

Introduction

The Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Program, authorized by the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) of 1972, is an innovative and voluntary national-state partnership between the Office of Coastal Management (OCM) and 34 coastal and Great Lakes states, territories, and commonwealths, including the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The Act provides the foundation for protecting, restoring, and responsibly developing our nation's diverse coastal communities and resources.

The CNMI Coastal Zone Management Program (CZMP) establishes an overall management strategy for resolving conflicts posed by the state priorities of economic development and conservation of the CNMI's valuable yet vulnerable coastal resources. The Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality's (BECQ) Division of Coastal Resources Management (DCRM) serves as the state agency authorized to implement this program, as mandated by the CNMI's Coastal Resources Management Act (CRMA) of 1983 (PL 3-47), as amended. The jurisdiction of the CRMP includes the entire land area and territorial waters of the 14-island archipelago.

The CNMI's Coastal Zone Management Program implements 14 specific powers, functions and duties as enumerated in Section 4 of PL 3-47, which can be combined into the following major components and functions:

- Promoting sustainable economic development and growth through careful planning, coordination and monitoring of coastal developments, and consistency with the CZMA;
- Coordinating state and federal actions and making findings on proposed activities requiring federal consistency determinations pursuant to Section 307 of the CZMA (16 U.S.C. Section 1456); and
- Balancing coastal resource use and preservation to ensure that future generations will continue to benefit from the CNMI's rich coastal resources.

Who We Are

The Division of Coastal Resources Management (DCRM), organized under the Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality (BECQ), was established in 1983 to promote conservation and wise development around the CNMI's coastal resources. DCRM consists of the Coastal Zone Management Program (CZMP) and the Coral Reef Initiative (CRI), which work cooperatively to achieve complementary goals of the agency.

While the CZMP works to promote wise use and conservation of the CNMI's resources through permitting and planning, the CRI program emphasizes the need to protect and preserve the CNMI's coral reefs, ensuring responsible management of these resources associated with those habitats. The CRI program, funded through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP), focuses its work on watershed planning, Marine Protected Area (MPA) management, environmental stewardship, habitat restoration, and the long-term monitoring of the coral reef ecosystems.

To leverage the resources available to the agency, DCRM fosters a working environment in which both programs are able to avail of the other's technical capacities, experience, ideas, and resources in order to

close any potential management and communication gaps there may in the agency's overall management of the CNMI's resources. Since the location of the CNMI's coral reefs, MPAs, and watersheds lie within the CNMI's coastal zone, it is only appropriate that the CZMP assist the CRI program in reaching its management goals.

About The Plan

This five-year strategic plan (2018-2023) was developed as a collaborative effort between DCRM leadership and staff. It identifies key priorities that align with DCRM's values and further DCRM's mission and vision. Each priority is supported by strategic actions and milestones, which together provide a roadmap for progress within a defined timeframe. Throughout the next five years, this document will guide DCRM's actions and priorities, while helping to track and measure strategic outcomes.

DCRM's Vision, Mission, and Values are outlined in the following section in order to underscore the overarching principles that shape this Strategic Plan.

Vision

An informed CNMI actively protects and maintains a clean and healthy environment and makes decisions that balance cultural values, environmental integrity, and economic prosperity.

Mission

To protect and enhance the CNMI's coastal resources for residents and visitors through effective and adaptive resource management, interagency collaboration, and stakeholder engagement, in a manner that builds and sustains community resilience and well-being.

Values

These values are inherent in DCRM's daily interactions:

- **Integrity** – DCRM performs its mandate respectfully, consistently, fairly, and transparently.
- **Stewardship** – DCRM empowers communities to understand and enhance their environment through effective leadership, outreach, and education.
- **Communication** – DCRM engages in cooperation, collaboration, and coordination with partners, stakeholders, and staff.
- **Adaptability** – DCRM approaches current and future challenges with enthusiasm and flexibility and plans for and adjusts to change using sound science and best management practices.

DCRM's Building Blocks of Coastal Management

DCRM's strategies and techniques are based on the following building blocks of coastal management. These building blocks provide the foundation for DCRM's Goals, Objectives, and Strategies.

- Engage in process-based and participatory **planning**.
- Uphold **regulatory** duties and requirements.

- Apply **research & data** towards informed management decisions.
- Strengthen **communication** of DCRM programs to the general public.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Building Block: Planning

GOAL 1 – Public access and use of coastal resources are enhanced, protected, and restored.

