



# News Release

U.S. Army Garrison, Pohakuloa

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Release number: 2009-X-XX

March 1, 2009

## New PTA biologist has eye in stewardship, conservation

Pohakuloa Training Area (PTA) gets its share of new employees every year. This year is no different. PTA has a new biologist.

His name is Peter Joseph Peshut. You can call him Mr. Peshut or, as he prefers, just call him Peter. Any way you call him, he is known and assigned as the biologist for natural resource management of military lands at PTA. He reports directly to the U.S. Army Garrison, Hawaii, Directorate of Public Works, Environmental Division.

“The decision to come to PTA was a positive one for me and my wife Edna,” said Peshut. “We wanted interesting work in Hawaii. We’ve been here before many times, and we always enjoyed our visits, and we wanted to live here.”

“We spent the past 14 years in the Pacific territorial islands (of the United States): Saipan, Guam, American Samoa,” he added. “In our last positions in Samoa, we had built the Environmental Protection Agency with the local folks and local government, but there came a time to hand things over and move on with the next phase of our lives. I had taken a one year break to finish my doctoral degree based on research in

the Pacific region, including some of our program work. I feel fortunate to have accepted this job position while at the university in Australia.”

Peshut has been working at PTA since February.

“My first impression here is that it is the coldest tropical climate I’ve experienced in my life,” said Peshut. “Here we are at 19 degrees north latitude, and I was used to temperatures in the 80s and 90s. It is a little chilly, but it is beautiful here at PTA.”

“Although some people might think it looks stark, based on the lack of vegetation, this is a very unique place,” he added. “I know Hawaii has among the highest endemisms in the world, comparable with the Galapagos and parts of Australia, which makes PTA a very interesting place.”

Pōhakuoa has many unique natural resources, according to Peshut.

“From the biological perspective, it is a great thing what PTA can offer, similar to other military installations,” he said. “We are occupying lands that can be significant areas for conservation, since the military owns large areas, but use only relatively small pieces of it.”

“In the vernacular of biologists, refugia, areas that maintain populations of rare, endangered or threatened species, that might otherwise be destroyed elsewhere,” Peshut added. “This is a great contribution from PTA and the Army. There are a lot of important activities at PTA. We are exercising good stewardship of untouched land, protecting habitats, and share conservation plans for all kinds of plants and animals. The Army has a very important role here and has committed financial and personnel resources to this effort.”

Peshut’s managerial responsibilities include PTA’s compliance with regulatory requirements, monitoring wildlife and endangered species populations, monitoring/action on incidences, community liaison and outreach, fencing to control feral animal populations, fuel breaks to control risk of fire, weed control, and outplanting.

Peshut’s role at PTA is significant with the assistance of Center for Environmental Management of Military Lands (CEMML) personnel.

“My responsibility for PTA lands is stewardship and conservation on about 60,000 to 70,000 acres,” Peshut said. “I work with the Colorado State University staff, through the CEMML, a group of about 50 people that assist PTA’s natural resources program. The CEMML folks are a great group of people to work with. There is a lot of talent there.”

“My role continues to evolve as I learn more of the aspects of the natural resources program, so I expect more duties and responsibilities,” Peshut said. “Primarily, I am the fulcrum between the Army that uses the base for training purposes and objectives for compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the Sikes Act, using CEMML contract personnel to meet the statutory requirements. My role is to make sure compliance is maintained, with the assistance of CEMML in the field and in the office.”

Peshut sees the future at PTA with an eye on land stewardship and species conservation.

“PTA’s natural resources program has been well-planned out based on what I have seen so far,” said Peshut. “There is a plan for the next five to eight years as the stewardship program includes fencing, invasive species and ungulate control, and

propagation of rare and endangered species. All of these programs are currently mapped out, underway and happening. The goal right now is to completely embrace the program objectives and advance toward final implementation/final completion. At that point, we either go into an expansion mode on new conservation and stewardship initiatives or maintain what has been implemented.”

“That decision is probably still five years away,” he added. “There’s an awful lot to do. I hope it would go to expansion. But for the next five to eight years, we have our hands full in just completing our current programs,” Peshut concludes.

“Essentially, the natural resources program has eight major program areas which cover the Army very well in compliance with statutory requirements. We are always trying to refine, improve and build our knowledge base of natural resources at PTA. It is a good program, and we have a lot of CEMML folks who have the talent, skills, and broad knowledge of the habitats, the fauna and flora at PTA to help us get there.”

(NOTE: After graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from Southern Illinois University in 1987, Peshut’s work has taken him from Norwell, Massachusetts; to Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands; Guam; Pago Pago, American Samoa; and now to the Big Island of Hawaii. Peshut earned his Master of Science in Biology from the University of Guam Marine Laboratory, and has submitted his thesis for a Doctor of Philosophy in Environmental Science from the University of Wollongong, Australia. Peshut has numerous individual and collaborative publications, ranging from water quality management, toxicology, controlling air pollution and noise, managing solid wastes, and environmental assessments for interesting initiatives such as remediation of the sunken World War II fuel tanker USS Chehalis in Pago Pago Harbor.)