the South Pacific Tourism Organization Board and Council of Pacific Tourism Ministers (Apia 2013), is the "Tourism will inspire sustainable economic growth and empower the Pacific people."

Vessel Training and NOAA Components Course:

Dana Wilkes (Small Boats Coordinator) & Jordan Cousino (Course Trainer/Consultant) were in American Samoa to complete teaching a NOAA Component Class. Sanctuary team members completed the course as well as training exercises and

vessel checkout on the R/V Manuma. Training included trailering, launching, docking, maneuvering, navigation, hazard identification, and emergency response. The sanctuary team gained valuable experience while logging on-water training hours on the R/V Manuma that are crucial for building additional capacity for the sanctuary vessel operations program.

Sanctuary Science Team Dives in Ta'u:

The Science and Marine Coordinators completed a field expedition to Ta'u that included documenting one of the biggest *Porites* coral heads in the world, nicknamed Big Mamma. Some measurements taken included: Circumference ~41ft, Max Depth at base-46ft, and depth at the top of the coral head-25ft. Two dives were completed and followed-up by tow board surveys that took place along the western side of the Ta'u sanctuary management area.

Sanctuary Outreach School Visits:

The National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa (sanctuary) has been presenting on various topics to numerous schools. The sanctuary outreach team has visited 2-3 schools per month. Teachers would schedule visits to the Ocean Center and would have the outreach team present to their classes either before or after their visit. In some of these presentations, the sanctuary outreach team has invited other agencies to share about their program and other environmental issues. Since January 2014, we have reached close to 300 students during our school visits.

NOAA Coral Reef Watch:

NOAA Coral Reef Watch conducted a User Outreach Meeting at the Ocean Center. NOAA Coral Reef Watch provides current reef environmental conditions to quickly identify areas at risk for coral bleaching. Additional information can be found at <http://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/satellite/index.php>.

Hökūle'a Worldwide Voyage High School Essay Competition:

The Hōkūle'a will visit the sanctuary in August 2014. A student from Ta'u and a student from Tutuila will have the opportunity to learn from the world renowned crew of the Hōkūle'a and will attend the Navigation and Voyaging summer training in Hawai'i.

Media Coffee Chat:

The sanctuary hosted their first "Media Coffee Chat" which is an overview of events/programs and activities, highlights for newsworthy coverage. The first coffee chat highlighted sanctuary work for the first quarter of 2014 (Jan-Mar). This "chat" enabled the media to give feedback on how to work collaboratively with media/communication leads from sanctuary to ensure our community is well served.

Communication/Outreach Coordinator Isabel Gaoteote and Education Outreach/Community Coordinator Veronika Mortenson presented on Sanctuary Wellness, Ocean Swimming/Ocean Science program, Festival of Sites, One NOAA meetings, and promoting the Hōkūle'a Student Competition. The next Media Coffee Chat is scheduled for March 26, 2014.

Research Collaboration:

The Coral Reef Conservation Program organized a meeting with visiting researchers and on-island scientists and managers to discuss current projects and future collaborative efforts. Four on-island agencies were represented, including the sanctuary, as well as researchers from United States Geological Survey (USGS), National Center for Coastal and Ocean Science, San Diego State University (SDSU), and NOAA Fisheries.

Research discussed included contaminants, current modeling, sedimentation, and socioeconomic studies. Many connections were made, and further discussions with USGS included the potential to collaborate on a funded program to analyze coral cores taken in the sanctuary. Additional discussions included regular socioeconomic monitoring for the sanctuary with help from SDSU researchers.

Coral Bleaching Research Planning:

The Research Coordinator and Operations Officer met with University of Hawai'i researcher, Dr. Tom Oliver, to discuss details of his

study on coral bleaching tolerances.

Due to staff input, Dr. Oliver will be starting his project in two sanctuary management areas: Fagatele Bay and Fagalua/Fogam'a. He will also be including several other sites around Tutuila, providing important comparisons with the sanctuary areas.

The research includes significant outreach components, for which he is also coordinating with the sanctuary team. The project field work will continue through the summer and further genetic analyses and reporting will occur the following year.

Information will help in planning protected areas that are resilient to climate change.

Support for American Samoa Community College (ASCC) QUEST Marine Biology Camp:

The Research Coordinator gave an hour lecture on coral reef ecology to the QUEST camp, a week-long spring break training camp in marine field methods for local American Samoa Community College students. Staff from the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) also attended. The Research Coordinator also participated in an evening panel discussion on Marine Protected Areas and enforcement in American Samoa.

Other panelists included representatives from DMWR, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, and the National Park American Samoa.

Students asked many questions, including about opportunities for employment in marine work with local agencies.

One NOAA Contaminant Research:

Members of the sanctuary team assisted National Center for Coastal and Ocean Science researcher Dave Whittall and Coral Reef Conservation Program manager Susie Holst with research conducted in Faga'alū in February. The study is assessing nutrients and contaminant loads in sediments in the bay. The sanctuary Research Coordinator assisted with equipment acquisition and conducted three dives for sediment samples. Future collaborations for contaminant sampling in the sanctuary are being discussed.

Coral Restoration Workshop:

The sanctuary Research Coordinator assisted with a coral restoration workshop in the village of Leone. The workshop was taught by Dr. Shai Shaffer of Israel, and run by the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources.

Participants employed three different methods of securing small coral fragments to grates that will be hung in the ocean for a year, allowing the coral fragments to grow to a size where they can be outplanted back on the reef.

Trainees will maintain the grate array in that village and spread the program by teaching the methods in other villages.

LOOKING AHEAD

Hōkūle'a worldwide voyage visits American Samoa in August 2014.

Crown-of-thorns starfish removal at priority reefs and sanctuary management areas, April 14-28, 2014.

Business Exchange Program, April 2014.

Google Street View Mapping of Anu'u, Fagatele Bay, and Fogama'a and Fagalua, May 2014.

S.E.A. Robert Seaman's, August 2014.

Jean Michel Cousteau, Swains Island Film Release, August 2014.

Ecotour development will continue in 2014 with the launch of Tour Excursions (visitor-to-village).



Media Coffee Chat

Photo: NOAA/NMSAS