

WEST MAUI MOUNTAINS WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP MARKS 10TH ANNIVERSARY

KAHULUI -- Ten years ago state and private landowners officially formed the West Maui Mountains Watershed Partnership, one of nine such voluntary alliances now existing statewide. Its eleven members are committed to the common value of protecting 48,000 acres of forested watersheds for water recharge and conservation values.

To commemorate the West Maui Mountains Watershed Partnership's 10th anniversary on January 16, 2009, there will be a reaffirmation of the founding Memorandum of Understanding and signing ceremony at the Maui Tropical Plantation. In the afternoon partnership staff will lead an interpretive hike on Waihe'e Ridge trail, to view watershed project areas, fences and discuss resource management issues.

"Investment in watershed partnerships makes good sense for the state and private partners in so many ways," said Laura Thielen, Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) chairperson.

"Collaborating on management actions across property lines saves money. Through partnerships, resources and expertise are pooled so landowners, including the state, are able to increase their capacity to engage in watershed protection, and work more effectively together," said Thielen.

Maui Mayor Charmaine Tavares added, "The County of Maui increased funding support to the West Maui Mountains Watershed Partnership by nearly 75% last year and we remain committed to the critical work the partnership will do. I cannot emphasize enough the value of collaboration to help ensure a consistent source of water for today's needs, as well as for the future."

"Since its beginnings ten years ago, the West Maui Mountains Watershed Partnership has done exceptional work and I congratulate them on their many achievements. The protection and stewardship of our fragile ecosystem is the responsibility of both the public and private sectors and the County of Maui is pleased to have a part in these important endeavors," Tavares continued.

Since its inception in 1998, the partnership has managed the native forests of West Maui that provide billions of gallons of water for residents, businesses and agriculture in West, Central and South Maui. The Maui County Department of Water Supply's also relies upon West Maui's native forests for 77 percent of its source water.

Watershed partners work to protect this fragile ecosystem from feral ungulates (hoofed animals) by building fences to keep the animals from trampling, eroding, and damaging the area. Over 17 miles of fence has been built to protect almost 18,000 acres of land. More than 23,000 acres of critical habitat for 126 rare and endangered species is also being cared for, in addition to over a hundred miles of perennial streams. Weeds that could change native habitats are continually monitored and controlled.

“It is fantastic to see the land recover from the impacts of feral ungulates and dirt bikes and know that all our hard work is making a difference in preserving Hawaiian forests and water resources,” according to Chris Brosius, watershed coordinator.

“I’m hopeful that we can make further progress against forest threats over the next decade. To do so, we will need the continued support of our partners, funding agencies and the general public who all rely on our forested resources,” he said.

WMMWP members include the County of Maui , [Department of Land and Natural Resources](#), [Ka’anapali Land Management Corp.](#), [Kahoma Land Company L.L.C.](#), [Kamehameha Schools](#), [Makila Land Company, L.L.C.](#), [Maui Land & Pineapple Company, Inc.](#), [The Nature Conservancy of Hawai‘i](#), [Wailuku Water Company, L.L.C.](#) along with contributing entities, the University of Hawai‘i - Research Corporation of the University of Hawai‘i and the Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit and Tri Isle Resource Conservation & Development.

Management actions by watershed partnerships statewide are funded through cooperative state, county, federal and private sources. Due to the downturn in the economy, partnerships face shrinking budgets and considerable challenges just to maintain the existing investments in infrastructure. Federal funding can be jeopardized by the loss of required state matching funds.

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Background:

Forests are worth \$4.6 to 8.5 billion for the recharge to our aquifers alone. That's according to a study of the Ko'olau forest on O'ahu, prepared by the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization.

When aesthetic values, water quality, climate control, biodiversity, and other forest services were calculated, the total value is estimated at \$7.4 to 14 billion.

"In the case of our forests, we pay no bill for the capture and filtering of rainwater that replenishes our island aquifers, no bill for natural erosion control and clear nearshore waters. We pay no bill for the uptake of carbon dioxide and the supply of oxygen, for the calming influence of green mountains on our psyche, or the shady trails we hike. Contemplate the cost of replicating just one of these essential services through feats of technology or engineering and you begin to appreciate the contribution our forests make to our economy and quality of life."

(Environmental Evaluation and the Hawaiian Economy" prepared by the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization. All costs are estimated as net present value using 3% and 1% social discount rates for the ranges. Excepted from "Last Stand - The Vanishing Hawaiian Forest" prepared by The Nature Conservancy, Hawai'i.)

Healthy forests prevent erosion, keeping our reefs healthy and attractive to visitors. They provide a wide range of recreational activities, preserve native habitats and species unique in the world, provide materials important for the perpetuation of Hawaiian culture, and act as living laboratories to educate the young scientists we need to encourage.

A map showing partnership lands can be viewed at <http://www.westmauiwatershed.org/UserFiles/PartnershipMap.pdf>.

Additional information, photos and watershed staff contact information can be found at <http://www.westmauiwatershed.org/>.