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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?”

There are two things why it is important to preserve public lands in the CNMI. One of the main reason and perhaps the most important aspect to preserving our land is scarcity. Our lands in the CNMI are almost occupied by economic development. There’s practically nothing wrong with developments for economic activity here on our islands. In fact it is important and crucial to providing employment opportunities, boost tourism industry, and diversify our community here in the CNMI. But to what extent CNMI can offer public lands for economic activity if we clearly do not have enough land to provide. Geographically, land scarcity is happening all over the world and people in those areas have their ways to preserving their land. Some ways may not be in their favor because of bureaucratic alignment with investors and developers for economic prosperity. Leaving countries, towns, and cities overpopulated and people may be forced to self expel. Our situation is unique because we are just a speck of raised limestone islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Clearly we don’t have much space to offer. While we emphasize scarcity, as a CNMI Descent, I’m concerned that my generation and generations to come may not be able to obtain land for ourselves in the future if we continue to disburse our precious commodity which is our public lands for the benefit of economic growth and development. The Department of Public Lands in consultation with the CNMI leaders may perhaps develop a more realistic strategic plan to ensure we do not inadvertently displace our people because of the lack thereof. I remain optimistic that such actions will arise for the benefit our generation and generations to come. Our older generations whom are privileged to obtain land are known to sell their lands because of economic and financial hardships. Inheritance of family land is sometimes complicated and does not guarantee equal distribution. I will appreciate inheriting land from my parents but I really do not depend that. As a CNMI Descent, I would like to see that we obtain land first over investors and developers.

Another important aspect to preserve public lands is for the protection of our tradition, cultural values, and indigenous plants and animal species. Our ancestors once roam our public lands thousands of years ago leaving behind remnants of significant cultural and traditional blueprints. The recent on-going special resource study developed by the National Park Service on the island of Rota identified approximately 5,000 acres of pre-historic significance, WWII sites, and limestone forest lands for inclusion in the National Park Service. The preliminary findings indicate that the natural sites associated with the island’s limestone forests, sites associated with ancestral Chamorro culture, and historic sites associated with World War II meet the national significance criteria. As a resident of the island of Rota, I am concerned about the possibility of a federal take-over of our public lands, especially the areas where our ancestor once lived. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with the intentions of the National Park Service to protect and preserve our places of historical significance and limestone forest. We need to know what the benefits are for the people and the island of Rota besides being listed as Rota National Park. Will the takeover limit our access to places of historic significance? Our limestone forest

is a place where abundance of medicinal plants is located. Some areas of our limestone forest have access to the reefs for fishing. Will our local healers and fishermen be able to access the forest for medicinal plants or fishing? These are just a few of the many questions we should continue to ask the federal agency.

In conclusion, preserving our public lands is essential to promoting our culture, tradition, and values as Chamorros. We have such exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our heritage in the Mariana Archipelago. The high degree of integrity our sites represent a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource to preserve and protect endlessly. I support economic growth and development but I also believe that by having our own piece of public land shows ownership and a sense of belonging. We the people decided the fate of public lands therefore with cohesiveness, land use management solutions, and strong regulations favorable to preserving public lands, we will be able to accommodate future generations to come.