The Surf Conservation Partnership

HARNESSING THE POWER AND PASSION OF SURFING COMMUNITIES TO CONSERVE MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

Update: December 15, 2019

The Surf Conservation Partnership is a joint effort of Conservation International and Save The Waves Coalition to mobilize the power and passion of the world’s surfing communities to protect areas where excellent surfing waves overlap with the world’s most biologically diverse marine and coastal ecosystems.

The partnership is collaborating with the Indonesian organizations, A Liquid Future and the Indonesian Locally Managed Marine Area Foundation as well as the University of California Los Angeles Institute of the Environment and Sustainability and the Anderson School of Management.

Upper Photo: A local boy surfs on a traditional board in Morotai, Indonesia. © Erik Anton Soderqvist
We have made great progress over the past few months both in the field and with outreach and fundraising. Below are a few highlights.

1. Surf Protected Area Development in Morotai, Indonesia
The establishment of Surf Protected Areas in Morotai, Indonesia is moving quickly.

Village Level Conservation/Surf Protected Areas: The project officially kicked off the establishment of village-based conservation/surf protected areas in September, 2019. There will be a total of 10 village conservation/surf protected areas created in the east and north of Morotai, where we are also working to create a much larger Surf and Nature Tourism Park surrounding and including the villages.

Since the kick off, 7 out of the 10 villages in the region have created village based natural resource management regulations that address threats to their coral reefs, forest, coastline and waves. Regulations include creation of fisheries replenishment areas (“no fishing zones”), fishing gear restrictions, restrictions on forest clearing and coral and sand mining and several other site-specific rules to limit threats. The remaining 3 villages will develop their natural resource management regulations in early 2020. All 10 villages in the proposed park zone are also now developing regulations to sustainability manage tourism including limits on leasing land, waste management, and guidelines on tourism infrastructure.

We are energized by this rapid progress, which has been fueled by the passion for the ocean and environment that community members have developed through surfing.

The Larger Surf and Nature Tourism Park: In late October, partners from CI, STW, A Liquid Future, and ILMMA kicked off the process to create the much larger Surf and Nature Tourism Park. This area will include 30 miles of coastline, 30 waves, and over 120,000 hectares of primary forest and coral reef and includes the 10 village level conservation/surf protected areas. Regulations to manage forests, coasts, reefs, fisheries, waste management and tourism development will be developed to complement and reinforce village level regulations. We expect this process to take the majority of 2020 or longer as this zonation has to be approved at the Province level. Fortunately, the establishment of the village level protected areas means that conservation of waves and the surrounding environment will be happening even as this larger Surf Protected Area is under development.
2. Collaboration with University of California Los Angeles – on Sustainable Surf Tourism and the Role of Women in the Blue Economy

**UCLA Anderson School of Management.** We are partnering with the Anderson School to develop a sustainable surf and marine tourism development and marketing plan for Morotai. Morotai has been selected by the Indonesian government for rapid tourism development. The environmental and social impact could be devastating. Fortunately, the government wants to develop Morotai with a pristine tourism model including creation of the large Surf and Nature Tourism Park.

Two members of the five-member team visited Morotai over the Thanksgiving Holiday, hosted by our local partner, A Liquid Future. They had an opportunity to survey the tourist infrastructure (natural features, lodging, and services), meet with government tourism officials and hotel managers, and engage with local people to understand how they can benefit from sustainable development. The main take-aways from the trip are:

1. Building human capacity will be key to effective tourism development as there are very few people now with capacity to design low impact tourism experiences;
2. Marketing for tourism needs to go hand in hand with development of facilities using low impact approaches to make sure there is an effective compliment; and
3. Framing Morotai as an adventure surf and dive tourism destination that doesn’t require much additional development may be the most effective way to sustainably grow tourism.

The project will wrap up in February, 2020 with another visit to Morotai and completion of the recommendations for sustainable tourism development and the marketing plan.

**Institute of the Environment and Sustainability (IoES).** The Surf Conservation Partnership has partnered extensively with IoES to create an academically rigorous methodology for surfonomics and to assess the overlap of great surf and biodiversity. Our collaboration continues with a new undergraduate practicum project to better understand the role of women in the blue (ocean) economy. The value of promoting opportunities for women to assume leadership or management roles in blue economy projects is huge. Recent research has shown that locations which have women in marine management leadership have greater conservation success.

This practicum team will set out to capture the status of women’s involvement in the blue economy in seven countries: Bermuda, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Liberia, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Tonga. The Surf Conservation Partnership will apply the results of the analysis as a first step to exploring how to strengthen the role of women in the sustainable blue economy with a focus on fisheries and tourism in the SCP countries of Indonesia, Costa Rica, and Liberia.
3. Dedication of the Guarda do Embaú World Surfing Reserve on October 27, 2019

The dedication of the ninth World Surfing Reserve in Guarda do Embaú Brazil, led by Save The Waves, was a huge success. Guarda is a small town in the heart of the southern Atlantic Rain Forest, where the amazing Rio da Madre river sculpts the left-hand point break and supports an incredible and diverse ecosystem. As part of a threatened biodiversity hotspot, it is truly a spectacular place and such a great example of a conservation win for the Surf Conservation Partnership. As one of the first places where STW and CI joined forces, we created the management plan for the Reserve that focuses on water quality improvements and halting destructive coastal development. CI’s country office in Brazil was instrumental in the planning phase as well as language and facilitation support.

The result of this work is a completely engaged community, a number of big wins around improving water quality in the river, and the joining of a terrestrial protected area with a marine protected area. Also, all of Brazil is now paying attention to surfing and marine conservation after the dedication, as the following icons joined the event: world champ Adriano de Souza, Brazilian actor Mateus Solano, and Brazilian surf legends Taina Hinckel, Teco Padaratz and Ricardo Bocao.

The Surf Conservation Partnership is also building on this success to engage with new communities in Brazil, which want to develop Surf Protected Areas. With strong local support and many amazing surf ecosystems, Brazil will be a fantastic place to continue expansion of the Surf Conservation Partnership through creation of a Surf Protected Area Network.
We are so grateful to our many donors and supporters. This great progress has only been possible thanks to your consistent and generous support. Happy Holidays and best wishes for an incredible new year to you and your families.

The Year Ahead:

Our first full year - 2019, has been an exciting one for the Surf Conservation Partnership. We have made solid progress in the field and been successful with several fundraising efforts including gifts from individuals, foundations, and government grants. As we look toward 2020, we have great momentum and will leverage our progress to pursue ambitious growth with the following focus:

- Continuing the great success with implementation the Surf Protected Areas in Morotai.
- Expansion to Biak Island in Papua Province in Eastern Indonesia and to Bali and Sumba Islands in Central Indonesia to create new networks of Surf Protected Areas.
- Developing a national policy to support expansion of Surf Protected Areas as part of the protected area framework of Indonesia.
- Developing a Surf Conservation Strategy for Fiji including collaboration with Fiji-based surf tourism resorts, local communities, and government.
- As funding allows, we will pursue Surfonomics and a national policy to protect surf breaks and create Surf Protected Area Networks in Costa Rica and in Brazil.
- We will continue our outreach and fundraising with events in Kauai, Los Angeles and San Francisco.
- We are developing a strategy to involve professional surfers and the surf industry and to make better use of social media.