

Money Continues to Grow on the Special Ka Trees in Kosrae

May 6, 2021

On Saturday, May 1, 2021, Dr. Tholman Alik, Executive Director of the Yela Landowners Association, presented checks to the heirs of Alik Kufus for the Yela Forest Conservation Easement. This is an annual event, where the landowners receive dividends from their conservation endowment. This year each family received approximately \$2,758. Thus far the conservation easement has provided over \$111,665 to the families over the past 5 years.



Image 1. Yela landowners pose for a photo after receiving dividends from their conservation endowment

The conservation easement, which was executed in 2014, is between the Yela Valley landowners, the Kosrae Island Resources Management Authority (KIRMA) representing the Government of Kosrae, and the Micronesia Conservation Trust (MCT), who is responsible for managing the endowment associated with the conservation easement. The conservation easement, which was developed by KIRMA, with technical and financial assistance from The Nature Conservancy, US Forest Service Forest Legacy Program, the Micronesia Conservation Trust and the Lucile and David Packard Foundation, set aside approximately 87 acres of the special Yela *Ka* (*Terminalia carolinensis*) forest/valley in Kosrae – the last remaining stand of this endemic *Ka* tree which only exists in Kosrae and Pohnpei (known locally as *Kehmah*).



Image 2. Dr. Tholman Alik in the Yela Ka Forest

At its core, a conservation easement is an agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency under which certain uses of the property are restricted in order to preserve the land's natural or cultural features. While the landowners still own the land at Yela, they've signed a lease agreement with KIRMA/Kosrae State Government, to forgo some of their development rights, such as homesteads and road construction, to the land in order to preserve the valley. The families are still allowed to hunt wild pigs and harvest crops and medicinal plants, as well as carry out ecotourism, scientific research and student learning fieldtrips that support management of this highly unique forest. "To us, this is a win, win situation. We protect our land, and at the same time are able to improve our livelihood from the annual dividends we receive from our endowment and the ecotourism activities we allow on site", says Dr. Tholman Alik.