Commercial activity occurring in the CNMI’s coastal zone has increased tremendously, fueled largely by soaring tourism growth. As demand for coastal-dependent activities grows, DCRM will build the long-term sustainability of both coastal resources and uses by engaging in spatial planning, site-specific restoration and enhancement projects, and user education. Over the next 5 years, DCRM will work to:

1.1. Implement special area management planning.

- 1.1.1. Transition the CNMI’s three Conservation Action Plans (CAP) for Priority Watersheds into Integrated Watershed Management Plans (WMP) to improve comprehensive “Ridge to Reef” watershed function through a more technical lens.
- 1.1.2. Continue to pursue management recommendations from the 2017 Saipan Lagoon Use Management Plan (SLUMP) update, actively engage stakeholders throughout the implementation process, and annually evaluate user conflict and other emerging issues.

1.2. Enhance access at priority sites.

- 1.2.1. Develop and maintain an inventory of public access needs that include shoreline enhancement planning (parking, restroom facilities, and waste management) and recreational enhancement (mooring buoys and diving paths/markers).
- 1.2.2. Assess user capacity thresholds at priority sites and discuss potential mitigation measures with partner agencies.

Key Indicators

- Number of new WMPs created and total acreage of land protected by each plan.
- Number of stakeholder groups represented at each CAP/WMP workshop.
- Number of partner agencies/organizations consulted per SLUMP Priority Recommendation Area and/or Action.
- Number of recommendations from the 2017 SLUMP update incorporated into management decisions.
- Percentage of beaches enhanced as recommended in the Shoreline Access and Shoreline Enhancement Assessment (SASEA).

Building Block: Regulatory

GOAL 2 – Coastal developments and activities are fairly and effectively regulated to minimize impacts to coastal resources.

The CNMI’s coastal zone provides beautiful and bountiful resources from ridge to reef. While the CNMI’s coastal lands and waters provide important social, economic, and environmental benefits, their resources must be actively managed to ensure that they can support current and future needs. In order to ensure developments and activities have minimal impacts to the environment, DCRM exercises regulatory power in

delineated areas known as Areas of Particular Concern (APCs). Over the next 5 years, DCRM will work within its APCs to:

- Promote local and federal interagency cooperation and collaboration.
- Identify and close regulatory gaps and overlaps between local agencies.
- Strengthen the regulatory framework for addressing uncertainties in natural resource management such as cumulative and secondary impacts, climate change impacts, and coastal hazards.
- Implement the mitigation hierarchy to ensure avoidance, minimization, and mitigation of impacts.

2.1. Promote local and federal interagency cooperation and collaboration.

- 2.1.1. Coordinate with One-Start and CRM Agencies, Office of Zoning, and Office of Planning & Development to discuss development proposals early in the planning process.
- 2.1.2. Improve CRM Agency involvement and technical review of permit applications through regular board trainings, meetings, and other related capacity building activities.
- 2.1.3. Increase collaboration between partner natural resource regulatory agencies and the CNMI CRMP regarding plans and projects in areas of overlapping jurisdiction.
- 2.1.4. Establish and maintain various interagency forums - including the CNMI Enforcement Working Group and CNMI Watershed Working Group.

2.2. Strengthen the regulatory framework for addressing uncertainties in natural resource management such as cumulative and secondary impacts, climate change impacts, and coastal hazards.

- 2.2.1. Improve the process for assessing and minimizing secondary and cumulative impacts by establishing a framework to guide internal review of proposed projects.
- 2.2.2. Incentivize climate and coastal hazards adaptation for new projects and introduce “managed retreat” into DCRM’s management/regulatory approaches.
- 2.2.3. Continue updates to maps of wetlands, streams, and shorelines as needed, and ensure these updates are reflected in APC and other regulatory revisions.

2.3. Implement the mitigation hierarchy to ensure avoidance, minimization, and mitigation of negative impacts.

- 2.3.1. Implement the mitigation hierarchy to support net gain of critical coastal resources, including coral reefs, seagrass beds, and wetlands.
- 2.3.2. Update 2005 “Recommended Wetland Policy” report to include a proposal for the *Commonwealth Wetland Protection Act*, which would establish an interagency coordination committee.

Key Indicators

- Hours of capacity-building training offered to the CRM Agency Board and other partners per year.
- Percentage of Major Siting permit applications that qualify for a fee discount for meeting best management practice standards with respect to energy use, building rehabilitation, low impact development, and/or climate preparedness.
- Acreage of “net gain” vs. “net loss” of coral reefs, seagrass beds, and wetlands as a result of permitted activities.

