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Contact: Tanya Harris Joshua 202-208-6008

Tanya_Joshua@ios.doi.gov

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas

Interior Grants \$650,000 to Combat Threats to Coral Reefs, *Build Capacity, Public Education and Awareness for Coral Reef Protection in the U.S. Insular Areas*

WASHINGTON , D.C. (May 12, 2015) - Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Kia'aina approved nearly \$650,000 in initial grant assistance provided under the Coral Reef Initiative (CRI) program in the Office of Insular Affairs to fund several efforts to reduce threats and improve management of coral reefs in the U.S. insular areas. The goal of the CRI program is to improve the health of coral reefs and marine resources in the Nation's island territories and freely associated states for their long-term economic and social benefit.

"Coral reef resources are under threat from a variety of stresses, including sedimentation, poor water quality, over-harvesting, coastal development and climate change," said Assistant Secretary Kia'aina. "It is important to build capacity by training high school and college students interested in coral reef protection and management and increasing education and awareness for the general public. These grants will help achieve these objectives while addressing local threats and improving the overall health of coral reefs that are critical to the livelihoods of island communities."

National Coral Reef Institute - \$200,000 to support a Coral Assistantship program in American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Northern Mariana Islands. The program was identified as a priority by the insular areas in the 2014 U.S. Coral Reef Task Force 2014 report for funding in 2015 and 2016. It will be administered by the Nova Southeastern University's National Coral Reef Institute. The program will help fill current capacity gaps as well as build longer-term capacity by placing qualified young professionals where their education and work experience will meet each jurisdiction's specific needs.

Micronesia Islands Nature Alliance - \$133,776 to support the Tasi-Watch Program which trains unemployed recent high school graduates to become community conservation rangers. A second project will support CNMI's Summer Eco-Camps for teachers and students in CNMI's high schools. This year's curriculum will focus on conserving Saipan's watersheds. A third project will support the Managaha Pride Campaign, which uses social marketing and community outreach to educate citizens about the importance of Saipan's Marine Protected Area network.

Micronesia Conservation Trust - \$175,000 to implement the goals of the 2013 -2016 Strategic Action Plan of the Pacific Islands Managed and Protected Areas Community . Activities include implementing priority actions for addressing vulnerability and adaption to climate change; conducting on-the-ground, community-based conservation projects; and training youth in marine resource management.

American Samoa's Coral Reef Advisory Group - \$135,169 to assess water quality and identify likely sources of nutrient loads in American Samoa's watersheds; install rain gardens to reduce land-based sources of pollution in targeted watersheds including Faga'alu, Vatia and Nu'uuli; and continue efforts to eradicate the crown of thorns starfish invasion and monitor the bleaching event of 2015.

The Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas carries out the administrative responsibilities of the Secretary of the Interior in coordinating federal policy for 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 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 executes these responsibilities through the Office of Insular Affairs.

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