FY2024 Pacific Islands Region Funded Project Summaries

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About the Federal Programs Office

The Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) Federal Programs Office is located at the NOAA Inouye Regional Center in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. With technical assistance from PIRO and Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) staff, Federal Program officers administer financial assistance agreements throughout the award period, from the initial solicitation through post-award management.

They work closely with the NOAA Grants Management Division, technical monitors, and grant recipients to facilitate the successful completion of each grant’s project objectives.

The Federal Programs Office supports the NOAA Fisheries mission through competitive and non-competitive grants and cooperative agreements. PIRO funded the following grant programs during FY24:

- Western Pacific Fishery Management Council
- Hawai‘i Marine Wildlife Response, Outreach, and Population Monitoring Program
- International Marine Turtle Management and Conservation Program
- Marine Education and Training Program
- Pacific Islands Marine Protected Areas Community Program

Western Pacific Fishery Management Council

The Western Pacific Council prepares, monitors, and revises fishery management plans for domestic and foreign fishing within the 200-mile U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Western and Central Pacific

Ocean. PIRO is responsible for implementing the management measures created by the Council. NOAA OLE, the U.S. Coast Guard 14th District, and local enforcement agencies enforce the measures.

Western Pacific Fishery Management Council Cooperative Agreement ($4,708,411)

In FY 2024, PIRO funded the 5th year of a 5-year cooperative agreement to support Western Pacific Council base administration and operations. The Council received $4,708,411 for the following nine activities under this 5-year cooperative agreement:

1. Council Base Administration and Operations ($4,026,311)
2. Annual Catch Limits Implementation ($197,528)
3. Council Peer Review ($142,075)
4. Council Education Committee Scholarship/Internship Program ($25,000)*
5. Magnuson-Stevens Act Implementation ($89,235)
6. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) ($88,998)
7. SAFE Report Coordinator ($60,000)**
8. Scientific and Statistical Committee Stipends ($55,764)
9. Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review ($23,500)***

*PIFSC contribution
**PIRO and PIFSC contribution
***PIRO contribution

Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund ($1,101,780)

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act includes authorities in Section 204(e) to permit foreign fishing within the EEZ in the Pacific Islands region. Before permitting foreign fishing under a Pacific Insular Area fishery agreement, the Council must develop a 3-year Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) that describes the uses for any funds collected by the Secretary of Commerce. The CNMI and the territories of Guam and American Samoa must develop similar MCPs.

Funding for the Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund is authorized under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (Section 204(e) (7)(A)). Funds are derived from Specified Fishing Agreements between U.S. Participating Territories of American Samoa and CNMI and vessels permitted under the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan for Pacific Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region. Regulations covering Specified Fishing Agreements and associated deposits into the Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund can be found at 50 CFR 665.819.

The Sustainable Fisheries Fund serves as a repository for:

- Permit payments the Secretary receives for foreign fishing in the EEZ around Johnston Atoll, Kingman Reef, Palmyra Atoll, and Jarvis, Howland, Baker, and Wake islands
- Fines and penalties the Secretary receives, in the case of violations by foreign vessels occurring in the EEZ around these islands
- Funds or contributions received in support of conservation and management objectives under an MCP, as well as payments made pursuant to specified fishing agreements with the territories

American Samoa ($353,625)

In FY 2024, PIRO allocated $353,625 to seven activities in American Samoa.

1. U.S. Pacific Territories Fishery Capacity-Building Scholarship Program ($50,000)

The project supports students with close connection to American Samoa seeking to complete an undergraduate or graduate degree, and participate in an internship or vocational training program related to fisheries development, monitoring, research or management. Funding will support one student from American Samoa for two semesters and one summer internship. The participating students, upon completion of their degree, certificates and/or program, are required to work for a local fishery-related agency or organization as identified by the scholarship program subcommittee and endorsed by the Council. The scholarship program can provide support for travel-related expenses to attend school, participate in the internship or vocational program. Other expenses covered through the scholarship program may include subsequent employment with a fishery-management agency, tuition, books and fees, supplies, internship compensation, housing/dormitory accommodations, board and other related expenses.

