

Community participation - becoming environmental stewards

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Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary, located on the south shore of Tutuila Island, American Samoa, was designated as a National Marine Sanctuary in 1986. It is one of 13 National Marine Sanctuaries and one ecosystem reserve under the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration. It protects a 0.65-sq.-km (0.25-sq.-mi) coral reef formed by the crater of an extinct volcano. There was a tremendous loss of corals by an invasion of crown-of-thorns sea-stars (*Acanthaster planci*) in the late 1970s, and damage to the reefs from coral bleaching and destruction by the hurricanes of 1990 and 1991 (Goldin, 2002). In addition to these natural disasters, the increases in marine debris and illegal methods of fishing have contributed to additional damage and harm to the corals.

The American Samoa Department of Commerce administers the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary under a cooperative agreement with the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration. Under the Resource Management Division of the Department of Commerce the two programs, Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the American Samoa Coastal Management Program have joined efforts to promote marine education, ocean issues, and awareness within the territory. Environmental education and outreach programs are two primary management tools that the Sanctuary uses to address issues and threats to coral reefs, not only at Fagatele Bay, but throughout the territory of American Samoa.

The Department of Commerce Resource Management Division in 2003 developed the theme “To Build, Promote, and Enhance Environmental Stewardship”, as a guide to direct education and outreach goals and objectives. In order to combat the major threats to the Sanctuary and coastal areas of American Samoa, the need for community participation, that is, for people to become environmental stewards, caretakers of their own environment, is seen as the ultimate goal in protecting, preserving, and improving the Sanctuary and our coastal areas. To gain community participation, the Sanctuary developed projects focusing on community education (schools) and the community at large or general public.

Focusing on the earliest stages of education, one of Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary’s projects called Reefweeks targets fourth grade students. The ultimate goal of Reefweeks is to instill appreciation and respect for the coral reefs in young students by teaching them about coral reef ecosystems and how they can be wise stewards of the marine environment. Reefweeks is an annual project held in the month of March in the first week, and the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary staff conducts coral reef classroom presentations. Reef trips highlight the following week of the project, having the students draw and describe what they observe out on the reefs. In the remaining weeks, students are required to participate in poetry, essay, and art-work competitions relating to coral reefs. At the end of the project, both the teachers and students involved are given an evaluation of the overall project. Results from these evaluations and the work submitted by the students indicate the effectiveness of the project and the increase in these students’ knowledge and appreciation’ for their marine environment, particularly coral reefs.

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Camp Tifitifi is an education and awareness project spearheaded and coordinated by the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary, in collaboration with other environmental agencies such as the American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency, the American Samoa Coastal Management Program, the Coral Reef Advisory Group, the Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources, the American Samoa Community College's Land Grant Forestry & Agriculture Extensions, and Sea Grant. These groups combined make up the local environmental educators group called *Le Tausagi*. The annual summer camp targets young people between the ages of 8 and 12. For three days, filled with environmental presentations, ocean activities, games, and field trips, the camp educates these youngsters about the territory's limited natural resources and encourages them to "become environmental stewards"—the theme for the camp in 2004.

Annually, three camp sessions are held, with two on Tutuila island (east & west), and one on Manu'a. Each year, the camp draws in a limit of 30 participants at each session due to budget constraints and manpower. Each of the agencies in *Le Tausagi* contributes some portion of funds and staff time to the successful implementation of the camp. Evaluative questionnaires are given at the end of the camps to determine the participants overall responses to what they had learned. The collaboration and cooperation among the various agencies plays a major role in the successful implementation of Camp Tifitifi.

In 2003, Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary hosted the Ocean Fest, an outreach event for families, the first ever of its kind in American Samoa. The purpose of Ocean Fest is to raise awareness about ocean issues with the general public. Various environmental agencies were invited to set up display booths, with the requirement that they provide hands-on ocean related activities that would engage the public, both young and old, in learning more about ocean resources and the need for their protection and conservation. The program for the day was developed to entertain and instruct, yet would also reflect tradition. For example, a minister was invited to give the invocation, and three youth groups (two church groups and one dance group) to put on quality performances.

An awards presentation was also made for recipients of the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary college scholarship, to Ms. Bonnie Mc Cuddin, majoring in marine biology at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, and a field experience opportunity that year, to Ms. Alofagia Laolagi and two of her students from South Pacific International Christian Center, who visited the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, which was co-sponsored by the National Marine Sanctuary program and the National Geographic Society. The unveiling of the Ocean Fest poster by well known artist Robert Lyn Nelson was another main attraction and important part of the day's events. A Seafood Cooking Contest, open to the public, featured two categories, oka, and tilapia recipes. Thirteen contestants signed up, and participants were satisfied with the event, as were the judges. The Ocean Fest drew in hundreds of people and was a huge success for a first time event. The local media also did a great job of covering the Ocean Fest (Daschbach, 2003).

The achievement and success in the protection and sustainability of natural resources mainly lies in the support and cooperation from a community and the users of those resources. To gain community participation and support, the community continually needs to be educated and updated about the threats and issues at hand. Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary will continue this mission to promote marine education and awareness within the territory of American Samoa and throughout the Pacific. Collaboration and partnerships add to the overall success and implementation of programs and in achieving goals of increasing

environmental stewardship and community participation. 'The future of American Samoa's only marine sanctuary is directly tied to the health of Tutuila and its people. With awareness comes understanding, with understanding comes protection, something that all Samoans can feel good about as they pass along the islands of American Samoa to their children' (Evans, 2003).

