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Ten Pacific Islanders selected as interns in new U.S. Forest Service program

Contact: Katie Friday; (808) 933-8121, ext. 120; kfriday@fs.fed.us

Media assistance: Yasmeen Sands, (206) 732-7823, ysands@fs.fed.us

ALBANY, Calif., December 22, 2008—The U.S. Forest Service’s Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry (IPIF) has named ten Pacific Islanders as interns in its Professional Internships in Pacific Terrestrial Island Ecosystem Management program:

- Eugene Eperiam, Pohnpei Division of Forestry and Marine Resources
- Rickson Johnnithan, Yela Environmental Landowners’ Authority (Kosrae)
- Roseo Marquez, Conservation Society of Pohnpei
- Fa’afu’i Tony Maugalei, American Samoa Community College’s Forestry Program
- Uelbil Puanani Michael, Palau Bureau of Agriculture
- Maximilian Nithan, Kosrae Island Resource Management Authority
- Omekrael Sadang, Palau Bureau of Agriculture
- Jacob Sanney, Kosrae Conservation and Safety Program
- Sheldon Siksei, Aimeliik State (Palau)
- John Ah Sue, American Samoa Community College’s Forestry Program

The internship program was established to address the concerns of Pacific Island foresters, who have long voiced the need for scholarships and programs that recruit and train the next generation of forestry professionals. Interns were competitively selected based on nominations by their respective island agencies; their academic backgrounds; and personal essays, which outlined their experience and intended contributions to forestry.

“We’re thrilled about this program and its potential to prepare interns for careers of service in forest conservation,” said Katie Friday, an IPIF forester and coordinator of the program. “The ten interns we selected have the potential to become both leaders and cooperators, and we hope to work collaboratively with them and their agencies for years to come.”

The interns began the two-year program at the College of Micronesia and will be traveling to Hilo, Hawaii, in January 2009 to complete coursework at Hawaii Community College and the University of Hawaii at Hilo. Later that year, they will return to their home islands to implement focus projects, in which they apply their studies, with the help of mentors, to forestry and natural resource issues of significance in their communities.

“The Forest Service mission in the Pacific is to equip island agencies and people to manage their forest resources,” Friday said. “We hope to arrange follow-up, on-island training that includes the interns’ colleagues and cooperators, something that will benefit the larger community.”

In addition to supporting the development of young forestry professionals, the internship program is intended to enhance partnerships and encourage institution-building among the program's numerous partners.

Funding for the internship program is provided by Forest Service State and Private Forestry, International Programs, and Research. Regional implementation assistance and matching funds are provided by The Nature Conservancy; Micronesian Conservation Trust; University of Hawaii, Pacific Aquaculture & Coastal Resources Center; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; FSM Department of Economic Affairs; Conservation Society of Palau; Conservation Society of Pohnpei; Pohnpei Division of Forestry and Marine Resources; and other sponsoring island organizations.

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