

Watershed Working Group
November 15, 2017
BECQ 3rd Floor Conference Room
8:30am – 10:00am

Attendees:

BECQ: Rich Salas, Emily Northrop, Mallory Muña (Planning), Jihan Buniag, Katie Graziano (Coral Reef Initiative), Olivia Tenorio, Carlos Ketebengang, Dean Palacios (Water Quality/NPS) David Benavente (Marine Monitoring), Richard Brooks (Enforcement)

NOAA: Robbie Greene

NOAA/BECQ Fellow: Malcolm Johnson

US EPA: John McCarroll

MINA: Wayne Dawe, Micky Kautz

DLNR/Soil and Water Conservation District/DOA: Diane Gabaldon

Presentation:

Malcolm Johnson, NOAA Coral Reef Management Fellow, Jan. 2017-Nov. 2019
Revegetation, Soil Loss, and Management in the Talakhaya Watershed

See pdf of Powerpoint attached, and final report from Horsley Witten

Questions:

Robbie: The last 4 years there have been field agents posted to prevent fires. Is there any protocol for measuring how effective that is in preventing fires? It would be interesting to observe trends over time in the frequency or timing of fires, related to the existence of field agents.

Malcolm: No – we have two agents on two access points, but the amount of time they're out is very flexible. If they report something, there is not much you can do to either prosecute the people who started it or to stop the burn. People tend to know who did it, but won't say who it was.

Editor's note: The fire in 2017 happened before the dry season, so the field surveillance agents were not out yet. Before that fire, it had been many years since there was a large burn. 2012 and 2009 are the next ones that I have on record. Fires are relatively infrequent, so noting a real trend would be hard. But, you could make a statement like "Since 2012, a large fire has not been set while field surveillance agents were posted."

John McCarroll: This is a really excellent project, a well thought-out strategy to ultimately protect the coral. It takes time to measure the impacts to the coral.

Is there data in turbidity in the nearshore water, coral cover, any bio indicator of the coral itself?

Dave (Marine Monitoring Team): There has been a slight increase in reef accretion, but not an increase in coral cover. Coral cover has even gone down in some places because of bleaching.

What about comparing the reefs in Talakhaya to others around Rota – at some point, at least not declining is a good thing.

Agreed, and that's where we're at. As long as coral is not getting worse, that's a good sign.

Richard Brooks: Any thought of controlled burns? Working with hunting groups, to set a controlled burn for a part of the hunting season?

Malcolm: I have seen that it is recommended in other watersheds, to stop illegal burning with controlled burning. It may be a possibility, definitely something to look into. Definitely need to work with hunters and bring them into the management planning process, rather than viewing them as the opposition. We also don't have the capacity to do a controlled burn, would need more funding for something like that.

Jihan: We've been branding the "no burn" and "real hunters don't burn" campaign for a long time now, that's our ultimate goal – behavior change so that hunters are not relying on burning as a method.

Editor's note: Our other goal is to ultimately return Talakhaya to native forest, not a managed grassland (As you see some places in the states). Yes, you can contain wildfires by taking away fuel, but there are other practical and effective methods to slow the spread, like firebreaks.

Robbie: When is the next CAP update?

Will be finished by the end of 2018.

Round-table Updates

Diane Gabaldon, NRCS/SWCD/DOA– Kagman watershed project –US Congress approved funding for \$1.2 million for the final phase of the project, but SWCD also needs to contribute \$1.2 million (local share). Next is phase 7, flood prevention project, going on since 1983. Need to try to convince the legislature and the government to get the funding. Meet with legislatures to make sure they are aware of the needs. Trying to set up meetings with the legislatures to try to get support.

Since the beginning of the project – enterococci hits have decreased (shown by Water Quality Data from Tank Beach, provided by Kathy, collected by the WQ Branch). The project is also beneficial to the farmers. It used to be very flooded in that area before the first part of the project was completed. Our leaders need to recognize the importance of the Kagman Watershed Project.

Rich Salas: Climate change working group met last month, it would be good to align goals with the Watershed working group.

