

Jo Anna Ada Award Winner for Tinian –
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2020 Department of Public Lands Scholarship Essay Contest

Essay Prompt- “Why is it important to preserve public lands in the CNMI?”

James Monroe once said, “The public lands are a public stock, which ought to be disposed of to the best advantage for the nation.” To me, this quote means that we should give public lands to the best option that can benefit us as a society. In regards to this specific quote, I think that the best option would be to preserve our public lands here in the CNMI. By definition, public land is land that is owned by the government. Some types of public land include the wilderness, historical sites, and many others. Substantially, it is important that we preserve public land here in the CNMI, for they are ecosystems and habitats, they are a part of history, and the community on Tinian only has access to ⅓ of their public lands.

First and foremost, preserving public lands in the CNMI is important because they are the ecosystems and habitats to our native animals and creatures. If we do not preserve and protect these habitats that are on public lands, then we could possibly lose our native creatures. With this in mind, these creatures could become endangered or even worse become extinct. For instance, some native animals or creatures that the CNMI could lose are the Marianas Fruit Dove (Paluman Totut), the Marianas Fruit Bat (Fanihi), the Coconut Crab (Ayuyu), and the Tinian Monarch (Chichurikan Tinian). These and many other native animals can become extinct if we do not preserve our public lands. This is extremely important because these animals help our islands in many ways. Some of them can be a source of food and some can help spread seed of plants that can later be eaten.

Furthermore, it is important that we preserve public lands here in the CNMI because some of them are historical sites. In the CNMI, there are many historical sites that are from both World War I and World War II. These historical sites are of great importance to our community. Not only does it connect us to our past and ancestors, but it also helps our economy as a whole. These historical sites help our economy financially because many tourists and people from different places around the world come to see it. Additionally, some of these sites serve as an educational purpose to the students that learn about our history and our islands as well. Preserving these public lands means that we save and protect a part of our history, which is something that is exceedingly valuable.

Moreover, in the CNMI, it is important to preserve our public lands because on Tinian, the community only has access to use ⅓ of the island. You see, a covenant was established for the CNMI to become a Commonwealth in Political Union with the United States. In this covenant, Article 8, Section 802 states the land or property that will be leased to the United States for 50 years. This lease can also be renewed for another 50 years if the U.S. government sees to do so.

About $\frac{1}{3}$ of the public land on Tinian, 72 hectares at Tanapag Harbor in Saipan, and 83 hectares of public land on Farallon de Medinilla (FDM) is being leased to the United States. This is a great amount of our public land in the CNMI being used by the U.S. for its defense responsibilities. Considering this fact, it is important that we preserve the public land that we have in the CNMI because a portion of it is already being utilized by the United States.

To conclude, it is vital and of interest that we conserve the public lands here in the CNMI. These public lands are homes to our native creatures. Additionally, they are a great part of our history. And lastly, Tinian only has access to utilize $\frac{1}{3}$ of the island.