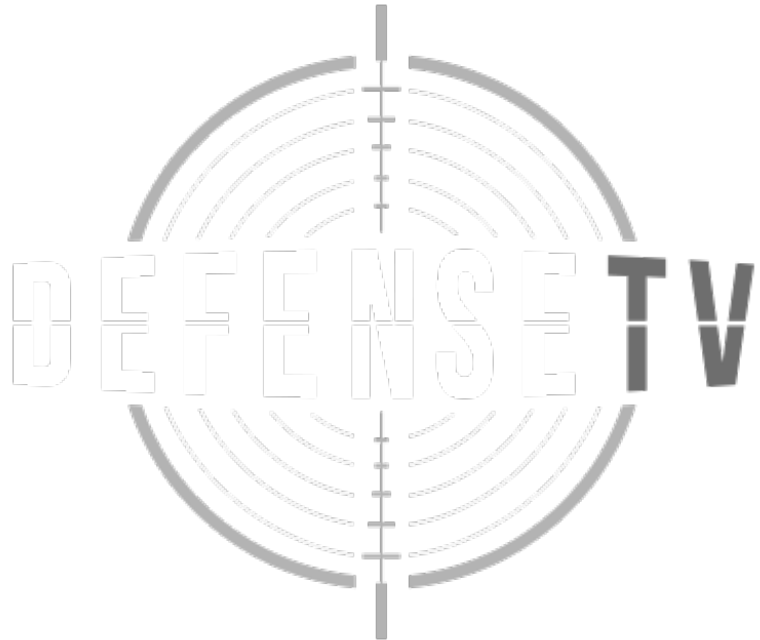


# JRM Partners with Local and Federal Agencies, Invests in Habitat Conservation on Guam

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**ASAN, UNITED STATES**

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**Story by Shaina Marie ONeal**

## **Joint Region Marianas**

Joint Region Marianas (JRM) awarded \$2 million in support of a cooperative agreement with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Aug. 3, to initiate a foundational conservation alliance in support of the advancement of habitat conservation on Guam.

Funding for the agreement is made available through the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program administered by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and will align with and significantly support priority conservation initiatives of the Guam Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

“This is a win for Guam,” said Rear Adm. John Menoni, JRM commander. “The award represents DoD’s enduring commitment to protect and preserve Guam’s natural resources through mutually beneficial partnerships.” Menoni added, “It is an effort that builds upon

our longstanding commitment to environmental stewardship, and it further demonstrates our dedication to our island community.”

Adhering to the Sikes Act and through this REPI project, JRM will support long-term viability of natural habitats for outcomes beneficial to both the military and the greater community. The long-term effort seeks to reduce constraints to military training and capabilities by providing a landscape-scale ecological boost to important natural resources, while also assisting the Government of Guam in building capacity to manage Guam’s critical forest resources.

“Guam is home to a growing list of threatened and endangered species impacted by the continued degradation of habitats across the island, primarily from invasive species and development,” said Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz Environmental Director Al Borja. “The cooperative agreement with the NFWF, the USFWS and our GovGuam partners will build much-needed capacity, foster collaborative partnerships, and implement landscape-level off-base projects in support of our island-wide species recovery goals.”

Borja said the endeavor first began with relationship-building among organizations in 2017, further developed through a series of meetings, including a workshop held in 2018, and culminated in a memorandum of agreement with GovGuam for the purposes of establishing a partnership to advance the conservation of Guam’s forest resources and the species that depend on them. This effort enabled JRM to pursue and receive funding through the OSD REPI program’s competitive process on its first attempt, which Borja noted was a milestone event.

The NFWF, a nonprofit foundation dedicated to supporting conservation and management of natural resources, will manage conservation funds and work with key stakeholders and partners to implement ecosystem-level habitat recovery and restoration activities within off-installation locations to support forest restoration and watershed management goals.

“The NFWF is excited to work with the Department of the Navy and a diverse coalition of conservation partners across Guam,” said Jonathan Birdsong, director of NFWF’s Western regional office. “This new public-private partnership will focus on enhancing and building resilience for the island’s many unique plant and animal species.”

The goal of the initiative is to leverage existing plans and programs to improve priority habitats in concert with the Guam Department of Agriculture and other partners. Aside from habitat conservation, watershed management activities will also work to reduce erosion and improve the quality of local water resources.

“The Department of Agriculture is extremely proud to be a part of this project,” said Chelsa Muña-Brecht, Guam Department of Agriculture director. “This is a win for our entire island; \$2 million for habitat management and conservation work on GovGuam lands is

substantial and the largest single award received of this kind.”

“We worked with our partners to apply under an authority rarely used in REPI funding,” Muña-Brecht continued. “This would not have been possible without the partnerships between the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Navy, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, Guam Office. We came together, committed to making this happen for Guam, and achieved success.”

Another office integral to bringing this collaborative partnership to fruition is the USFWS. “The REPI Initiative will provide important conservation benefits for numerous upland vegetation communities - which will benefit Guam species listed under the Endangered Species Act,” said USFWS Mariana Islands Supervisor Jacqueline Flores. “Our office is committed to working with our partners to protect and recover federally listed threatened and endangered species on Guam.”

NFWF and JRM will begin preparation with GovGuam, USFWS and other stakeholders to develop an implementation plan and prioritize habitat parcels.

“The hard work is still ahead of us, but I grow with confidence as we recruit more like-minded people to the effort to achieve our goal of 100 acres of forest enhancement and 500 acres of watershed management for the betterment of our island home,” Borja said. “This military and civilian partnership is born of a strong sense of respect for the land and Guam’s people and we look forward to forests and habitats that we can be proud of passing on to our future generations.”

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