2. Motorboat Operator Certification Course Training ($50,000)

The MOCC Project will involve a comprehensive set of activities to ensure successful implementation and sustainability. Initially, the project will conduct a needs assessment to identify competency gaps and develop a detailed training plan. Coordination with the School of Maritime Training at the National University of Samoa will finalize the training content and logistics, including travel and accommodation arrangements for the trainer. The training phase will deliver both theoretical classroom sessions and practical hands-on training, covering essential topics such as boat handling, navigation rules, maintenance, and emergency procedures. Continuous evaluations and a final certification exam will ensure participants achieve the required proficiency.

3. Marine Conservation Plan Coordinator ($50,000)

This project will provide half-time support for a MCP Coordinator to oversee projects funded through the Sustainable Fisheries Fund in support of the American Samoa MCP. This coordinator will report directly to the Director of the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR), who in turn will prioritize and manage the coordinator's workload and determine the day-to-day scope and

duties of the position. In addition to administering this grant and related projects, the individual will facilitate updates and revisions deemed necessary for the overarching American Samoa MCP.

4. Vertical Longlining and Giant Squid Fishing Workshops in American Samoa ($40,000)

The DMWR will organize a series of workshops each focusing on training in vertical longlining and giant squid fishing techniques. These workshops will be led by trainers who have an understanding of vertical longlining and squid fishing. The trainers will introduce the techniques, explain the science behind them, and demonstrate how they can be effectively used in the local fishing context. In addition to theoretical knowledge, a portion of the workshops will be dedicated to practical sessions. During these sessions, the fishermen will get hands-on experience with the new methods under the guidance of the trainers. They will learn how to set up the equipment, how to use it safely and effectively, and how to handle the catch.

5. Enhancing Public Awareness on American Samoa Fisheries ($37,000)

The project will focus on a video competition for middle and high school students in American Samoa. Students will create videos around themes such as sustainable fishing practices, marine biodiversity, impacts/benefits of fishing, traditional fishing methods, and marine protected areas. The project will kick off with a launch event to introduce the competition, explain the themes, and provide resources and guidance on video production. Following this, workshops may be conducted to assist students with video production, storytelling, and research techniques. There will be a designated submission period for students to create and submit their videos. A panel of experts will judge the videos based on creativity, accuracy, and impact, culminating in an awards ceremony to announce the winners and distribute prizes. The winning videos will be compiled into an 8-episode series, which will be distributed to educators for use in classrooms and broadcasted on local television stations as part of a broader public awareness campaign.

6. Pathway to Fishing Courses ($56,625)

The project will include planning and coordination, developing curricula and materials for fishing clinics, and community fishery courses and a local fish and coral coloring book will be designed and produced along with other educational materials. Throughout the year, three fishing clinics will be conducted, including one on the Manu'a Islands, to promote sustainable fishing and conservation practices. Fishing instructors will be trained to enhance their knowledge of fishing techniques, safety, child handling, and sustainability. Additionally, an environmental fishing camp will be held for 30 campers aged 8-13 to teach Community fishery courses for various age groups, incorporating theoretical lessons on marine conservation, practical learning experiences through visits to local sites, and hands-on training in traditional and modern fishing methods. Interactive sessions with professionals will culminate in group projects and fishing derbies.

7. Seaweed Supply Chain Targeting Village Women ($70,000)

This project will involve scoping coastal reefs of several villages in Tutuila and the Manua Islands for the presence of the green seaweed *Caulerpa racemosa*, which is the species used for mariculture and other

edible seaweeds. The scoping will also note other edible seaweeds such as *Gracilaria* spp., *Ulva intestinalis*, etc. The project also entails two, three-day workshops targeting women's groups (20 women) from two villages under the community based fisheries management program of American Samoa DMWR. Workshop design will be based on local environment informed education to ensure learning activities incorporate an understanding of the local environment and milieu, and fisheries knowledge. Materials and presentations will be developed so participants learn through visual, experiential, practical, and discussion methods.

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands ($748,155)

In FY 2024, PIRO allocated $748,155 to five activities in the CNMI.

