

FAGATELE BAY

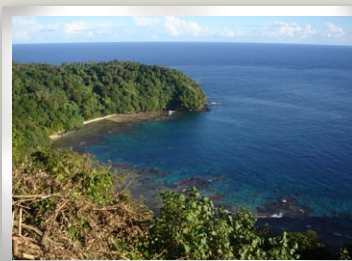
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A clownfish takes shelter in an anemone in the Fagatele Bay sanctuary. Photo: Richard Murphy



Students and volunteers hike along the Fagatele Bay Trail. Photo: NOAA



Lush green slopes surround Fagatele Bay. Photo: William Kiene

Fagatele Bay Condition Report Released

Sanctuary staff released a new status report evaluating the health of Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Titled the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary Condition Report, the document presents a summary of the pressures and trends facing sanctuary resources. The report, which examines the status of everything from water quality in the sanctuary to its coral reefs and fish populations, distills a wealth of information about the sanctuary's complex marine resources into a straightforward, easily understandable document. Topping the list of concerns for the sanctuary are threats like blast fishing and other harmful, prohibited fishing practices, as well as an increasing number of coral bleaching events due to elevated surface water temperatures. The report also states that habitat and water quality in the sanctuary are in very good condition. The full report is now available online at <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/condition>.

Fagatele Bay Proposed for World Heritage List

An initial proposal to have Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary added to the "Tentative List" of U.S. candidate sites for World Heritage Status has been submitted. The proposal highlights Fagatele Bay's rich biodiversity, ecological complexity and cultural heritage. It is this cultural tie that is one the sanctuary's most unusual characteristics, and gives unique insight into traditional Samoan marine stewardship practices. Such practices are being overshadowed by economic and social change throughout the world. If the Fagatele Bay sanctuary makes it through the long and competitive process, its designation as a World Heritage Site would bring significant attention and protection to the important biological and cultural treasures it embraces. Even if the proposal is unsuccessful, the submission is an indication of the value of Fagatele Bay to the National Marine Sanctuary System and to the people of American Samoa.

Fagatele Bay Hiking Trail Opens

A new nature trail connecting Fagatele Bay with Larsens Bay in American Samoa opened in March. The Fagatele Bay Trail is a significant new collaboration between the sanctuary and the people of Taputimu, Futiga and Vaitogi villages that will make Fagatele Bay accessible to the public and to island visitors, and be a tool for promoting better understanding of American Samoa's natural and cultural heritage. This trail is a tangible link between the villages, which have an important stake in the future of Fagatele Bay and its surrounding coastal environments and watersheds. The trail also includes signage that highlights the area's unique coastal and marine environment, and a new stairway that was built to provide convenient and safe access to the beach at Fagatele Bay.

<http://fagatelebay.noaa.gov>





Collaboration Seeks to Mitigate Soil Erosion

The Fagatele Bay sanctuary, USDA National Resource Conservation Service, American Samoa Land Grant, and American Samoa Community College launched an effort to curtail the effects of deforestation by agricultural workers on the ridge slopes above Fagatele Bay. Forest clearing has expanded over the last year, raising concerns about its impact on water quality in the sanctuary. To help stop soil erosion, the project has planted rows of vetevier, a grass with deep roots, within the taro plantations. As a demonstration of its ability to stop soil erosion, students from the college will measure the amount of soil transport in areas planted with vetevier and compare this to plantations without the grass. Staff and researchers hope this effort will engage landowners in better land use practices and promote stewardship of American Samoa's forests and adjacent coastal environments.

Sanctuary maps available at sanctuaries.noaa.gov

Sanctuary Promotes Traditional Marine Stewardship

Sanctuary staff collaborated with local groups in a study of traditional knowledge of fisheries and fisheries management in American Samoa — a subject that is considered an important basis for marine conservation efforts in the territory. The study will be a significant contribution to the sanctuary's management plan review, which is seeking to incorporate Samoan traditions in defining the future role of the sanctuary program in the territory. The sanctuary also helped make this theme an important part of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meeting that was held in American Samoa in August. The meeting provided a unique opportunity for Task Force members to learn about successful indigenous strategies for managing marine resources from the cultures of Samoa and the South Pacific. The results provide a basis for implementing policies that will strengthen the role of traditional practices in developing coral reef marine protected areas strategies.

Monitoring of Fagatele Bay is Part of Oldest Dataset in Pacific

University of Hawaii, The Nature Conservancy and local scientists conducted coral reef monitoring surveys in Fagatele Bay — ongoing at three- to five-year intervals since 1985. This long-term dataset is a vital part of our understanding of Fagatele Bay's marine ecosystem. Combined with past surveys, the data provides an important view of how the ecosystem responds to environmental changes. Results show that Fagatele Bay's coral populations are resilient, progressively recovering from coral bleaching and other disturbances that have occurred over the last two decades. The team also conducted surveys in Pago Harbor, which includes the Aua Transect — the oldest survey location in the Pacific, having been regularly monitored since 1917.

To learn more about these and other accomplishments, visit sanctuaries.noaa.gov

