

## Watershed Learning Exchange in Hawaii Summary

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## **Watershed Learning Exchange in Hawaii Summary**

A watershed learning exchange was held in collaboration with the Global Reef Resilience Program. Palau participants visited watershed sites on Hawaii's Oahu, Kona and Maui to learn how to reconcile increasing development with conservation. For more than two decades, Palau has been a leader in marine conservation. However, in the last 10 years, new development and a growing island economy has increased soil erosion resulting in sedimentation of the nation's coastal marine areas. This has caused great concern among community members and policy makers who want to encourage development and improve infrastructure but also protect the environment. The following people participated in the exchange:

### **Ngarchelong State**

Alan Kangichi – chair of the Babeldaob Watershed Alliance and state assembly member

Rteruich Katsushi Skang – fifth ranking chief from Ollei village and a traditional fisherman

### **Ngaremlengui State**

Blas Lawrence – state legislator and member of the state's management planning committee

Maireng Malsol – member of Ngeremlengui Governor's staff and the representative for the women's community group

### **Palau Conservation Society (PCS)**

Honorable Noah Idechong- Speaker, House of Delegates and Palau environmental champion

Elbuchel Sadang – PCS Director, PCS is leading the development of a green fee for Palau

### **Palau National Congress**

Honorable Swenny Ongidobel – Resources Committee chairman and a supporter of development

### **Oahu**

Hawaii is the closest island nation that offers Palau examples of how to grow development while minimizing environmental impacts. The exchange began with an introduction on how stream channelization on Oahu has led to major and costly environmental issues. Participants also viewed the examples of massive development in the Kai watershed, which dramatically illustrated how development has modified the environment and drastically reduced the amount of water for groundwater recharge and how it now flows instead into the ocean.

Key lessons: When we returned to Palau, Allen Kangichi, chairman of Babeldaob Watershed Alliance (BWA), reported what he learned to the BWA steering committee and emphasized that Palau must take steps to plan its development to protect its water. He imagined what Babeldaob Island would look like in 20 years without proper planning; the island could be covered with concrete and houses and with no outlet other than the ocean for water and sediment. He questioned whether they would still have their coastal areas and reefs for fishing and future needs.

### **Kona**

The Kona Marine Life Advisory Committee (KMLAC) provided key lessons on the second day. The Palau group was struck by the loss of cultural practices in Hawaii and how Hawaiians are

trying to revive what has been lost. This gave them a renewed commitment to protect their cultural and traditional practices. They also learned about the partnership between the KMLAC and local developers in trying to integrate Hawaiian practices and management of marine resources in their development efforts. In Palau, conservation and development have been on opposite sides, with developers accusing environmentalists of being anti-development. However, Palau's conservationists want compatible development so as not to compromise the nation's biodiversity that is the basis of Palau's tourism economy. Finally, the participants learned how a local community group is restoring its watershed by using re-vegetation to control soil erosion. The participants also learned how goats and deer impact a watershed and the importance of fencing off a restoration site. This is a very important lesson as current Palau administration hopes to import goats to the republic.

## **Maui**

On Maui, we visited a watershed preserve and several pineapple farms to see the effects of storm water management on large scale farming. We also met with local government officials and viewed Hawaiian village restoration sites. There were many lessons learned from these visits including:

- Managing invasive species by stopping introduction.
- Minimizing human impacts to protected areas by building simple boardwalks that can support eco-tourism.
- The importance of maintaining forests to filter water and reduce evaporation. We were shown examples of ranchers working with conservationists to ensure that there is enough water to recharge groundwater to support cattle and local communities.
- The importance of protecting wetlands for floodwater control.
- Seeing Hawaiians on Maui, just like on Kona and Oahu, try to re-establish lost cultural traditions and practices. The Palau participants came away with a renewed appreciation for their own culture and traditions that are still being practiced.

## **Summary**

The exchange was a huge success, providing examples and lessons learned to community members and members of Palau's State legislature who are directly involved in natural resources policy decisions. In particular, Delegate Ongidobel, who has been a staunch advocate for increased development, was able to see firsthand how unplanned and unregulated development can result in the costly restoration of critical ecosystem functions. He also learned that protecting the environment is compatible with economic development and provides jobs for people. Finally, the Palau participants have a renewed respect for their culture and the need to preserve it.

The watershed learning exchange has been a tremendous success in showing Palau's policymakers and conservationist the environmental challenges faced by other Pacific island communities. The Palauans learned the urgency of managing their natural resources now, otherwise they may, in the not so distance future, face similar challenges to those being experienced in Guam, Saipan and Hawaii. The realization that their nation is a model among island communities for conservation success made the Palauans more appreciative of the work that is being done by NGOs and government agencies to increase environmental awareness and empower local people to manage their resources for the future.