1. U.S. Pacific Territories Fishery Capacity-Building Scholarship Program ($50,000)

This project supports students with close connection to CNMI seeking to complete an undergraduate or graduate degree, and participate in an internship or vocational training program related to fisheries development, monitoring, research or management. Funding through this program will cover one student over a one period seeking to complete his or her college degree, or students seeking opportunities for internships with local, federal or other entities responsible for the management and conservation of Pacific Island marine resources. Funding can also be used to support students seeking to develop professional skills in marine industry sectors through vocational training. The participating students, upon completion of their degree, certificates and/or program, are required to work for a local fishery-related agency or organization as identified by the scholarship program subcommittee and endorsed by the Council.

2. Fishery Monitoring, Development and Enforcement—*Kirida* and Enforcement Vessels ($145,400)

Fishery training under this award will continue CNMI's fisheries training and demonstration program. The program goal is to increase catches to meet expanding local demand through enhancement of fishing skills and introduction of new fishing methods to target bottomfish and pelagic species. Fishery training and demonstrations include fish handling and storage, and marketing led by expert fishermen, seafood purveyors and culinary experts through hands-on demonstrations and training.

3. Garapan Revetment Phase 3 ($227,707)

Funding through this award will support installation of an additional 100 feet of revetment at the Garapan Fish Base to stabilize the shoreline for community access and vessel activity. The prior revetment project installed the first 100 feet of revetment along the coast line of the parking lot directly south of the boat ramp. This work is identified as a high priority in the CNMI MCP Objective 4 to "support construction of or improvement to boat harbors, piers, boat ramps and vessel access points that allow for more efficient and safer access for fishing vessels." Work will include clearing and disposal of material/debris from the proposed site area; excavation and grading for revetment installation;

installation of under fabric, under stone layer, and armor cap rock; landscaping; finish grading; and installation and monitoring of environmental mitigation.

4. Renovation of Department of Land and Natural Resources Lower Facility ($209,708)

The goal of this project is to update existing DLNR facilities to improve program and administrative services to communities participating in fishery development, cooperative research and monitoring programs. This project supports MCP Objective 4: Promote responsible domestic fisheries development to provide long-term economic growth and stability and local food production. The DLNR will solicit and contract services to develop architecture and engineering designs to improve the Lower Facility to better facilitate fishery development workshops, community meetings, vessel maintenance and repair demonstrations and vessel storage.

5. Marine Conservation Plan Coordinator ($116,000)

This project aims to hire a half-time MCP Coordinator to oversee the above projects funded through the Sustainable Fisheries Fund for a 2-year period. This Coordinator will report directly to the Secretary of DLNR, who in turn will prioritize and manage the Coordinator's workload as well as determine the day to day scope and duties of the position. In addition to administering this grant and related projects, as time allows, this individual would also facilitate any updates and revisions deemed necessary for the overarching CNMI Marine Conservation Plan.

Hawai‘i Marine Wildlife Response, Outreach, and Population Monitoring Program

In FY 2022, funds for the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery and Marine Mammal Response Program, Pacific Islands Region Marine Turtle Management and Conservation Program, and the Promoting Responsible Wildlife Viewing Program were combined under a single competition called the Hawai‘i Marine Wildlife Response, Outreach, and Population Monitoring Program.

This program supports priorities related to in-field response, educational outreach, management, recovery, population monitoring, conservation, and habitat use for Hawaiian monk seals, sea turtles, and spinner dolphins in Hawai‘i. Projects in this program promote the recovery of endangered Hawaiian monk seals, support responses to marine mammal strandings in the main Hawaiian Islands, and develop community-based and integrated projects designed to elevate public awareness and build capacity in the community. Projects in this program also implement recovery plans by supporting programmatic activities for Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed sea turtle species either residing in or migrating through the Pacific Islands region. In FY 2024, PIRO allocated a total of $646,671 to eight projects.

Hawai'i Marine Animal Response - Hawaiian Monk Seal and Sea Turtle Management Support, Field Response, and Outreach on Oʻahu **($230,277)**

Hawaiian monk seals and sea turtles are some of the most iconic and beloved marine protected species in Hawaiʻi. However, they are vulnerable to key threats that are challenging their recovery. In this project, Hawaiʻi Marine Animal Response will provide capacity to support field response, escalated and directed surveys/responses, and interventions and strandings for Hawaiian monk seals and sea turtles on Oʻahu. They will also support effective community outreach and collaboration, maintain staff and volunteer capacity, provide training programs and operational procedures, and build effective communications and reporting protocols.

