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PRESS RELEASE

Government Environmental Departments developed outreach and workshop with Nu'uuli Church Youth Groups on Watersheds.

The Land-based Sources of Pollution (LBSP) working group, under the leadership of Fanuatele Dr. To'afa Vaiaga'e, Director of the American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency (AS-EPA) coordinated and facilitated a Participatory, Learning and Action (PLA) watershed outreach program to Nu'uuli church groups in September 2010. The LBSP group is part of the Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG) who exclusively deals with land based sources of pollution issues in the Territory. It is one of the four Local Action Strategy working groups for the Territory's coral reef management program composed, through collaboration, of the following resource agencies: ASCC Land Grant, American Samoa Department of Commerce (AS-DOC), Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR), American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency (AS-EPA) and the NOAA-Fisheries Pacific Island Regional Office (PIRO).

What is Watershed?

A watershed is the area of land that drains to a common waterway, such as a stream, lake, estuary, wetland, aquifer, or the ocean. All land use activities within watersheds impact the water quality of downstream bodies of water. The Nu'uuli watershed winds from the peak of Matafao over to Le'ele Mountain onto Taumata Mountain then to the Tuasivitasi ridge. The water that falls in these highlands drains down through the Tafuna Plain, Malaeimi valley, Coconut point and eventually into the Pacific Ocean through Airport Beach and Pala Lagoon. Any waste or debris gets carried by waterways or streams, eventually ends up in the ocean affecting the coastal areas and marine resources.

Watershed Problems in the Territory

Problems including illegal dumping of Solid Waste, Filling of wetlands, Illegal piggeries, septic tanks from residents, Laundromat, and high levels of bacteria and nutrients entering our streams and village reefs concerned the LBSP working group. As our community continues to illegally dump and trash our environment, American Samoa's underground drinking water continues to contaminate.

Management Goals and Priorities.

Improving coastal watershed quality and implementing watershed management plans to improve water quality and enhance coral reef ecosystem resilience have been identified as one of the national Coral Reef Conservation priority goal and objective. This also

correlates to the American Samoa Coral Reef Conservation goal and objectives for LBSP impacts. After identifications of Priority Watersheds by the LBSP working group, it was agreed upon that Nu'uuli Pala Watershed is a top priority watershed for the group to focus its efforts on based on various criteria's.

Community Watershed Process for Nu'uuli

The PLA approach, organized and agreed by LBSP working group, was used to guide and direct the group's effort with the church groups. A letter was sent to the Office of Samoan Affairs prior to the PLA approach and workshop to inform about the project, its purpose and process. The following is the approach used for the Nu'uuli church groups: PLA Outreach/Education Approach:

1. Contact Church Leaders
2. Meet with each church key Point of Contact (POC)
3. Organize target dates with church POC
4. Facilitate PLA Education/Outreach Program (evaluation included)
5. Analyze PLA information/results
6. Present combined results back to church groups
7. Collect recommendations and results from participants to coordinate management activities with church groups
8. Results to use by resource managers for management decisions and to develop projects in collaboration with church groups.

Target Audience

The main target groups for this project were church youth groups from the Catholic, Mormon (LDS), Assembly of God and the Methodist churches. The project was designed and aimed to mainly assist the community in assessing potential strategies to better manage and conserve the village watershed and the resources.

Objectives

In addition, the following objectives were the basic principles and focus for the LBSP-LAS working group while implementing and coordinating the PLA outreach for Nu'uuli:

1. To increase collaboration and partnership with villagers;
2. For government resource agencies to better understand the watershed issues and resource use in Nu'uuli for better management and coordination of projects with communities;
3. To build community stewardship of their environment and resources;
4. To enhance and promote community awareness of their village watershed and resources;
5. To use information about the village watershed and resources to make management decisions and develop management tools.

There were about 163 participants, ages ranged from 5 to 65, from the Nu'uuli watershed PLA outreach program. The project team has analyzed the information collected from the church groups with the goal to present the results back to the community and identify management actions that each church group will coordinate and implement with the LBSP working group.

It is the hope of the LBSP-LAS working group that each church group, given the information gathered from the PLA, will develop and collaborate on a management project to address some of the problems identified. In addition, the information gathered from the resource mapping tool helped the LBSP working group to develop a watershed resource map for the village that highlights the important resources that are found, threats to the resources and the recommended management tools to assist in improving resource management within the village watershed. One encouraging aspect of this project was the interagency collaboration in planning, coordinating and facilitating the activities for this project.

Furthermore, all church evaluations categorized presentations offered as important information in promoting and enhancing their awareness. The LBSP working group will continue to utilize these presentations for ongoing outreach and education programs to other villages and schools. As the working group move forward in targeting other watershed villages, a network of watershed communities will be established to connect communities and enhance their participation to improve watershed management in American Samoa.

On behalf of Coral Reef Advisory Group, the Director of AS-EPA, Fanuatele Dr. To'afa Vaiaga'e and the LBSP working group would like to thank all the Pastors, Church Leaders and Youth Presidents from the village of Nu'uuli who requested this Watershed Outreach for their community. We look forward to networking and collaborating with you in the near future in protecting our watersheds and environment.

Thank you all for your commitment to safeguarding our environment and public health.

