

Nanwap Marine Protected Area

The Nanwap reef system is considered the most biologically diverse and the best-preserved spawning and aggregation site for a range of fish species. The traditional leaders of 5 communities in Pohnpei State signed a partnership agreement with OneReef in October 2020 to protect their declining marine resources and coral reef systems. The conventional signing ceremony was co-organized by OneReef partner, the Conservation Society of Pohnpei. The agreement supports the Nanwap Marine Protected Area (MPA) co-management in Madolenihmw municipality, where the Paramount Chief of Pohnpei resides.

The word "Nanwap" characterizes the traditional ways in which the coastal communities or villages of Lukop, Aparahk, Mesihsou, Metipw, and Dolopwhail shared and co-managed the resources from this area. They continue to safeguard this special place following traditional stewardship principles and practices shaped by their intimate knowledge and kinship to the environment. The 3.04 sq mi sanctuary consists of a channel, barrier reef, reef flat, patch reef, and blue holes. It is well-known by the indigenous villagers as a spawning and aggregation site for rabbitfish, parrotfish, snappers, wrasse, sea cucumber, turtles, clams, and many other essential food species.



Humphead Parrotfish



Sea Turtle

Historical Stewardship

According to oral history, it was common practice for the village leaders to send their designated *Sosset* or master fishers and guardians to the reef flat to monitor the reef fish's aggregation and spawning activities. Their empirical observations tracked fish types, spawning cycles, and their respective movement across the reef. The Paramount Chief relied on the *Sossets'* reports to regulate the quantity of fish harvested and determine the harvesting schedule. Once the *Sosset* signaled the end of a spawning cycle, the king would authorize the village fishers to commence harvesting. In the past, anglers formed stone barriers along the reef to trap fish, but later fish nets became the more common method for harvesting. Traditional conservation practices sanctioned harvest only after the first few schools of fish had crossed the reef flats to return to their habitats. It was uncommon to harvest entire schools of fish. Instead, they would only take what was needed and release the rest. The villagers often undertook this traditional practice with exceptional skill and haste as the anglers were required to present fresh live catch to the Paramount Chief. The Paramount Chief, revered as an intermediary with the deities, enjoyed the best quality catch first while the rest was distributed equally throughout the villages. This traditional conservation system primarily depended on *Sosset*, whose extraordinary fishing knowledge and skills also accorded them the responsibility to safeguard distinct marine spaces such as Nanwap.

Current Efforts

Overfishing due to modern pressures related to a lifestyle change, an increase in population, and unsustainable fishing practices continue to threaten Nanwap, despite the centuries-old management approach. In the late 90's anecdotal accounts by village elders revealed a substantial decline in the number of fish schools, often citing only a single school of fish during any given season. In 2008, with the support of the Conservation Society of Pohnpei (which is now a OneReef partner), the village leaders mobilized and lobbied Pohnpei State Legislature to formally establish Nanwap as an MPA. It subsequently received the

highest protection level as a no-take zone and joined the Pohnpei State MPA Network when it received its formal designation as an MPA in 2011.

In 2012, the Nanwap MPA was selected as one of the Micronesian sub-regions main sites to participate in the RARE Pride Campaign. This was a 2-year social marketing initiative designed to raise awareness around the significance of Nanwap as a traditional fishing ground and foster community support and ownership of the site's management. The RARE campaign ultimately aimed to reinforce the Micronesia Challenge's execution, a regional commitment by Micronesian Leaders to protect 30% of near-shore marine resources and 20% of terrestrial resources by 2020. At the end of the campaign in 2014, the number of volunteer Community Conservation Officers (aka rangers) increased, and awareness about the MPA's importance improved notably. The Pohnpei State Division of Fish and Wildlife experienced a dramatic rise in the number of reported violations at the site. Furthermore, pre-and post-biological monitoring conducted by Marian Island Nature Alliance (MINA, formerly the Pacific Marine and Resource Institute) reported a remarkable increase in fish stocks.

Today, the Nanwap MPA is managed and safeguarded by Community Conservation Officers (CCO), volunteers from the five villages, under Chairman Francisco Alex's leadership.



CCO - Ms. Rihna Villazon

In Pohnpei, CCOs are appointed by traditional leaders to execute monitoring and enforcement activities. One of the Nanwap CCOs is Ms. Rihna Villazon from the Dolopwhail community, who works full-time as a Health Assistant. She has been a Community Conservation Officer for 12 years (since 2009). She was the first (and is still the only) female CCO for Nanwap MPA, performing nightly patrols. Rihna encourages other women to get involved in

natural resource management in their own communities as she believes Pohnpeian women are a natural fit for this role due to their dependability and steadfastness.

In March 2020, OneReef collaborated with its partner, the Conservation Society of Pohnpei, and the Pacific Islands Managed and Protected Areas Community (PIMPAC), to facilitate and draft the Nanwap MPA five-year management plan (2020-2025). Through this engagement, the Nanwap MPA communities entered into a formal agreement with OneReef. The agreement leverages their traditional knowledge and practices as well as the substantial progress and successes made to date with conservation investments, technology, and science from OneReef to achieve the common goal of long-term protection, monitoring, and the sustainable management of Nanwap marine resources. Specifically, OneReef will contribute additional surveillance and enforcement training, equipment, and monitoring technology that, combined with the application of traditional stewardship principles, will result in meaningful and effective outcomes for ocean conservation.