

EXPANDING THE FIA INVENTORY TO UNDERSTAND PLANT DIVERSITY IN PALAU'S CONSERVATION AREAS

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Abstract—Palau is well known as an area of high plant diversity; indeed, it is considered the most species rich island group within Micronesia (Kitalong et al., 2008). The Palauan archipelago covers only about 535 km² of land area and yet contains an estimated 730 native plants, including 151 endemic species (Kitalong et al., 2008). Broader scientific interest in Palauan forest health and biodiversity is mirrored locally by residents and land managers who seek baseline information to inform resource management decisions. With these concerns in mind, the Data Collection Team at the Pacific Northwest Research Station proposed a small pilot project to assess the feasibility of conducting more detailed vegetation surveys in Palau as well as the value of the information gained by more intensive sampling. In this survey we documented about 25% of the known plant species of Palau on the 15 subplots sampled, a total area of about 0.0025 km² or 0.62 acre. In summary, this pilot work demonstrates that detailed vegetation sampling (i.e., censuses) on FIA plots in the Pacific Islands is technically feasible, yields a wealth of information on plant diversity, and is potentially interesting on many levels to local communities, land managers, and the broader scientific community.

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