

**Bibong Corporation Award Winner –
Victoria Bellas**

2020 Department of Public Lands Scholarship Essay Contest

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

Popularly known as the 26th President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt was also an esteemed naturalist and conservationist. He once said, “To waste, to destroy our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.” This passage deeply resonates with the idea of protecting public lands, especially here in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Our chain of islands hosts such pristine beauty that is becoming more and more unique to this world. It is imperative that we restore, protect and develop our public lands with the intention that it will support a diverse community and economy in addition to inspiring other places throughout the world to do the same.

The CNMI is a small place to begin with. According to the United States Central Intelligence Agency, the total land area is 464 sq km. This size is comparable to about 2.5 times bigger than the size of Washington, D.C. Considering this, it is also important to note that much of this land area is composed of private properties. Therefore, public land is an extremely scarce resource which propels the value of these lands. Given the circumstances, we are in an extremely optimal position to encourage the preservation of our public lands and to utilize them in ways that benefit the current residents of the CNMI and stimulate appeal towards potential foreign visitors. One excellent example of public land preservation that has become an icon within our tourism industry is Managaha Island. The CNMI has done an excellent job in maintaining the land and utilizing the island as a recreational place for both residents and visitors to Saipan. On Managaha, locals and tourists alike are given the opportunity to fully enjoy the abundant and dynamic environment our islands have to offer. We see more and more interest directed towards the Northern Islands as well for the purpose of eco-tourism in addition to hunting tours. Due to these newfound travel trends and possible avenues for economic diversification within the tourism industry, it is essential to create programs and guidelines that boost the potential incoming revenue while also protecting our natural habitat in the most sustainable manner.

Having this conversation about protecting public lands is an avenue that bridges the gap between “tourist” and resident within the CNMI. If our islands move forward without the consideration to protect these lands, we are rejecting the opportunity to establish tourism development and possibly inciting the inability for future indigenous generations to enjoy the bounty that the Marianas has to offer. That being said, there is nothing more important than protecting these lands that we consider home. While it is important to consider the potential in gaining revenues through the development of our public lands, it is the knowledge and the indescribable spirit associated with those very lands and the fact that they were once used by our ancestors and will continue to be used for many generations to come that serve as the fundamental reason to preserve public land.

References

Conservation Quotes (299 quotes). (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/conservation>

The World Factbook: Northern Mariana Islands. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_cq.html