Building Block: Research & Data

GOAL 3 – Management of coastal resources are improved through monitoring and research.

Expanding research and consistent monitoring of the CNMI's coastal resources are necessary for DCRM to accurately assess the impacts that various human and natural occurrences have on the CNMI's resources, and will best inform management practices moving forward. Data collected through these monitoring and research programs are made publically available and leveraged for both federal and local projects moving forward. Over the next 5 years, DCRM will:

- Acquire, manage, and disseminate data while simultaneously improving information technology.
- Continue environmental monitoring and pursue new and innovative research questions that will further DCRM's ability to achieve informed management decisions.

3.1. *Acquire, manage, and disseminate data and improve information technology.*

- 3.1.1. Improve the collection, organization, and sharing of GIS data and metadata.
- 3.1.2. Synchronize updates between DCRM's internal network and its web-based GIS portal.
- 3.1.3. Develop and maintain web mapping services and interactive maps to better distribute DCRM data, communicate project results, and enhance the permitting process.
- 3.1.4. Facilitate interagency capacity building with respect to the collection, sharing, analysis, and use of environmental data.

3.2. *Continue environmental monitoring (e.g. coral reef, shoreline, wetland/stream, benthic habitats, marine life, etc.) and research projects.*

- 3.2.1. Report research findings to professional groups and the general public at national conferences and local forums.
- 3.2.2. Strengthen agency partnerships with academic institutions and professional organizations.
- 3.2.3. Use marine monitoring data to develop a narrative of local regime thresholds and identify the most pressing environmental stressors requiring concerted management effort.
- 3.2.4. Use shoreline profile data to identify the beaches most vulnerable to erosion and calculate appropriate rate-based development setbacks for these sites.
- 3.2.5. Document all instances in which DCRM research guides CNMI decision makers and/or policy.

Key Indicators

- Acreage of wetland habitat surveyed, newly delineated, and/or classified according to the CNMI Wetlands Rapid Assessment Methodology (RAM).
- Percentage of existing coral reef and benthic monitoring sites surveyed per year and number of new monitoring sites established.
- Number and total acreage of stream systems surveyed using the CNMI Stream Visualization Assessment Protocol (SVAP).
- Number of shoreline monitoring sampling cycles completed per year.
- Number of management decisions made that reference data or research conducted/collected between 2018-2023.

Building Block: Communication

GOAL 4 – Strengthen communication of DCRM program activities and outcomes to increase environmental stewardship and promote a resilient and sustainable CNMI.

Environmental consciousness comes as a result of individuals being informed of problems and solutions and empowered to incorporate best practices into daily life. Spreading knowledge regarding the CNMI's coast and management of its resources will inform all audiences, including residents, visitors, and developers, and assist DCRM's efforts by generating new stewards of our coasts and its resources. In the next 5 years, DCRM will:

- Emphasize the purpose and importance of DCRM programs, regulations, and policies in communications with the general public and decision makers.
- Provide a resource tool-box to the general public via a well-maintained, interactive DCRM website.
- Coordinate public outreach efforts and projects with relevant partners.

4.1. Convey the purpose and importance of DCRM programs, regulations, and policies.

- 4.1.1. Publicize DCRM and its programs through various media platforms to maintain and expand local support for management plans and protection policies.
- 4.1.2. Link public awareness of DCRM's complementary coastal and coral programs by focusing on the concept of "ridge-to-reef."
- 4.1.3. Tailor communication materials to various audiences by relating the most current information to a variety of issues and causes.

4.2. Provide a resource tool-box to the general public via the DCRM website.

- 4.2.1. Maintain and enhance the permit and enforcement database and associated web mapping applications.
- 4.2.2. Ensure that appropriate information is available to the public through mapping services and visualizations.

4.3. Coordinate public outreach efforts and projects with relevant partners.

- 4.3.1. Maintain and expand DCRM media presence.
- 4.3.2. Utilize local organizations, magazines, radio and television shows, social media platforms, and other venues to increase the reach of messages to all target audiences.
- 4.3.3. Conduct social marketing campaigns targeting specific behavior change related to land-based sources of pollution, coral reef conservation, water quality protection, and climate change.

Key Indicators

- Total number of internet users accessing DCRM's Permitting App and/or Reef Report and percent growth in traffic per year.
- Percent increase in social media followers, average post reach, and average post engagement per quarter.