The American Samoa Coastal Management Program (ASCMP) was established in 1980 under a federally funded program created to promote the management and protection of individual states, territories, and commonwealths. The mission of ASCMP is to provide effective resource management by protecting, maintaining, identifying, conserving, restoring, and enhancing the resources of the coastal zone. Our coastal zone is defined as the area within three miles of the coast. In American Samoa this means that the entire territory is managed under ASCMP.

ASCMP is administered by the American Samoa Government's Department of Commerce (DOC). ASCMP's divisions include: Project Notification & Review System (PNRS); Water Quality / Non-Point Source Pollution; Cumulative & Secondary Impacts (C&SI); Wetland Protection; Geographical Information System (GIS); Public Awareness Campaign (PAC) and Ocean Resource Management Program (ORMP).

Public Awareness Program

The Public Awareness Campaign, or PAC, of the American Samoa Coastal Management Program (ASCMP) is an attempt to come up with an eclectic approach to educating American Samoa's island community. The ultimate goal is to engage the public as a whole to take the lead on environmental issues and act responsibly to preserve the Territory's limited resources and becoming environmental stewards.

The PAC helps gain public support of ASCMP. We use several different strategies to get our environmental conservation messages out of the office and into different communities. These Strategies include and are not limited to: (1) outreach visits to schools and village groups, (2) conducting workshops, (3) interactive demonstrations, (4) utilizing media mediums, (5) working with other groups concerned with environmental issues and (6) promoting environmentally sound practices during public events. These strategies are all implemented to accomplish the goal of the Public Awareness Program, to build public understanding of environmental issues affecting the Territory and to recruit our residents to care for our environment or to become environmental stewards.

What educational and awareness activities implemented?

There are a multitude of activities used to educate the public about coastal management and at the same time, building, promoting & enhancing environmental stewardship. Each technique varies depending on the target population and the type of information to be provided. Much of the public outreach visits are done with Le Tausagi, a cooperative, non-profit, interagency, environmental educators group. ASCMP's PAC Program annually celebrates wide success with several community-wide education events throughout the year with events such as the following:

Wetlands Month: This annual May event celebrates the wonderful ways wetlands enrich the environment and people. It is a time to give back to the environment by learning more about

wetlands and participating in the scheduled events such as trivia questions and presentations to various youth groups. Wetland presentations are scheduled across the island to educate, involve and engage the general public to better understand the value of one of earth's most important ecosystems. Communities show their participation by conducting wetland cleanups and enforcing the protection of these areas through village councils or through the Project Notification Review System.

Coastweeks: This annual event is the largest environmental awareness project in the Territory. Usually two weeks in September, the PAC staff schedules activities that cater to all tiers of the island's social structure. Some of these activities include: kayaking excursions, tours to historical sites such as the Tia Seu Lupe by Fatu-o-Aiga; tours to the National Park of American Samoa; tours to the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary; tours to the Faisua Hatchery; tours to the Aquaculture farm; poetry writings; art work contest; tracking the gecko; radio environmental trivia; media talk shows on coastal related issues; public outreach etc. The possibilities for each year's activities vary from year to year and are endless. Prizes and awards are given out every year for the active participants. This has always been a fun festivity for most students throughout the territory. It has proven that the general public's participation in this event has tremendously increased over the years. It is through this event that most people realize the importance of coastal environments and eventually take action through conducting voluntary coastal cleanups.

Art and Tide Calendar: The Coastal Zone Management Calendar is one of the most popular activities the program sponsors with assistance from other governmental agencies. Students from around the territory compete in an art and poetry competition to have their work selected for the calendar. Community participation portion, more than 100 artwork entries were submitted that portrayed students' perspectives of how important coastal areas are.

Geographical Information System (GIS) Awareness Week: Not too many students know about this vital program. The purpose of this specific event is to showcase and provide the general public with basic information about the GIS. Since the start of this program, a great number of students acquired basic knowledge about the program and utilized the collected information to compile a data that can be of use for outreach or research purposes.

Water Quality Monitoring Program (WQMP): The WQMP is an education outreach program designed to help students and young citizens of the Territory appreciate the importance of water resources and their quality. This program provides hands-on experience in collecting, analyzing, and reporting water quality data. It also teaches students about the causes and effects of human behavior on water quality, thus preparing them to become responsible adults. We have carried out this program to a total of approximately 15 schools and hoping to continue this program in the future. Profoundly, after the school year was over, participants also joined and initiated stream and beach cleanups.

Success: The responsibility of protecting, maintaining, restoring and enhancing the resources of the territory should be a shared responsibility. One great success gained from these multitudes of environmental awareness and outreach activities was community initiation of voluntary cleanups; village cleanups and more students are interested in pursuing environmental careers. There is definite change of behavior towards protecting and restoring the environment. We hope to continue this effort in partnership with school and village communities to "build, promote and enhance environmental stewardship."

Lessons Learned:

- Increase of Community Awareness

- More collaboration between community and government
- Effective collaboration among environmental agencies
- Better understanding and improved skills on managing coastal resources

“One of the principal reasons why managing the coastal resources are insufficiently valued by society is the lack of education about their benefits and their importance in sustaining the world’s ecosystems and societies...”

(IUCN 1994)

References

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