



# Media Release

U.S. Army Garrison, Pohakuloa

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**Volunteers from PTA and Waikoloa Dry Forest Restoration Project group take a break after several hours of cutting invasive grass and fencing at a nearby forest of Waikoloa Village on the Big Island. Photo by Chicpaul Becerra, Pohakuloa Public Affairs.**

## **PTA employees support dry forest**

By Chicpaul Becerra  
Pohakuloa Public Affairs

POHAKULOA TRAINING AREA, Hawaii— Satisfaction is the end word for this all-volunteer force trying to protect Big Island land against forest fires and feral goats living in the area.

Civilian employees at PTA, led by Robert Wright, deputy garrison commander, came and joined forces with other volunteers, members of the Waikoloa Dry Forest Recovery Project Group, cutting fountain grass and other invasive weeds as a preventative measure against wildland fires and placing fences in designated areas to prevent wild goats and other ungulates from ravaging native vegetation in the southwest vicinity of Waikoloa Village on the Big Island..

“We have a group of volunteers from PTA and the Waikoloa group who came here to cut down some of these non-native, invasive weeds that has taken over certain areas,” Dave Faucette, land rehabilitation and management coordinator, PTA Integrated Training Area Management, said.

The group’s 24 volunteers are from different backgrounds.

“We have biologists, folks from the conservation department, guys who work at Pohakuloa, and even another person who has a doctorate degree,” Faucette said. “We really have people from all walks of life who wanted to contribute and help out.”

One volunteer was eager to get rid of the invasive vegetation.

“I recently retired from the department of culture and natural conservation services, and wanted to do something to keep me busy,” said Jerry Williams, a project volunteer. “So far, we worked on some fire breaks to reduce potential fire hazards and wildfires. This area has some particularly rare trees, the\_uhiuhi and the wiliwili that needs protection. The trees are surrounded by fountain grass, which is considered a hazard to the trees, and so we are using weed eaters to cut the grass.”

The volunteer labor generates grant money to the group.

“The project has been sponsored by money from NRCS (Natural Resources and Conservation Services) and from the Forest Station,” Faucette said. “What happens is we sign our names on a roster sheet and give the form to NRCS personnel and calculate how much in-kind service we provide. In return, we receive a grant. The dry forest recovery group can use this grant money to put irrigation and be able to purchase more materials that we can use to do all kinds of things. So that’s how that works.”

The number of people coming to volunteer is overwhelming.

“We are grateful that Dave (Faucette) came along with some volunteers from Pohakuloa to do some grass clearing,” Beverley Brand, coordinator, Waikoloa Dry Forest Recovery Project, and president, Waikoloa Village Outdoor Circle, said.

We want this project to be a community-based project now that we have legal access to this area for a couple of years and have a license, according to Brand

“We plan to put a fence around these trees. Once we’ve got that done, we can quarantine the 35 dry forest species, then plant seedlings, and have a greenhouse and water (irrigation),” Brand added. “Part of the recovery project is also to create a trail for people to enjoy the area. We are also hoping helicopters can use the firebreaks for defense in firefighting and make it a doable purpose.”

The group sees the project as a long-term, life long mission.

“Because we have endangered trees in the area, this might be our last chance of saving these endangered plant species,” Brand said. “We have 13 trees left and are trying to create an environment for them so that the seeds will eventually regenerate through the natural process of the blowing wind. We will care for them and water them. Our vision is, maybe in a hundred years, this whole 75 acres will be an example of the naturally regenerated environment.”

According to Brand, the project started when someone in the village sold some of the wiliwili trees for a resort hotel.

“When members of the Waikoloa Village Outdoor Circle found out, they thought that was not appropriate,” said Brand. “We went to the village association and told them that we needed to do something about this (transfer of native trees from the area). We asked the village board of directors that these trees, the uhiuhi, and the wiliwili with 13 left in the entire world, should be protected.”

One PTA volunteer agrees.

“These trees are the last in world, and it is gratifying to know that we are taking steps in preserving these natural resources,” Chris Hardenbrook, geographic information systems analyst, PTA ITAM, said.

The group is always in need of volunteers and welcomes new members, so if you want to be a volunteer for this dry forest working group, call Beverly Brand at 883-3362 or 895-4679.

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MEDIA NOTE: For more information, contact PTA Public Affairs Liaison Officer Chicpaul Becerra at (808) 969-2411 or [chicpaul.becerra@us.army.mil](mailto:chicpaul.becerra@us.army.mil)