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LOCAL NEWS

Posted on: Thursday, May 29, 2008

Big Isle alliance aims to protect watersheds

Advertiser Staff

VOLCANO, Hawai'i — A new partnership of public and private landowners has been created to protect watersheds and natural resources across more than 1 million acres on Mauna Loa, Kilauea and Hualalai on the Big Island.

The Three Mountain Alliance watershed partnership will include nine partners who will cooperate under a memorandum of understanding and a recently completed management plan.

The alliance will also involve Kulani Correctional Facility and its inmates in conservation work including fencing and native reforestation.

"By participating in the partnership, our inmates receive education and work training opportunities," said Beryl Iramina, warden at Kulani. "Inmates can also give back to the community through our community service programs helping Three Mountain Alliance partners protect and restore important

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watershed lands."

Three Mountain Alliance plans for the near future include an education and restoration project at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park and on Keauhou Ranch lands that would have students and teachers planting native plants grown by Kulani inmates.

Also in the works are development with the community of a watershed management plan for the upland forests of Ka'u and Kapapala, control of wild cattle in several state-owned forest reserves, protective fencing of dry forests in upland Kona, and joint invasive weed control projects.

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Three Mountain Alliance partners are the state departments of Land and Natural Resources and Public Safety, the U.S. National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey Pacific Island Ecosystems Research Center, Kamehameha Schools, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i.

The Three Mountain Alliance will focus on protection of native habitat and species, and will benefit the community by managing upland forested portions of the watershed that provide essential groundwater, water filtration and flood reduction.

"Partnerships such as the Three Mountain Alliance are the most effective way to address threats to the landscape such as invasive weed species that occur across land ownership boundaries," said Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park Superintendent Cindy Orlando. "The park is able to accomplish much more with partners than we could on our own by sharing scarce staff and resources to accomplish joint objectives."

Kamehameha Schools is the largest private landowner involved in the partnership, but other agencies and large, private landowners with a management interest in the landscape will also be invited to join the Three Mountain Alliance.

The Three Mountain Alliance is one of nine partnerships in the state that are members of the Hawai'i Association of Watershed Partnerships. Its management plan can be found at www.hawp.org.

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