

# Friends of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge



Volume VI, October 2010

## Congresswoman Mazie Hirono Visits the Hakalau Forest NWR

Dr Creighton M. Litton

In the June 2010 (Vol. V) issue of the FOHF Newsletter, we highlighted the recent legislation that Congresswoman Hirono (D-Hawaii) introduced to authorize the expansion of the Refuge (Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge Expansion Act of 2010, H.R. 5380), and shared a letter that the FOHF Board submitted outlining our strong support for this initiative. If signed into law, the legislation would add two adjacent parcels to the Refuge that contain native forest habitat that supports some of the most endangered forest birds in the world, helping to ensure that the Refuge can continue to contribute to the survival and recovery of Hawaiian forests and the native birds, plants, and insects that depend on them well into the future.

H.R. 5380 is currently in the initial stages of the legislative process, having been introduced by Congresswoman Hirono and referred to committee (House Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife). To track the progress of this legislation, see <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h111-5380>. Introduced bills first go to committees that deliberate, investigate, and revise them before they go to general debate. The last action on this bill was a subcommittee hearing on July 27, 2010. So keep your fingers crossed, provide testimony when the opportunity arises, and look to future FOHF newsletters to update you on the progress of this important legislation.

On September 1, 2010, Congresswoman Hirono and several of her staffers made a much anticipated visit to the Refuge. The Congresswoman participated in a helicopter tour of the Hakalau Unit, landing on the Pu'u Akala tract where she and her staff were briefed on the native plant restoration initiatives at the Refuge and provided the opportunity to do some

birding. This visit was important for a number of reasons, including the fact that it was the Congresswoman's first visit to the Refuge. In attendance were Hakalau Forest NWR staff, several members of The Nature Conservancy in Hawaii who are playing a key role in negotiating and facilitating the potential land acquisition and transfer, and Friends of Hakalau Board members. The weather was gorgeous, the company fantastic, and the trip was an outstanding success.



*Refuge Horticulturalist Baron Horiuchi discusses current outplanting work with Congresswoman Hirono, highlighting a recent shift towards enrichment plantings with understory native species in the restored Acacia koa forests.* Photo credits: USFWS.



Ron Needham (FOHF Member), Congresswoman Hirono, and Refuge Biologist Lance Koch scan the forest for native birds.  
Photo credits: USFWS.

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Group photo including Creighton Litton (FOHF Board), Jim Kraus (USFWS), Rob Shallenberger (TNC), Congresswoman Mazie Hirono, Ron Needham (FOHF Member), Mark Fox (TNC), Emily Needham (FOHF Board), Baron Horiuchi (USFWS), Lance Koch (USFWS), and Lorri Ellison (FOHF Member).  
Photo credits: USFWS.

**OPEN HOUSE! OPEN HOUSE! OPEN HOUSE!**

OPEN HOUSE for Hakalau Forest will be October 16<sup>th</sup> from 9 to 3:00 PM. If you're thinking of attending or just have questions, give the refuge a call: 808-443-2300. They will take your reservation and will provide information & directions to Pua Akala Tract. It's always a fun day in a beautiful place, so hope you can be there.

There will be available a whole new selection of Friends tee shirts, some free gifts for everyone, and special rewards for those who join our Friends group.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH

by Dr. Richard C. Wass

President "Friends of Hakalau Forest NWR"

**YES!!** After thousands of hours of effort over a four-year period, Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan is finally nearing completion. The CCP, which is mandated by Congress, will guide refuge management priorities and actions for the next 15 years. The plan is a good one and the "Preferred Alternative" is strongly supported by Friends of Hakalau Forest as evidenced by the following letter of comment to Refuge Manager Jim Kraus. The need for increased staff and resources to maintain fences, control feral ungulates and invasive weeds, outplant native understory species, coordinate volunteer activities, and to initiate active management within the Kona Forest Unit is also a major theme of the letter.

Dick Wass

To: Jim Kraus, Refuge Manager

September 15, 2010

From: Friends of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge

Re: Comments on Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

Dear Mr. Kraus:

The Friends of Hakalau Forest (FOHF) is a private, nonprofit organization that brings together people interested in and supportive of the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) and its mission "to protect and manage endangered Hawaiian forest birds and their rain forest habitat". Our 131 members represent diverse views, experiences, and expertise, and include people that have been involved with the Refuge since its establishment 25 years ago. We welcome this opportunity to comment on the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge.