The Honu Project - Population Monitoring and Conservation of Hawaiian Hawksbill Sea Turtles on Hawaiʻi Island **($95,500)**

Hawksbill sea turtles *(Eretmochelys imbricata)* are among the rarest sea turtles in the Pacific Ocean. They are classified as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The overall goal of the Hawaiʻi Island Hawksbill Project is to support the management, conservation, protection, and enhancement of hawksbill sea turtle populations and their nesting habitats in Hawaiʻi. To achieve this, the program carries out research and conservation activities at the most important nesting habitats along the southern coast of Hawaiʻi Island. Efforts in this project include monitoring nesting beaches to identify and count nesting females and nests; determining hatching success and hatchling production; protecting nests to maximize the number of hatchlings that safely reach the ocean; controlling non-native species on nesting beaches to reduce predation on nests, eggs, and hatchlings; improving nesting habitat through habitat restoration activities; measuring nest temperature during the incubation period in different zones on the beach to assess the impact of climate change; and promoting public stewardship of hawksbills and coastal marine ecosystems through educational outreach.

The Marine Mammal Center - Strengthening Hawaiian Monk Seal Response and Community Engagement on Hawaiʻi Island **($102,962)**

The last surviving species in its genus, Hawaiian monk seals (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*) are one of the most endangered seal species in the world. The Marine Mammal Center's Ke Kai Ola facility is a hospital designed solely to provide long-term medical care and rehabilitation to sick, injured, and orphaned Hawaiian monk seals from anywhere in the archipelago. Ke Kai Ola also provides significant education and outreach aimed at inspiring and empowering visitors and residents alike to care for the Hawaiian monk seal. In this project, the Marine Mammal Center will continue strengthening its Hawaiian monk seal response and community engagement on Hawaiʻi Island, in addition to providing volunteer training and increased communications. This project will also fill a capacity need for sea turtle response in west Hawaiʻi Island.

Hawai‘i Marine Animal Response - Hawaiian Monk Seal Management Support, Field Response, and Outreach on Moloka‘i **($78,715)**

Hawaiian monk seals face many threats, including inappropriate interactions with and disturbances from people due to lack of public understanding and support. This program will provide support for field response, escalated and directed surveys/response, and interventions and strandings of Hawaiian monk seals on Moloka‘i. This project will conduct field-based community outreach, public engagement, and hotline response; triage; dispatch; multi-agency coordination; and information collection, transfer, and reporting.

The Marine Mammal Center - Building Hawaiian Monk Seal Response and Community Engagement on Maui **($76,297)**

Ke Kai Ola, the Marine Mammal Center's Hawaiian monk seal hospital, provides long-term care and rehabilitation to monk seals and significant education and outreach about the seals to visitors and residents. With just over 1,500 individuals remaining, conservation efforts to protect and increase the population are critical to this species' survival. In this project, The Center will continue strengthening its Hawaiian monk seal response and community engagement on Maui, in addition to providing volunteer training and increased communications.

Maui Ocean Center Marine Institute - Sea Turtle Management Support, Field Response, and Outreach on Maui **($40,000)**

The Maui Ocean Center Marine Institute provides a comprehensive sea turtle conservation program on the island of Maui. Through support from this funding opportunity, the institute will respond to reports of sick, injured, distressed, or otherwise compromised sea turtles. Using the data obtained through stranding response, the institute aims to improve understanding of the issue within the community and reduce threats impacting sea turtles by establishing easily adaptable conservation initiatives and accessible environmental education. This project will allow the institute to increase sea turtle stranding response capabilities and expand community education and outreach efforts.

