

Hawaii joins RMI to keep tabs on turtle population

Majuro July 27 — A joint RMI/State of Hawaii turtle tagging and research expedition to the northern uninhabited Marshalls' atoll of Bikar is scheduled for August, according to Marshall Islands Maritime Resource Authority director Danny Wass. Hawaii State will be represented on the expedition by Bill Puleloa, a former fisheries officer here in the Marshall Islands.

According to information on the research project, it is intended that a team will spend at least a couple of weeks out on Bikar measuring and tagging turtles that come ashore to lay eggs. It is assumed that future recovery of these tagged turtles will provide information as to migration patterns, growth rates, and survival rates.

Turtle populations in other areas of the Pacific are suffering from a terrible tumor disease that can ultimately prove fatal.

Part of the investigation will be to determine if turtles here in the Marshalls follow a pattern which has been documented in Hawaii. There, according to Puleloa, studies indicate that most turtles hatch in the northwest Hawaiian islands and then swim off as far as 800 miles to the main islands of Maui and Molokai to forage and grow.

Upon reaching sexual maturity, the turtles return north and repeat the cycle. In the Marshall Islands, most turtles (won) hatch at traditional sites such as Bikar, Jemo and Erikup, islands located in the north. Accepted thinking is that

lands' turtle population. According to Puleloa, turtle populations in other areas of the Pacific are known to be suffering from a terrible tumor disease. These tumors form on the soft part of their bodies such as the eyes, flippers, throats, etc., and can ultimately prove fatal.

"On Molokai, recent research surveys have revealed as much as 30% of the turtles affected by this disease," he said.

Turtles as far away as Texas and Florida have been known to bear similar tumors, and the Bikar study (which should begin this week, the boat taking the team to Bikar left Majuro Tuesday morning and expects to return here August 17) will try to establish if the sickness has reached



BILL PULELOA, former Marshalls fisheries officer, represents Hawaii in the joint RMI-Hawaii turtle tagging and research mission.

here.

According to Puleloa, he feels that a long term study of turtles is necessary. In his work on Molokai, he has personally tagged over one thousand turtles.

"We hope that this initial project will provide the thrust in the right direction

for the preservation of won for all future generations of Marshallese to enjoy," he said.

Accompanying his father on the trip north is Mickey Puleloa. Mickey was a former elementary school student at Majuro Coop School.

Hawaii im RMI rej ibben dron im kakölleik wön ko

Majuro July 27 — Juon

ewor lernnak ko bwe team

rar kwalok im kemeleleik

lok, elkin rej bar jebelak

Wön ko ilo jet ian melan im enaj koman ilo Bikar