Emily Northrop: This afternoon is the kickoff meeting for the “Better Buildings” project – 5 year strategy under a NOAA grant, to focus on low impact development techniques and stormwater practices to reduce land based sources of pollution. Long term resilient infrastructure, incentivized by reducing permit fees.

Dean Palacios – In March, people are coming to study stable isotopes and microbial source tracking in the saipan lagoon and laolao bay. Researchers kiho kim – did a project similar at UOG, originally he was just going to sample on west side. It coincides with NOAA research lab (Mark and Marge based in Miami) doing source tracking, to determine source of bacteria. Better to start planning now. They were here in September and did some preliminary source tracking, and found markers for human fecal contaminant outside of Garapan.

Robbie – In the next year or 2, there are plans to start revising / implementing CAPs. About three years ago, there was a task force to develop a climate smart planning tool. It’s the same as the open standards for conservation planning cycle. So you can apply the climate smart strategy to incorporate into the cycle. It’s not a very complicated tool. Jihan and Rich are taking the online course, which is pretty intense.

La nina – more rain.

NOAA is releasing all landcover and mapping updates for the CNMI. Tentative dates: Rota should get it by next week (2014 data set), early Feb. for Tinian, and mid-June for Saipan (that will be 2016 data). Late Sept. for northern islands, not sure which will be included. Pagan , FDM.

Richard – hopefully take the UAVs to Talakhaya to get some better quality footage , maybe working with Bill to get a drone specifically for Talakhaya to expand that and increase the quality of the data for those systems.

John McCarroll – First of all, John feels very fortunate to be here for the Watershed Working Group meeting, and is impressed by all the work we do. BECQ submitted two success stories to EPA for water quality improvement projects. Kathy wrote them with the Water Quality team, one about Kagman watershed project and one about Laolao. EPA Headquarter selected the Laolao story, and it will be featured on the national headquarters website! It will be great for BECQ and the CNMI, visibility is very good for these things.

Region 9 will continue to do what we can to highlight work here. John and Carl Goldstein will be back in mid January, planning to do a tutorial on EPA consolidated grant, ending on 5 year cycle and coming up on a new cycle.

Mallory – Working on comprehensive communications plan for Coastal Zone Management. Feel free to contact her with any ideas, strategies, behavior change campaigns, etc.

Jihan – partnering with NMC CREES for to do outreach at manjoben centers in different villages, doing watershed based education. You can share information through our communication group, to share at the youth center. NMC Climate Forum happened last week – best management practices that farmers can take. Visited the CNMI museum rain garden. Farmers expressed interest in installing rain gardens on their property. Also, we're working with NMC to install a raingarden at the college, if anyone is interested to participate we welcome volunteers.

Mike Gawel, NPS (write in): American Memorial Park and War in the Pacific Park Guam will have Barbara Alberti returning in January as our long term Superintendent after her serving about five years at the NPSA regional office. Mitigation for impacts of PR dump closing has included planting of about 200 *Bruguiera* mangrove seedlings by MES along the marine shore where the flow from the created wetland discharges. Stormwater drainage from Garapan into the park's created wetland is being slowed because of invasive growth of *Phragmites*. Removal of this blockage is needed but not funded. Federal budgets for NPS this year are expected to be cut but hopefully approved in a month.

Katie – Stay tuned for updates from the Marianas Terrestrial Conservation Conference in Guam this weekend. Also, I will be bringing people together to start planning for the Laolao CAP Update. Malcolm is going to start updating the Talakhaya CAP in January, starting with public meetings.

Next Meeting: tbd

MINA will present on Garapan Field Surveillance Project...

Tentative January 10? Check with John and Carl to see when exactly in January they will be back. If not then, it will have to be February.

Other presenters: Maybe we should get the offroad enthusiast club to talk about what they like to do. According to the engineers, there's no significant impact on

water quality due to offroad activities in those spots. But, there are definitely changes in landcover. Maybe coincide it with Let's Go tours that go offroad.