

Climbing to New Heights:

Vegetation Management Training at Nan Madol, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)

Located off the coast of Pohnpei, FSM sits a newly designated World Heritage Site called Nan Madol. Basalt palaces, temples, and tombs seem to emerge from the ocean, serving as a gathering place for social and religious practices for island communities since 1200 CE. Many of these structures still stand today and can be toured by the public; however, Nan Madol is now also designated as a highly threatened heritage site due to the siltation of canals and unchecked growth of mangroves and other trees undermining the historic structures.

To help address unchecked vegetation growth across the site, USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program funded a two-week intensive technical training that empowered local communities around the site to safely and effectively remove and manage vegetation. Arborists Kevin Eckert and Charley Wagner from Arbor Global trained over 23 participants on how to use and maintain chainsaws, climb trees, prune branches, fell trees, and plant appropriate vegetation for the site.

“These critical training elements are required to safely and effectively apply the vegetation management plan for this important site. We found trainees that were exceptionally motivated, attentive and adept at learning, which resulted in a more effective and rewarding result,” stated Kevin Eckert lead trainer from Arbor Global. Equipment and tools were left with trainees to continue vegetation removal and control, safeguarding Nan Madol for future generations.

Partnership was essential in developing the training and ensuring all pieces and people were in place. Many pieces of equipment were donated by the private business Petzl USA and Arborwear, and additionally, Arbor Global worked tirelessly to bring all the specialized arborist equipment to the island



Figure 1. Two Nan Madol crew Members climb a tree to practice rigging and pruning.



Figure 2. Kevin Eckert from Arbor Global walks through chainsaw maintenance and safety.

for the training. The training could not have been done without the support of local government organizations under the Pohnpei State Research and Development Office (specifically Tourism and Forestry), as they were key to the planning and site preparation each day. Last but not least, the Cultural Site Research and Management Foundation working in tandem with FSM National Heritage Preservation Office, led the larger vision for Nan Madol and identified key supporters for this training.



Figure 3. 2023 Training Cadre