

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

2024 Citizen Centric Report



ENABLING AUTHORITY

The Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) is established by Public Law 2-51 and further amended by Public 10-57. The Division falls under the Department of Lands and Natural Resources.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Division mission is to conserve, protect, and enhance wildlife resources, including fish, game, threatened or endangered species.

VISION STATEMENT

Through best conservation management practice research, monitoring, and enforcement, the Division seeks to ensure the long-term survival and sustainability of the CNMI's natural resources for present and future generations.

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE PROGRAMS

- Management and Compliance of Federal Grants Program
- Wildlife Research & Monitoring Program
- Recreation Boating Access Program
- Aquatic Education and Outreach Program
- Fisheries Research & Development Program
- Fisheries Data Collection Program
- Conservation Enforcement Program
- Brown Tree Snake Interdiction Program
- Technical Guidance Program

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CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife

WILDLIFE SECTION

Wildlife Research and Management Program:

DFW's Wildlife Section studies and manages terrestrial wildlife and wildlife habitats within the CNMI with a special focus on threatened and endangered species. The section's activities utilize responsible science to generate data that informs policy and regulatory compliance on both local and federal levels.

In FY2024, the Wildlife Section presented at a total of 19 outreach events, conferences, and workshops. Under the Technical Guidance and Disaster Risk Management project, staff completed over 540 site surveys and provided recommendations to the Director for 484 technical guidance assessments. The Wildlife Section continued long-term monitoring and management programs for CNMI bird and bat populations. These programs involve a variety of surveys across Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and Managaha. In collaboration with DFW's partner organizations the Northern Islands Mayor's Office and Pacific Bird Conservation, the Wildlife Section furthered recovery objectives for the Nightingale Reed-warbler by laying groundwork for future translocations and collecting data on bird populations in the Northern Islands. Species-specific projects completed by the Wildlife Section include a remote-sensing



survey for Micronesian Megapode in the Saipan Upland Mitigation Bank, a prey availability study for the Nightingale Reed-warbler.

Lastly, Wildlife Section staff conducted auditory surveys for the Mariana Common Moorhen and studied the bird's breeding ecology at Lake Hagoi and Bateha wetlands on Tinian. Data was collected on eleven vegetation plots to characterize habitat for the species, and staff deployed trail cameras to characterize nest success and document factors limiting reproduction.



GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS) & SPATIAL DATA MANAGEMENT



DFW's GIS and Spatial Data Management Section provides technical and analytical support to the Division by creating databases, developing data collection applications, providing conservation planning, and conducting spatial analyses. In 2024, the GIS Section launched a drone/unmanned aerial systems (UAS) program to assist in monitoring wildlife populations and collecting habitat information. Two GIS staff were certified as Remote Pilots under the Federal Aviation Administration and the GIS program procured a federally approved UAS with a thermal imaging camera to track heat signatures of wildlife during surveys. The GIS section created spatial

databases for fisheries surveys and prototyped workflows for collecting site location data both in-water using GPS-enabled dive watches and onboard survey vessels using GPS-enabled field tablets.

The GIS Section's Conservation Planner is currently updating the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan (WAP), which identifies priority conservation actions needed over the next 10 years to conserve our fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of CNMI citizens. The plan also identifies priority "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" (SGCN) based on their biological, social, economic, or cultural value. To date, there have been over 30 outreach and engagement workshops to receive feedback on the WAP with government agencies, non-government organizations, and the CNMI public. If you wish to provide feedback, please visit the Conservation Planning website at:

<https://dlnr.cnmi.gov/conservation-planning.html>

CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT

The Enforcement Section of the Division of Fish and Wildlife is vital in safeguarding the CNMI's natural resources, enforcing laws for sustainable wildlife, fisheries, and marine conservation. Regarding conservation, the Enforcement Section administers fishing and hunting permits to regulate sustainable harvesting. They conduct patrols to combat poaching, safeguarding against illegal activities, thereby ensuring wildlife protection and environmental stability.



The Enforcement Section safeguards marine sanctuaries around the CNMI, through monitoring and enforcing regulations. Enforcement duties are carried out using various methods, including patrols, surveillance, and collaboration with law enforcement. These efforts protect biodiversity, promote resource sustainability, and benefit the environment and community.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

The mission of the Endangered Species Program is to conserve endangered and threatened species and their ecosystems through science-based research, recovery planning, and community-based collaboration with the public and our partners. Current on-going projects include:

1. Sea Turtle Research, Monitoring, and Outreach: The sea turtle program conducts daily beach monitoring for turtle tracks, nests, or illegal harvesting incidents, nest inventories, rapid response and



rehabilitation for injured turtles, and educational outreach in schools, public events, and public/social media.

2. Conservation of Endangered Plants on Rota: The endangered plants program conducts rare plant surveys, monitors outplantings, and propagates seedlings at our nursery.
3. Mariana Crow Conservation Research: The Mariana Crow, also called “Åga” in Chamorro, is an endangered bird now only found in Rota, CNMI. DLNR DFW, in partnership with the University of Washington and the San Diego Zoo, has been conducting a long-term research and conservation program of the Åga on Rota. This program conducts population assessments, monitors nest success, rears and releases chicks, and studies other threats the Åga may face.



