



Clynton E. Ridgell

Senator – 35th Guam Legislature

*Committee on Economic Development, Agriculture, Maritime Transportation,
Power and Energy Utilities, and Emergency Response*

SENATORS INTRODUCE BILLS TO PROTECT 2,000 ACRES OF GUAM'S FORESTS AND WATERSHEDS

JOINT PRESS RELEASE (February 18, 2020 – Hagåtña, Guam) - Monday, Senators Clynton E. Ridgell and Sabina Flores Perez introduced three bills for the long-awaited implementation of the Guam Forest System Plan enacted under the Guam Forestry Legacy Act of 2012.

Working closely with the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Land Management, and the Bureau of Statistics and Plans, Senators Ridgell and Perez have identified nearly two thousand acres of government of Guam land for the protection of natural resources and habitats. These measures are the first time that land is being added to the Guam Forest System inventory that was created over eight years ago.

Senator Ridgell introduced Bills 291-35 and 292-35, authorizing the Department of Agriculture and its Forestry Division full jurisdiction of government of Guam land in Merizo, Inarajan, Talofoto, and Umatac where there is already an active effort for planting native trees for soil enrichment and erosion control.

"In 2019 alone, our island suffered losses from nearly 500 wildfires," says Senator Ridgell. "Our residents down south are always under threat whenever severe weather hits. During dry season, it is the threat of wildfires; during rainy season, it is the threat of floods. Forest systems help to catch heavy rain which in turn prevents flooding. This is why I am working with Senator Perez to get this Forest System Plan moving forward. Wildfires and erosion lead to other catastrophic events that affect our marine life, our other natural resources, our personal property, our ability to fish, and our quality of life. We must be more aggressive with our conservation efforts if we want to protect ourselves from these events," he added.

Senator Perez's Bill 293-35 seeks to add the Pâgat Cave Site in Yigu to the Forest System Plan for the conservation of the limestone forest up north. "Our limestone forests, of which approximately 10% remain, are a natural wonder that took millenia to evolve and where our endemic plant and animal species are found," said Senator Perez. "It's critical we nurture and protect our environmentally and culturally significant regions. By protecting our lands, we also preserve historical artifacts in place and maintain a crucial connection to our past," said Senator Perez. "We cannot risk losing this connection to our ancestors. The historic, natural character of our lands must be retained and preserved," she added.

Threats to natural habitats and aquatic and wildlife resources in the north continue to increase with a rise in invasive species and overdeveloped landscapes, particularly with the increased military construction projects. "I am committed to seeking every opportunity for our community's response to climate change impacts and the conservation of our limestone forests," said Senator Perez. "Protecting our limestone forests is also a critical part of protecting our water resources, because

they are located atop our Northern aquifer that supplies most of our people with drinking water,” added Senator Perez.

GovGuam was criticized for not having established any forest-protected areas that could have been used to help preserve the endangered *Serianthes Nesolnii* or *Håyon Lågu* tree near the proposed military firing range complex. These bills will establish these long-awaited forest-protected areas on government of Guam lands.

"I will continue to work with Senator Perez to identify other sites that are deemed vital to the Guam Forest System Plan to make Guam green again," Senator Ridgell said.

“I look forward to collaborating with Senator Ridgell in preserving our precious natural and cultural resources,” said Senator Perez.

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