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**Department  
of Agriculture**  
STATE OF HAWAII

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Final Environmental Impact Statement Issued for Lower Hamakua Ditch**

The final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the long-term repair and rehabilitation of the Lower Hamakua Ditch is complete and available for distribution and review. This project will provide the infrastructure to ensure a steady and affordable source of water for the growth of diversified agriculture and economic revitalization of Hamakua, and to preserve the Waipio Valley Watershed.

“The 26-mile Hamakua Ditch System is literally the lifeline for new and expanding businesses that will create more jobs and strengthen the economic base of the Hamakua Region,” said James J. Nakatani, Chairperson for the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA).

“Approximately 170 farmers and ranchers from Kukuihaele to Paauiilo depend on water for their livelihoods, and major improvements are imperative in keeping the system operational. Repairing the leaky 100-year-old water system will result in savings of more than 6 million gallons (MG) of water each day; water which can flow into the Waipio Valley streams for watershed restoration.”

The Lower Hamakua Ditch Watershed Plan includes the reconstruction of nearly one-half of the flumes, removal of sediment to prevent flooding and overflow, and repair of the 10 MG Paauiilo Reservoir and construction of a new 1 MG Honokaia Reservoir. Plans also call for repair of the tunnel at Hakalaoa Falls and modification of intakes to reduce the amount of water diverted from Waipio Valley streams. Currently, the average water flow through the ditch ranges between 25 and 30 MG per day. Under the plan, a projected amount of 13 MG per day will service approximately 5,000 acres of diversified agriculture including production of coffee, macadamia nut, papaya, banana, foliage and floral, as well as ranching; the remaining water will be returned to Waipio Valley streams.

Repairs and construction are expected to take approximately four years to complete, with costs estimated at \$10.6 million. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) would fund approximately \$6.1 million, with the State covering the remaining amount of \$4.5 million. Funding amounts are based on 1997 prices.

Since the bankruptcy of Hamakua Sugar Company in 1993, the Hawaii Department of Agriculture acquired the daily operation and maintenance of the ditch system that serviced 21,400 acres of agricultural lands in the Hamakua Region. Given the dilapidated state of the ditch following the transfer of operations, development of a watershed plan began in 1994. Sponsors of the project include USDA-NRCS, HDOA, and the Hamakua and Maunakea Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

Anyone wanting to respond to the final EIS can submit written comments to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Resource Management Division, 1428 South King Street, Honolulu, HI, 96814. Comments must be postmarked by the last day of the public comment period, October 22, 1999. The final EIS is available for viewing at any regional library, or a copy can be obtained by contacting the Department's Agricultural Resource Management Division at 973-9473 (Oahu). Following the completion of the public comment period, the EIS will be forwarded to the Governor for approval to proceed in finalizing agreements and applying for project funding, both federally and locally.

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