Mālama i nā Honu - Mālama i nā Honu Sea Turtle Management and Outreach Project **($18,000)**

The Mālama i nā Honu project focuses on conducting public outreach and education to promote responsible viewing of green sea turtles at Laniākea Beach, O‘ahu. The structured and maintained program provides viable orientation, on-site training, and monitoring instruction for volunteers. This cadre of trained volunteers then conducts daily outreach and education with an ever-increasing number of visitors at the location. Volunteers teach about the species life cycle, foraging habits, migration, and nesting behavior to schools, clubs, service groups, and tourists. The project strives to bring awareness and implementation of strategies to mitigate boat strikes on turtles. It collects and analyzes data on basking turtles at Laniākea and makes the data available on Mālama i nā Honu's website.

Hawai‘i Preparatory Academy - Hawai‘i Marine Wildlife Response and Educational Outreach **($4,920)**

The Hawai‘i Preparatory Academy will support the conservation and recovery of sea turtles in Hawai‘i by operating a stranding program that covers the coast from ʻUpolu Point to Honokōhau Harbor on Hawai‘i Island. The academy will receive, vet, and document public reports and respond as appropriate to mediate the problem of sea turtle strandings. It will facilitate and deliver rapid and effective response to reported turtle strandings, injuries, and other situations. It will also provide education and advocacy for sea turtles with local organizations, visitors, and residents.

Pacific Islands Region Marine Turtle Management and Conservation Program

The Pacific Islands Region Marine Turtle Management and Conservation Program implements the recovery plans for the U.S. Pacific sea turtle populations by supporting programmatic and recovery activities for ESA-listed sea turtle species. These species may occur entirely within the Pacific Islands region or have documented linkages to the region, such as sea turtles that originate from areas outside of U.S. jurisdiction but migrate through or forage within the region, or are impacted by federally managed activities (such as commercial fisheries) and therefore relevant to NOAA Fisheries management and recovery obligations. Projects supported by this program aim to implement regional management priorities and species-specific monitoring, protection, or conservation needs as outlined in the recovery plans. They also complement ongoing federal, state, or international activities and align with current agency initiatives (such as the Species in the Spotlight initiative to save at-risk species).

FY 2024 focuses on international projects that monitor, protect, and conserve western Pacific leatherback sea turtles occurring in Indonesia and the Solomon Islands, and sea turtle projects within Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, or Japan) with a focus on fishery bycatch, nesting beach monitoring, poaching reduction, and/or the illegal sea turtle wildlife trade. In FY 2024, PIRO allocated $443,907 to five projects. The three leatherback sea turtle awards, in particular, continue funding existing programs to maintain monitoring and conservation momentum and are identified as high priority activities outlined in the Species in the Spotlight Pacific Leatherback Sea Turtle Action Plan.

The Nature Conservancy - Securing Co-management of Leatherback Turtle Nesting Beaches in Solomon Islands **($119,910)**

Under this project The Nature Conservancy will support Solomon Islands communities, the Isabel Provincial Government, and the Ministry of Environment to protect and monitor leatherback turtle nesting beaches from 2023 to 2026. Key objectives include: 1) building leatherback turtle monitoring and management efforts in Isabel Province by strengthening leatherback management at three existing sites and commencing management at an additional key site; 2) formalizing conservation efforts in Isabel Province to ensure their long-term sustainability; and 3) equitably engaging Solomon Islanders in environmental conservation work by employing women as rangers across all sites and engaging all rangers in awareness activities—a traditional strength of women in Solomon Islands communities.

World Wildlife Fund, Inc. - Implementing A Strategy to Address the Direct Take of Leatherbacks (*Dermochelys coriacea*) in the Kei Islands, Indonesia-Phase 2 **($119,671)**

The Western Pacific leatherback subpopulation is declining by 6 percent each year. In the waters off the Kei Islands, Indonesia, leatherback sea turtles congregate to forage on large aggregations of jellyfish where 11 villages hunt and consume leatherback sea turtles. In 2017, World Wildlife Fund, Inc. documented 104 leatherbacks taken in this hunt. This level of leatherback take exceeds traditional levels and likely contributes to the decline of their population. Over the past 5 years, the World Wildlife Fund has worked to develop a multi-layer strategy aimed at reducing the ongoing leatherback hunt, including the formation of a robust regional monitoring program and broad outreach efforts that have reduced leatherback take from a high of 104 in 2017 by an average of 85 percent in recent years. Continued collaborations with Indonesian governmental agencies, religious institutions, village councils, and the KEI-Kecil Marine Protected Area provide a pathway to solidify these early conservation gains and achieve a more permanent solution for the recovery of the Western Pacific leatherback population.

