The ten families who own part of the Yela Valley in Kosrae continue to benefit from their commitment to conservation and sustainable development. In April 2020, the Micronesia Conservation Trust (MCT), who manages the Yela Conservation Easement Endowment Fund, released $21,111 to the Yela Environment Landowners Association (YELA). The easement was established in 2014 with support from The Nature Conservancy, the Kosrae Island Resource Management Authority (KIRMA), the US Forest Services (USFS) and the Lucile and David Packard Foundation. Every year MCT disburses approximately $20,000 from the endowment to the landowners to help them manage and benefit from their decision to protect the Yela Valley. This is the 5th year that MCT has made this disbursement. The Yela watershed is a special place that is home to the world’s last remaining terminalia forest stand. Locally known as ka, this species of terminalia exists in Kosrae and in Pohnpei (kehrmah). As you fly into Korsae, you can view the amazing ka forest on your right side of the plane as you are just about to land, with its distinct and beautiful light green colors.

Conservation easements are common in the US and in other parts of the world, providing a way to assist landowners who wish to sustainably manage and protect their forests that support ecosystem services, for themselves, and for the greater good. The Yela Conservation Easement outlines certain rules, like restrictions on major infrastructure to help maintain the health of the forest resources, but also allows sustainable farming and eco-tourism activities. Today the families also benefit from visitors who pay an entry fee to visit this unique forest by boat or for hiking. The conservation easement is a long-term agreement and if the families continue to abide by their own policies, they will continue to receive the funds from their endowment with MCT. The conservation easement also serves as a sort of forest insurance for Yela. If a natural disaster, such as a typhoon, destroys the forest and the natural resources that support the livelihoods of the landowners, they will continue to receive the earnings from their endowment.