

AND ATOLL DECLEARED A BIOSPHERE RESERVE

After 5 relentless years of hard work and preparation, the Nanpei Family, along with the Conservation Society of Pohnpei (CSP) and its partners are proud to announce the establishment of And Atoll Biosphere Reserve. Biosphere Reserves are just another tool used conserving important ecosystems and natural resources. The Biosphere Reserve is an international conservation tool being utilized by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Bureau of the International Coordinating Council of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Program has recently added 23 new reserves sites in 18 countries to its global network including And Atoll.

In 2002, CSP and UNESCO's Pacific office began working together to establish Pohnpei's first Biosphere Reserve on And Atoll. To meet this goal, several activities were carried out, which included stakeholders (landowners, resource managers, and government officials) meetings, public education, and community outreach on biosphere reserves. From these activities the stakeholders agreed to submit the application to UNESCO in 2005. However, in the process, the core team, which included the landowners, the Department of Lands and Natural Resources and CSP, determined that more fieldwork, assessment and discussion was required to gain the information needed to complete the application for submission in 2006. A Rapid Ecological Assessment (REA) was conducted, which revealed And atoll as one of the most biologically significance areas on Pohnpei.

Due to its isolation and undisturbed human occupation for more than 20 years, And Atoll is Pohnpei's number one marine Area of Biodiversity Significance (ABS) and a Priority Action Area (PAA). And Atoll retains one of the last relatively intact seabird rookeries in the region and provides crucial nesting grounds for rare sea turtles. And Atoll's main channel has also been validated as one of the few grouper spawning and aggregation sites on Pohnpei. Also found at And are the healthiest giant clam population and impressive aggregations of sharks, barracudas and other tourism-attraction marine life. And has great potentials for ecotourism and is already reputable for diving and snorkeling.

Unfortunately, over fishing, bird/turtle hunting and egg collection has become a major threat. Establishment of a biosphere reserve is one of the initial steps for us to save and conserve these resources. Unlike the existing Marine Sanctuary and Wildlife Refuge Act of 1999, UNESCO's biosphere reserves enclose three zones. These are Core Zones: commonly known as "No-Take" areas, Buffer Zones: allows certain, but restrictive activities, and Transition Zones: where human settlements are and most activities such as agriculture, fishing, logging, and even mining are allowed. And Atoll Biosphere Reserve is unique because its Pohnpei's first government and private landowner co-managed MPA, and the first sanctuary established on an atoll, outside of Pohnpei's lagoon.

We, the citizens of Pohnpei, should be proud for the establishment of And Atoll Biosphere Reserve. Not only will And Atoll will serve as a sanctuary for the animals and plants, but it will conserve resources for generations to come. Pohnpei is now included in a biosphere learning network around the world. We can learn from the other nations, states, and/or communities how they are managing and benefiting from their Biosphere Reserves.