World Wildlife Fund, Inc. - Leatherback Sea Turtle Nesting Dynamics in the Maluku region **($102,683)**

The Pacific leatherback sea turtle is a species most at-risk for extinction. The Indonesian archipelago is an important nesting habitat for the surviving population, but their numbers have dramatically declined in part due to egg harvesting and direct take from nesting beaches and foraging grounds. In 2017, conservation efforts were put in place on a newly found leatherback nesting site on Buru Island, where egg poaching and direct take of nesting females was rampant. By 2019, significant results in the protection of mothers and nests made Buru Island the first substantial nesting population discovered outside of Papua, Indonesia, in the past decade. This project continues the conservation work in Buru Island. The objectives are to maintain monitoring, continue collection of genetic samples, and deploy satellite tags to improve understanding of turtle movement patterns. These data will inform the boundaries of a proposed marine protected area, which will allow a transfer of conservation responsibilities to Indonesian agencies.

Sea Turtle Association of Japan - North Pacific Loggerhead Conservation: Nesting and Threat Assessment **($74,663)**

The population of loggerhead turtles inhabiting the North Pacific Ocean is endangered. Accurate sea turtle population modeling assessments are reliant on robust data on both nesting levels and threat impacts, especially fisheries bycatch. North Pacific loggerheads nest exclusively in Japan, and data from the index nesting beach complex of Yakushima Nagata-hama represents the primary nesting input needed for population modeling. The organization historically responsible for coordinating the collection and sharing of nesting data from Yakushima Nagata-hama has undergone several organizational challenges in recent years, culminating with the group's dissolution in 2022. As a result, loggerhead nesting data have not been made available to national and international stakeholders since 2016. In addition, bycatch assessments carried out between 2007 and 2011 identified high levels of loggerhead mortality at multiple sites in Japan that have coastal pound net fisheries. Funding limitations led to the cessation of research activities and have left major gaps in our understanding and quantification of this

threat. Via this 3-year proposal, the Sea Turtle Association of Japan will lead a collaborative effort to ensure nesting beach monitoring continues at Yakushima Nagata-hama and that past, current, and future nesting data are organized and made available for domestic (Japanese) and international stakeholders (e.g., NOAA). Additionally, the association will spearhead efforts to re-establish and initiate new fisheries bycatch assessments and monitoring at several high-priority sites. This will generate urgently needed information on bycatch mortality and advance the identification of potential mitigation strategies. Combined, these efforts will provide important data streams for the conservation and management of loggerhead turtles in the North Pacific, with direct implications for U.S.-based longline fisheries.

Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute Philippines, Inc. - Olive Ridley Turtles in the Philippines: Collection and Centralisation of Data to Support the National Action Plan for Marine Turtle Conservation in the Philippines and Regional Stock Assessment **($26,980)**

Despite being the most common and widely distributed sea turtle species, olive ridley turtle populations have been declining substantially for decades. This is due to unsustainable harvest of eggs and adults, habitat loss, and fisheries interactions, with a 30 to 50 percent decline reported globally and up to 92 percent in the Central and Western Pacific Ocean (Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia). The Philippines hosts extensive nesting beaches along the West Philippines Sea/South China Sea and the south coast of Mindanao. But site management, conservation interventions, and data collection have thus far been disconnected and inaccurate, covering only a fraction of the existing and potential nesting sites, with currently no regional or national data officially available. Through a collaborative network with local stakeholders, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, and the Department of Land and Natural Resources, this project will assess the conservation status of the olive ridley turtle in the Philippines. This will be done through direct nesting beach monitoring, communities patrolling, hatchery management enhancement and expansion, consumption and trade monitoring and mitigation, telemetry, and genetics, while collating and managing historical data and citizen science reports in a centralized online database. Outreach programs will aim to identify major threats and possible mitigation measures and identify potential sites for the deployment of bycatch mitigation technologies. Emphasis will be given to understanding the impact of the threats on turtle populations' recovery and their connectivity with the Pacific Islands region.

