



OFFICE OF INSULAR AFFAIRS

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**News Release**

**Office of the Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas**

**Interior Assistant Secretary Announces Over \$300,000 to Protect, Manage  
and Preserve Coral Reef Ecosystems Critical to Pacific Island Livelihoods,  
Traditions, and Cultures**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** (September 19, 2014) – Interior Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Kia’aina today announced more than \$300,000 in coral reef initiative grants to American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Ulithi Atoll in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). The funds are made available through the Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) Coral Reef Initiative program for various projects intended to help protect and preserve coral reef ecosystems and educate communities and students on management of these natural resources.

“The vitality and viability of coral reef ecosystems are absolutely critical to the livelihood, traditions, and cultures of these Pacific Island communities,” said Assistant Secretary Kia’aina, “The damaging effects of invasive species, pollution, and ecological change are impossible to ignore in these areas,” she continued. “I am grateful that the federal government can support them in this meaningful way.”

- \$121,000 for coral reef projects identified by American Samoa’s Coral Reef Advisory Group to improve management and protection of their coral reef ecosystems. Projects include eradicating the invasive crown of thorns starfish, monitoring water quality, conducting a creel survey of the annual harvest of palolo worms and implementing the Two Samoas Environmental Cooperative.
- \$154,382 has been prioritized by the Northern Mariana Islands to support the regional efforts of the Micronesia Challenge in preserving natural resources that are crucial to sustaining Pacific Island traditions, cultures and livelihoods. These funds will also be used to reduce the amount of sediment, nutrients and other land-based sources of pollution in CNMI’s watersheds. The Pacific Islands Watershed Institute will focus on watershed field assessments and stormwater management techniques while CNMI’s

"Watershed Warriors" and "CNMI Snorkels" initiatives for elementary school students and other education projects around the CNMI will help raise awareness about natural resource protection among our youth.

- \$33,075 will be used in Ulithi Atoll, one of the outer islands of Yap, in the Federated States of Micronesia, where a joint team of scientists and local resource managers will continue community outreach to develop coral reef resource management plans. Communities in Ulithi rely primarily on food from the sea, and have documented a decline in the amount and sizes of fish they are catching. The reefs that sustain those fish are also undergoing change, likely as a result of climate warming, unsustainable fishing practices and other human impacts. The team will work with small autonomously-governed communities in remote outer-island locations to strengthen their capacity to manage their coral reefs and other natural resources, and enhance sustainability during a time of rapid ecological change.

The Secretary of the Interior has administrative responsibility for coordinating federal policy with respect to the territories of American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and administering and overseeing U.S. federal assistance provided to the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau under the Compacts of Free Association. The Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas executes these responsibilities on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior through the Office of Insular Affairs.

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