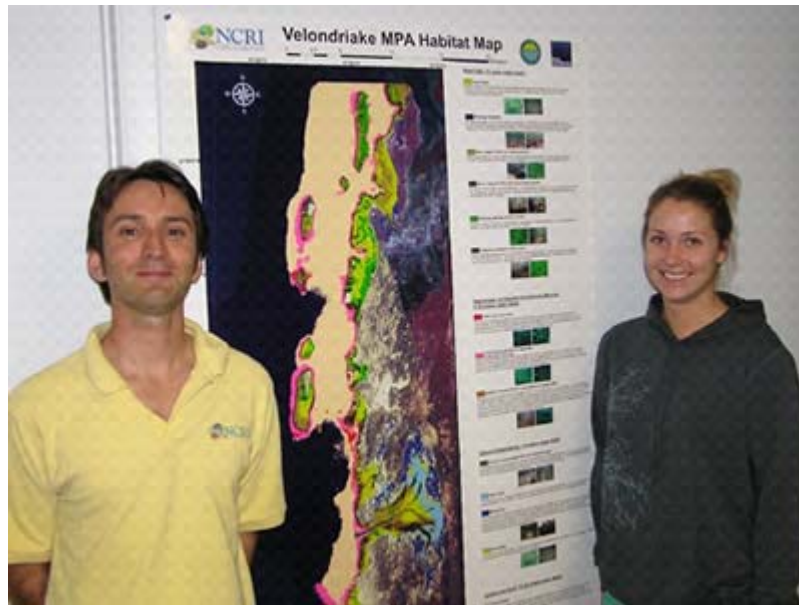


NSU Oceanographic Center Scientists Contribute to J. P. Getty Award Winning Project (January 13, 2009)



NSU scientists Dr. Sam Purkis (left) and Shanna Dunn present the satellite maps of the Andavadoaka region.



Dr. Sam Purkis (right) sits with NSU graduate Vola Ramahery atop a traditional fishing canoe. The craft is named the 'Volanirina' in recognition of the conservation work conducted by Vola, who now heads the marine affairs unit of the World Wildlife Fund in SE Madagascar.

A project in a remote corner of Madagascar supported by the National Coral Reef Institute (NCRI) at NSU's Oceanographic Center (OC) has received the international J. Paul Getty award for conservation. The prize, described by former President Ronald Reagan as the Noble Prize for conservation, is awarded by global conservation organization World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and is one of the world's most prestigious environmental accolades.

In collaboration with Blue Ventures, a British non-governmental organization dedicated to marine conservation in Madagascar, NSU Oceanographic Center assistant professor and NCRI researcher Sam Purkis, Ph.D., conducted fieldwork in the waters of Andavadoaka, an isolated village in the southwest of the country. These data were used to create a region-wide map of the coastal zone using high-resolution satellite data. NSU OC research scientist and graduate student Shanna Dunn led the mapping component of the project.

This work is a precursor to the development of the 'Velondriake' community-managed protected area network. Protection from this effort will encompass pristine terrestrial and marine habitats, including vast tracts of coral reef.

Purkis was joined in the field by a team of researchers from the World Wildlife Fund led by NSU alumna, Volanirina (Vola) Ramahery, who attended the NSU OC supported by a Fulbright Scholarship between 2004 and 2006. Ramahery has now returned to her native Madagascar and heads marine affairs for WWF in the region from her base in the coastal town of Toliara.

In addition to the J. P. Getty award, the project's success has led the government of Madagascar to use it as a model to create similar protected areas across the country. The coral reef off the southwest coast of Madagascar is the third largest in the world and the NCRI looks forward to contributing further to its critical preservation.