

AGENCY REPORT

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Department of Land and Natural Resources,
Division of Fish and Wildlife
March 24th – 27th, 2025
202nd Council Meeting

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Department of Land and Natural Resources regarding fisheries and conservation during the periods of **December 1, 2024– February 28, 2025**. The report covers Fisheries Monitoring and Research, Resource Protection and Enforcement, and Other Fishery Activities.

Fisheries Research and Monitoring (Fisheries Data Section)

The fiscal year 2024 Western Pacific Fisheries Information Network project concluded on November 30, 2024. Although an identical grant for fiscal year 2025 was expected to be awarded immediately, delays in proposal acceptance severely impacted project performance. To mitigate disruptions, funds from a separate award were used sparingly to sustain purchase report collection while ensuring compliance with that award's requirements.

- a. Boat-based Creel Survey
 - No boat-based surveys were conducted during this reporting period due to delays in award acceptance and funding.
- b. Commercial Receipt System
 - A separate award was identified to support purchase report collection.
 - Only seven purchase reports with purchase dates corresponding to this reporting period were collected.

Other Fishery Activities

- a. FAD Program
 - Initiated the ITB process to deploy FADs DE and EE in Rota waters
 - Inventory and procurement of FAD system hardware and equipment (chain, shackles, buoy, etc.)
 - A schedule has been set to deploy the two FAD systems during the third week of March
- b. Fish Life History Program
 - Attended Stock Assessment training and began stock assessment of several coral reef species including *Acanthurus lineatus* and *Scarus rubroviolaceus*
 - Collection of target species gonad and otoliths
 - Gonad and otolith processing and analysis- gonads processed and stained are viewed microscopically and staged for sexual maturity of several coral reef and

bottomfish species, otoliths mounted and processed to view microscopically for age

c. Coral Reef Management Program

- Baited Remote Underwater Video Survey (BRUVS) housing/frame development
- Recruitment of Coral Reef Ecologist
- Initiated benthic photo analysis of 2024 North Lagoon surveys using Coral Net
- 7 sites of different habitats have been analyzed and used to train the AI of Coral Net
- Started the procurement process for a workstation to conduct Structure-from-Motion (SfM) compilation and analysis; delays have occurred due to price changes

d. Movement and Connectivity Program

- Fishing supplies and external Floy T-bar anchor tag equipment quotes were submitted to procurement.
- Species for tagging identified
- Completed pilot testing of hook and line fishing method for tagging efforts, along with modifications to the data recording sheets.
- Completed preliminary exploratory modeling using recent species-specific estimates of lagoon population size (FISHA program), harvest rates (Creel Program), and past tag return rates (Movement Connectivity Program).
- External tagging SOP outline
- Acquired DFW Scientific Research Permit for tagging fish in Mañagaha Marine Conservation Area.
- Modification of project approach to incorporate tagging fish with conventional external Floy T-bar anchor tags on the western side of Saipan, including the Northern, Central, and Southern Lagoon, and the Mañagaha Marine Conservation Area and incentive framework for managing the outflow of incentives
- Acoustic tags and receivers: company search and quote requests.
- Outreach flyer designs have been created, and the design of incentives is currently in progress.

e. Fishery Independent Surveys and Habitat Assessments

- Recruitment of new professional staff
- Procurement of dive and survey equipment
- Continued development of training materials
- Fish ID and survey method training
- Site selection planning
- Analysis and reporting on data from previous years

Boating Access Program

- a. Saipan Marina and Docks
 - Repair work to the embankment continues for the Smiling Cove Marina. About 90% completion.
 - Finalized the USACE Nationwide permits for Sugar Dock, Tanapag and Fishing Base ramp maintenance activities.
 - Completed the maintenance dredging of Sugar Dock Ramp on August 2024
 - Initiating a technical assessment of the DFW ramp to determine ramp integrity.
 - Initiating a technical assessment of the proposed Marina Launching Ramp Scrapping. Awaiting SOW from DPW Technical Division.
 - The Smiling Cove Marina proposed Dredging Feasibility Study is ongoing. The Hofschneider's Engineering Company is currently doing the assessment.
 - Continue the operation and maintenance of Smiling Cove Marina.
- b. Tinian Marina
 - Ground maintenance services are ongoing for the Tinian marina facility.
 - Installed Tinian Marina signage and marked parking stalls.
 - The contract for the Rehabilitation of the Marina is completed, pending the issuance of the NTP.
- c. Rota Marina
 - Rota West Harbor Marina Rules and Regulations have been drafted and are pending review.
 - Ground maintenance services are ongoing for the Rota marina facility.
 - The marina damage repair work was completed on March 14, 2025.

Enforcement Program

- a. Vessel Patrol
 - Conducted vessel patrols around Saipan.
 - Provided education and outreach during interactions with boaters.
 - Regular patrols are conducted to enforce regulations within MPAs, protecting critical marine habitats.
 - Monitoring Saipan EEZ
 - Scheduled Patrol in Tinian's MLA marine sites
- b. Dockside Patrol
 - Patrols were conducted at MPA sites, known fishing areas, and turtle nesting sites.
 - Responded to incident reports, and conducted investigations on possible fishing violations.
 - Conducted interviews with roadside fish vendors.
 - Provided education and outreach during interactions with fishers and vendors.

- Collect Data on known turtle nesting sites and survey of potential turtle nesting sites
- c. Asset Status
- Engines are being procured for the Enforcement Safe Boat vessel.
 - Enforcement's long range vessel is operational.
 - Staff have initiated the procurement process for two jet skis.
 - ATV for access to remote areas and challenging terrains
 - 3 vehicles for patrol coverage

Sea Turtle Program

- a. Surveys
- Morning and night nesting beach surveys continue as scheduled.
 - In 2024, 27 green sea turtle nests were identified by STP, but only 18 nests were inventoried. Ten (10) were impacted by wave action and predation by monitor lizards.
- b. Outreach
- In 2024, STP conducted 18 outreach talks in schools and public events reaching over 1,200 individuals.
- c. Interactions
- One (1) stranded turtle was reported on November 26, 2024 at Smiling Cove Marina. A caller reported they had accidentally hooked a green sea turtle while fishing in the Marina. We responded and guided the turtle to an accessible area to remove the hook. Unfortunately, the turtle broke loose before it could be assessed. We were able to retrieve all contents of the fishing rod, including the hook. (Strandings prior to November 2024 were reported in prior Council Meetings).
 - One (1) stranded turtle was reported on January 13, 2025 at CNMI Sea Port. A dead green sea turtle was found floating by the dock. With the assistance of DFW Enforcement, the turtle was pulled out of the water. The cause of death is currently unknown as there were no external injuries to its body. STP necropsied the turtle and sent organ/tissue samples to NOAA PIFSC in Hawaii for analysis. The turtle was burned immediately after.