



**OFFICE OF SENATOR SABINA FLORES PEREZ**  
Chairperson  
Committee on Environment, Revenue and Taxation, and Procurement  
*I MINA'TRENTAI SINGKO NA LIHESLATURAN GUÁHAN*  
35<sup>TH</sup> GUAM LEGISLATURE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*Guam, July 14, 2020* — Committee on Environment Chairperson Senator Sabina Flores Perez, and Senator Therese Terlaje, chairperson of the Committee on Historic Preservation held a joint informational briefing discussing the clearing of cultural and historical sites by the Department of Defense for the planned Main Cantonment Area and the Live Fire Training Range Complex.

Legislators heard testimony relating to the removal of ancestral remains, artifacts, and the destruction of historic places such as Mågua as well as revelations that, to date, there have been at least 43 discoveries of culturally and historically significant sites found throughout the course of military buildup construction, which threatens the integrity of the island's limestone forests.

Senator Perez stated the preservation of our culture is intertwined with the protection of our natural environment, especially where the military is pressing on with construction without the expressed will and consent of the people of Guam.

“This is not simply a cultural issue, or a human rights issue. It’s also an environmental issue, as much as it is a public health issue,” Senator Perez said. “As the military is digging up these artifacts and burials of our ancestors, they’re also clearing large swaths of limestone forest which protect the integrity of our island’s main source of water, the Northern Guam Lens Aquifer. Protecting these resources in place is vital to both our heritage, and to our island community living today and future generations.”

During the course of the hearing, community members also raised concerns about buildup-related deforestation in places such as Tailalo, where the largest firing range at the Live Fire Training Range Complex is proposed to be built.

“The destruction of the high-quality, pristine limestone forest in Tailalo adds to the loss of one of the most endangered forest types in the world,” said Joni Quenga Kerr, a Guam Community College science faculty member. “While the military pursues their forest enhancement project as a replacement for the lost forest, it will never be able to replicate nature’s project which took millions of years to create. Further, the destruction of our natural resources increases our people’s disconnection with our *tåno*, around which our ancestral cultural heritage was founded and developed.”

Participants at the hearing also discussed the availability and potential of non-invasive subsurface mapping technologies, which would help prevent the destruction of significant CHamoru cultural and historical artifacts and remains. Particularly, professors Romina King and Jose Edgardo Aban discussed LiDAR, a mapping method which uses light to map the surface of the earth; and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), which uses radar pulses to depict what is below the ground before any degradation would occur.

Similarly, State Historic Preservation Officer Patrick Lujan stated his office is working on amending the 2011 Programmatic Agreement to emphasize the preservation of historic properties in place.

“While I commend the SHPO for finally insisting that human remains and cultural artifacts be preserved in place going forward, much more must be done by the government as we continue to lose opportunities to protect our cultural and historical sites,” Senator Terlaje stated. “Loss of these sites prevents further interpretation of the interaction of cultural practices and the environment that helped our ancestors survive 4000 years. Those future generations are relying on what our community does in the next few months as these projects continue to wipe out our cultural landscapes.”

While Senator Perez is advocating for reform to the Section 106 process to allow for the meaningful and decisive involvement of the people of Guam in military activities, she encourages members of the public to comment on the Department of Defense’s Project J-017 at [criwebcomment@navy.mil](mailto:criwebcomment@navy.mil).

“The people of Guam must have a meaningful say in all matters affecting our environment and our heritage. Our connection to the land also comes with the responsibility of ensuring its protection. It is up to us to ensure the preservation of our irreplaceable natural and cultural resources”, Senator Perez said. “Mitigation should be of contamination not of our pristine sites.”

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