FISHERIES RESEARCH SECTION

Program Management and Technical Guidance Support:

In FY2024 the program provided assistance towards various research, marine recreation, development and management activities in the CNMI. The Division of Fish and Wildlife works in collaboration with resource stakeholders to discuss marine resource issues, activities, and plans for the CNMI. Other activities associated with this project are the review and commenting on federal, state, military, research and commercial activities which affect the marine environment or its natural resources. In addition to these activities, technical guidance is provided for reviewing, assessing and providing biological recommendations to proposed nearshore fishery regulations.

Fish Habitat Surveys and Monitoring Program:

This Fish Habitat Surveys and Monitoring Program aims to collect data that can be linked to local fish population dynamics (e.g., recruitment, growth, distribution, and abundance) and essential fish habitat quality (benthic and water quality). Such information can help differentiate the potential impacts to fish and essential fish habitats from natural variation in mortality, land-based sources of pollution, and fishing. During FY2024, DFW has completed 305 of 320 fishery independent diver surveys since starting the Saipan Lagoon campaign in 2023. As part of this effort, DFW has developed and published an updated standard operating procedures and drafted two technical reports with more on the way.



DFW Fish Life History Program:

For FY 2024, FRS staff have focused efforts on target species collections around Saipan as well as gonad histology and age reading of *Kyphosus cinerascens* and plans to continue age reading of *Scarus ghobban*. Staff completed a Fish Life History Methods workshop in Guam and are being applied to process and read samples in the FRS lab. Life history data collections have been conducted on a monthly basis depending on weather and vessel availability. The information generated from this research project will be used to guide managers in addressing fishery issues in the CNMI.

FISHERIES DATA COLLECTION PROGRAM:

The Fisheries Data Collection Program collects and analyzes data from commercial and non-commercial fisheries in the CNMI through creel surveys, commercial catch reports, and fishing tournament recordings. These projects are continually improved for accuracy and ease of participation, with CNMI staff and volunteers gaining experience. The program promotes responsible fisheries stewardship. Our goal is to involve and recognize those who benefit most from this information, ensuring responsible stewardship of our fisheries.



AQUATIC EDUCATION

The Aquatic Education Program aims to increase awareness and knowledge about the importance of preserving aquatic habitats, promoting sustainable fishing practices, and fostering a sense of stewardship towards aquatic environments. This is achieved by actively engaging with the community through a variety of outreach initiatives, offering educational materials, conducting or participating in workshops/clinics, and examining the impact of human activities on marine ecosystems.



BOATING ACCESS

Smiling Cove Marine Program:

As part of on-going maintenance and up-keeping of the marina facilities, the following projects were completed at Smiling Cove Marina in Saipan.

1. Installation of the beacon light pole; replaced the dilapidated concrete pole; The BA manager coordinated with DPW and USCG on the light pole and beacon light repair.
2. Installation of a new 28' aluminum gangway with a built-in ADA railings at marina entrance gate #2.
3. Installed 30 new aluminum concrete piling signages.
4. Replacement of Rusty Fencing to new plastic-coated fence at gate entrance #1, #2 and #3.



Boating Access Program:

The Boating access program focused its effort on addressing the sand accretion issues at the Sugar Dock launching ramp on Saipan. On-going maintenance and up-keeping of the Marina Facilities on Tinian and Rota are being performed. As for the Tinian Docking System, DFW is currently waiting for the approval of the Project Worksheet 104 extension request from FEMA.

BROWN TREESNAKE INTERDICTION PROGRAM

The Brown Treesnake (BTS) Program's mission is to prevent the introduction and spread of the invasive brown treesnake (*Boiga irregularis*) into the CNMI. The primary goals of the BTS Program are to:

1. Prevent Snake Introductions: The program's most important goal is to stop the brown tree snake from entering CNMI.
2. Rapid Response and Containment: In case of a snake sighting or capture, the program has a rapid response protocol to confirm the sighting and contain the snake.
3. Raise Public Awareness: Raising awareness helps the community become part of the detection network, improving the chances of early detection.



In the past year, the BTS Program successfully conducted 3368 inspections at the seaport, airport, and import vendors' warehouses on containers, cargo, vehicles, or equipment to ensure the CNMI remains snake-free. The BTS Saipan-based canine handlers also provided manpower on Tinian for cargo coming directly from Guam, especially associated with the military build-up projects. The program has recently acquired two new canines. Three staff members, including a newly recruited team member from Tinian, are currently undergoing training as canine handlers. New training-aid snakes were procured from Guam to keep the BTS canines continuously training.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

DFW managed 60 federal awards and 2 special accounts. In FY24, DFW was awarded \$5,547,272 in new monies and managed \$7,364,125 in carryover funds for multi-year research projects. The DFW expended \$7,533,583 in FY24, leaving the balance of unused funds for ongoing projects. While the largest federal awarding agency was the Office of Conservation Investment (formally WSFR), DFW also received funds from USFWS Section 6, OIA, NOAA, and DOD.