



# IMAGINE GUAM HELPS CITIZENS PLAN FOR ISLAND SUSTAINABILITY

*A Challenge Initiative to Support Shore-to-Shore Cooperation*

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The idea of human sustainability being under threat reminds us that our environment is constantly at risk, and strategies and resources are prone to changes that contribute to shaping a community's desired quality of life whether we are "receptors or drivers of environmental change" (Beniston, 2010). To advance these discussions in Guam, the University of Guam's Center for Island Sustainability hosted the 6th Regional Conference on Island Sustainability. The 2015 conference theme, "Building Resilient Island Communities" touted conference goals on building on conservation best practices and wise use of indigenous resources. Other themes included advancing climate change solutions, addressing invasive species, and managing smart growth that enhances Guam's economic security.

Designing a community's future requires having a comprehensive view and understanding of the planning process and inviting citizenry input to contribute to this visioning and planning effort. In the case of Guam, through the Imagine Guam strategic vision and planning approach, we outlined the steps forward in hosting its community planning design for the island's future.

The popular themes coming from the environmental community reminds us of the need to address Guam's natural and unique heritage ecosystem. This effort includes 17 imagination community development areas with special attention to planning interests in parks, green spaces, and zoning plans with public infrastructure considerations all needing some part of the island's green space compliance. Guam's natural heritage

interest also extends beyond its shores and is similarly supported at the regional level through the Micronesia Challenge initiative as it represents the unified view of the region's sustainability and conservation agenda.

This challenge initiative includes the commitment to support strategic shore-to-shore cooperation representing a blend of environmental stewardship and preservation interests, as well as a means to promote collaborative ways to address common island problems and issues. Special interest is placed on supporting healthy marine and forest resources

and sustainable management of marine and forest resources across Micronesia that result in enhancing the region's desired quality of life.

Guam sustainability interests continue to advance and solicit practical and innovative ideas and solutions aimed at the village level. Guam's Preservation Trust Strategic Plan provides for the conservation of Guam's indigenous flora and fauna conservation programs. One such program includes the promotion and management of landscape, natural and cultural heritage, and preservation efforts

linked to defining Guam's Green Space Initiative.

This discussion began with identification of useful metrics and indicators for public enjoyment and ecosystem preservation. One approach considers balancing community growth issues and addressing the island's tropical



PICTURED: The official territorial tree of Guam "Ifit" or Intsia bijuga/P. Barcinas

forests and the role of such trees in Guam's ecology. This includes the best use of limited resources that are dedicated to roadways and infrastructure maintenance and addressing soil erosion issues while meeting green space planning or land areas dedicated for conservation and preservation. This approach stems from existing practices of island-wide beautification and cleanup events. Complementing this effort now requires a different approach to consider the following planning interest: How might we approach the appropriate island greening interest rests with the community's preservation interests going forward?

Guam's natural capital as a tropical island with an ideal year-round growing environment provides for a viable greening platform to support a range of biodiversity conservation and enhancement objectives. This commitment to green scape maintenance is an opportunity that is apparent in the island's annual maintenance costs of utility easements with an estimated cost of approximately \$2 million dollars to trim and maintain shrubs and trees. Added to this are the eight public golf courses with varying picturesque island scenery and the companion landscaping requirements provide an opportunity to shift from typical shrubs to intentional planting of indigenous plants and trees. Preserving Guam's most valuable trees and plants makes good sense as does identifying what resources can be sponsored and showing who benefits from this effort.

Another conservation of natural resources effort involves the U.S. Military buildup efforts to conserve the Cetti Bay Watershed as a compensatory mitigation solution to the military's wharf infrastructure construction. The plan calls for the conversion of grassland into forested areas and contract for the maintenance of 40.14 acres with over 18,380 trees planted in 2013 and the remaining 202 acres to be prepped for the planting of 92,712 Acacia (*Acacia auriculiformis*) seedlings. The idea for reforestation is a good indicator of the commitment to the greening interest. However, a missed opportunity to coordinate the selection of indigenous plants and trees would have made for an ideal indigenous tree planting strategy for Guam especially at that scale. While that would have been an opportunity, the next round of greening strategies can include setting up a dedicated indigenous plant inventory for meeting needed greenscaping initiatives or requirements.

Looking ahead, Imagine Guam provides the planning platform to sponsor community greening initiatives and an opportunity to engage local planning agencies and communities to restore Guam's forest and indigenous plants and trees. At present, ongoing

4-H Club community-based and school gardens demonstrate this interest and investment in our youth to support healthy communities.

Community-based conservation programs sponsored by Humatak Community Foundation builds on the ideas of conservation ambassadors and conservation mentors. This community approach invests in building awareness and promoting life-long learning experiences in conservation action planning and education efforts. The benefits of delivering on Guam's greening strategies of indigenous plants and trees will be seen in terms of community-supported initiatives and adoption by industries, as well as increase awareness for reestablishing Guam's natural flora. Through these efforts, we will begin our path to green empowerment for our island community where everyone benefits from our unique and intentional Guam greening approach. Imagine the benefits of promoting the idea of 19 villages and over 50,000 housing units interested in planting the official territorial tree "Ifit" or *Intsia bijuga*. •