Marine Education and Training Program

In 2007, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act was amended to include section 305 (j), which provides guidance on the development of a marine education and training program. Public Law 109-479 states: "the Secretary shall, in cooperation with the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, establish programs that will improve communication, education, and training on marine resource issues throughout the region and increase scientific education for marine-related professions among coastal community residents, including indigenous Pacific Islanders, Native Hawaiians, and other underrepresented groups in the region." The Pacific Islands Region Marine

Education and Training Program was established to meet Congressional intent. In FY 2024, PIRO allocated $10,000 to one project.

Hawai'i Academy of Science - Hawai'i State Science and Engineering Fair **($10,000)**

Every student in Hawai'i has the opportunity to participate in a science fair activity, helping build interest in marine and natural sciences. The science fair provides a platform for students to use the scientific method to investigate questions and solve problems in the real world. High school students interact with leading scientists in Hawai'i to conduct in-depth and comprehensive science investigations. Exposure to science activities could provide a catalyst to increase the number of students in Hawai'i pursuing advanced degrees in areas of study related to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The Hawai'i State Science and Engineering Fair connects students, scientists, and teachers by leveraging partners and donors and offering scholarships and awards to winners. The fair has temporarily moved to a virtual format, requiring an innovative approach to this effort.

Pacific Islands Managed and Protected Areas Community Program

The Pacific Islands Managed and Protected Area Community Program aims to provide continuous opportunities for the sharing of information, expertise, practice, and experience to develop and strengthen site-based and ecosystem-based management capacity throughout the Pacific Islands region. It began in 2005 as a pilot program to identify and address the unique set of challenges faced by Marine Protected Area managers in the region and they determined the need for 1) training and technical support around priority topic areas, 2) learning exchanges among their peers, 3) partnership building that would foster increased and long-term support and capacity building, and 4) information sharing of lessons learned and opportunities. The program continues to provide capacity-building opportunities to community members and government and non-government staff from Hawai'i, Guam, CNMI, American Samoa, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands. In FY 2024, PIRO allocated $112,950 to one project.

FLOAT Partners, LLC - Improve Coral Reef Ecosystem-Based Management for the Pacific Island Managed and Protected Area Community Network **($112,950)**

This award to FLOAT Partners, which consists of Fisheries Immersed Sciences Hawai'i Inc. and Lynker Ocean Alliance Team, will support the program's goal to provide continuous support for marine protected area managers through training, knowledge sharing, and partnership formation over a 3-year period. This project will focus on ecosystem-based management to include 1) building existing on-the ground site managers' capacity to lead activities for effective management, 2) leveraging regional success to improve protected area networks, and 3) expanding opportunities for youth and existing staff to access capacity building.

2024 Unfunded Federal Programs

The following programs were not funded in FY 2024 due to budgetary constraints:

Marine Education and Training Mini-Grant Program: This program supports projects that prepare communities for employment in marine-related professions; increase the safety, marketing, or management of seafood and fishing; or develop or use technology or data collection to increase the sustainability of fishing practices. All projects are developed and executed in partnership with government or non-government organizations that contribute to or expand relationships in the fishing and marine community.

Sustainable Recreational and Non-Commercial Fishing Program: This program supports recreational and non-commercial fishing projects in the Pacific Islands region that improve sustainable fishing opportunities, maintain stability of fish stocks, and protect cultural fishing traditions.

Western Pacific Demonstration Projects: Public Law 104-297 (16 U.S.C. 1855) authorizes grants for projects that foster and promote the involvement of communities in the Western Pacific.

Native Fishery Observer Program: The NOAA Fisheries Observer Program is responsible for providing longline observers, who obtain data on incidental sea turtle takings and collect fishing effort data. The observers document interactions of all protected species, tally fish that are kept and discarded, and process selected specimens for life history. The program targets Native Hawaiian, American Samoan, and other Pacific Islander residents for employment as fishery observers in the Hawai‘i and American Samoa fisheries.

Hawai‘i Seafood Program: This program strengthens the economic viability of the Hawai‘i fishing and seafood industry through activities that promote Hawai‘i fisheries as high-quality, safe domestic seafood produced by a responsible and well-managed fishery.