



Media Release

Public Affairs Office
U.S. Army Garrison, Hawaii
(808)656-3157/542-9489
“*Malama na Koa*”

Release number: 2009-09-06
September 25, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ARMY OBSERVES NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY

KAHANAHAIKI, Hawaii – Volunteers and Army staff are becoming one with nature in the Waianae Mountains, Sept. 26, in honor of National Public Lands Day.

Oahu Army Natural Resources Program (OANRP) staff and community volunteers are setting up the first phase of a field nursery designed to support the growth of *Acacia Koa* seedlings, here, in this forested gulch along the northwestern ridge of Makua Valley.

Koa trees are important, not only because they are native to the Kahanahaiki forest, but also because the Koa provides a home to many native Hawaiian forest birds and insect species. Koa is also an important food source for the Koa and the Kamehameha butterflies, Hawaii’s only native butterflies.

This project is a key part of a broader plan to repopulate one of the last areas of native mesic forest on Oahu. Field nurseries established on the outskirts of existing forest or adjacent to restoration sites can provide favorable conditions for the growth and spread of native plants.

“Currently the eco-system is dominated by introduced species of plants and trees,” said Kapua Kawelo, OANRP biologist, U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii Directorate of Public Works. “In order to make it a viable habitat for native plants and animals, we need to take an active role in restoring the native species to the area. The field nursery is a big step toward tipping the balance in favor of native species.”

The benefits of a field nursery are plentiful. Nursery plants are exposed to the same climate and insects as the restoration site, where they will eventually be replanted; the travel cost of relocating plants is limited or eliminated all together; and there is far less risk of bringing in new insect pests or pathogens to restoration areas.

The overall forest restoration project will help extend the valuable forest habitat of Kahanahaiki, which is currently home to at least seven endangered plant species and an endangered tree snail. Kahanahaiki is also a historically known habitat of the Oahu elepaio, a native fly catcher and one of Hawaii’s endangered birds.

-more-

NURSERY/2-2-2

In addition to the important natural resources found in the area, Kahanahaiki is a significant community resource. It is a source of culturally significant plants used by hula practitioners, lua (Hawaiian martial arts) and la'au lapa'au (traditional Hawaiian medicine). Members of these traditional Hawaiian arts collect native plants, utilizing conservation, and in exchange volunteer to care for the forests of Kahanahaiki throughout the year. Community volunteers are critical to the success of environmental projects, according to Kawelo.

“Because our small staff is actively engaged in the administrative processes of these types of projects, it is important to have volunteers who help us maintain consistency in the care of the area,” Kawelo said. “Ultimately volunteers help us complete projects, and they tell us that it is rewarding to be able to see the difference they are making.”

-30-

MEDIA NOTE: Media wishing to attend should R.S.V.P. to Loran Doane, USAG-HI Media Relations chief at preferred cell 317-847-2222, and meet Army escorts at Lyman Gate, Sept. 26, at 7:30 a.m. Media are advised that travel time to the site location is about 45 minutes each way, and involves a short but strenuous hike on mountainous terrain. The trek passes through heavy brush and wet slippery terrain, so appropriate footwear and clothing is advised. There is no drinking water on sight, so please bring along 2-4 liters of water for the duration of the trip.