

Subject: Habitat restoration update

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Message from the Assistant Secretary

CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT

February 4, 2014

Habitat conservation is critical to the sustainability of fisheries, protected resources and resiliency of our shore lines. NOAA plays an instrumental role in conservation, in particular through the Habitat Blueprint. The Blueprint provides a framework for NOAA to effectively improve habitats for fisheries, marine life, and coastal communities. Under the Blueprint, NOAA selects Habitat Focus Areas to prioritize long-term habitat science and conservation efforts.

Today, NOAA has selected two sites in the Pacific Islands region as the next Habitat Focus Areas: West Hawaii and the Manell-Geus watershed on the southern tip of Guam.

The Manell-Geus watershed contains extensive seagrass beds and coral reefs. These habitats support the local village's strong fishing tradition. However, the reefs are impacted by poor water quality, which is linked to erosion on the steep hillsides and streambanks.

As a Habitat Focus Area, NOAA and partners will provide training and start-up funding for conservation action planning and development of a watershed management plan.

West Hawaii is home to endangered or threatened mammals including Hawaiian monk seals, humpback whales, and green sea turtles. However, these and other natural resources are threatened by drought, fire, invasive species, and development.

Through NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program, we are already partnering with local communities to conduct regular marine debris clean-ups, invasive species removal efforts, and various coastal community habitat conservation projects. In the future, NOAA will also help with various projects that fall within the strategies of the area's Conservation Action and Watershed Management Plans.

The Habitat Blueprint demonstrates how NOAA's science, service, and stewardship come together to improve habitat conditions for fisheries, coastal, and marine life, and to provide other economic, cultural, and environmental benefits our society needs and enjoys. More information will be available later today at <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/>

Building on the momentum begun with the Russian River, West Hawaii, and Guam, we will announce the next two Habitat Focus Areas in February.

Thank you to the team that has worked to move this initiative forward and to everyone for their continuing habitat conservation efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mark', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dr. Mark Schaefer
Assistant Secretary for Conservation & Management