Because our primary mission is to support the purposes, goals and mission of the Refuge, we have been following the CCP and EA quite intensively over the past few years. You will recall that we sent you a letter on July 9, 2009 containing several recommended actions for inclusion in the plan. Thank you for studying that letter and for addressing many of our recommendations in the current draft.

The primary purpose of this letter is to state our view that *Alternative B*, the "preferred" alternative, is the best course of action for the future of the Refuge. Furthermore, we believe the Refuge needs substantial increases in staffing to effectively implement this or the other alternatives including the no action alternative calling only for continuance of existing management activities.

All three of the proposed alternatives incorporate an important and common set of management objectives (i.e., habitat restoration, ungulate-proof boundary fencing, adaptive management, integrated pest management, permanent full-time staffing additions, etc.). However, *Preferred Alternative B* would provide increased greenhouse capability and full native forest restoration including greater emphasis on endangered plants and common understory species. The initial outplanting emphasis was on koa trees but the time has come to focus on other species to ultimately re-create the diverse native forest that existed 200 years ago. Additional areas of both units would be protected through fencing which would facilitate increased ungulate removal and invasive plant control efforts. Additional opportunities for outreach and environmental education and interpretation would occur. The very

letter, cont.

successful volunteer program at HFU would continue and a similar program would be initiated at KFU, resulting in some visitor access for that unit. While public hunting has not occurred on the Refuge since 2000, public hunting would be formally closed. The limited public hunting program on the HFU that occurred during the early years may have had some initial value in reducing pig populations but the potential damage to recovered habitat and the risk of new weed introductions has become too great to consider further public hunting. Moreover, ungulate control can be accomplished more efficiently through use of other methods by staff and contractors.

The Refuge staff has accomplished an impressive job of reforestation, primarily utilizing volunteers on weekends. In addition to reforestation efforts, a critical focal area has been the fencing of large tracts of relatively intact native forest and the eradication of feral cattle and pigs. These fences, along with the proposed new fences in the CCP, require continual maintenance to ensure their fidelity and the exclusion of nonnative ungulates. Invasive weeds such as gorse, blackberry, banana poka and Christmas berry also need constant attention as they are continually re-introduced from adjoining state and private lands. Comprehensive management of the Refuge, including following the current management plan (*Alternative A*), requires substantial increases in permanent, full-time staffing. A few years ago, when the 45 miles of ungulate fencing on the HFU were well maintained, ungulate populations within fenced units were zero or nearly so, and gorse, blackberry, banana poka and other weed infestations were well controlled, the refuge staff consisted of 14 individuals including two at KFU. Staff size has since declined to where there are currently only seven employees to manage the 32,700 acre HFU and no staff dedicated solely to the 5,300 acre KFU. This has resulted in the return of substantial pig numbers to areas declared “pig-free” a few years ago and weed infestations are spreading again. We strongly endorse the plan to hire eight additional employees for the HFU and ten more employees as intensive management is initiated at the KFU. The additional positions are clearly needed to support new fence construction, ungulate control and invasive weed removal, particularly within the KFU. We are especially pleased with the plan to hire Park Ranger/Volunteer Coordinators for the HFU and the KFU. These positions will provide much-needed assistance for the active volunteer forest restoration program and valuable coordination for partners such as FOHF.

In summary, FOHF strongly supports the *Preferred Alternative B* and the Refuge’s need for additional staff to accomplish current conservation actions and those planned under *Alternative B*. We look forward to additional cooperative efforts with the Refuge as we work together toward ever more effective and sustainable conservation and management of Hawaii’s unique and endangered biota. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

*Richard C. Wass*, President

Friends of Hakalau Forest NWR

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## WHAT'S UP - AT HAKALAU FOREST

Lorri Ellison

THE NENE are starting to return to the refuge. They should be pairing in the next few months and nesting later in the year. You might be able to get a good photo of them during Open House; they are certainly a bit easier to photograph than the elusive smaller forest birds.

REFORESTATION efforts have been suspended since mid July due to low rainfall. Baron Horiuchi reports there has been some fog and mist but not enough to begin out-planting quite yet. Early in 2010 the decision was to not plant koa trees but to begin concentrating on non-endangered native trees and understory plants. To date, despite this lingering drought, 8,500 non-endangered natives were planted by Baron and refuge volunteers!

WATER remains a critical issue for all of the refuge and especially the greenhouse operation. This has been an exceedingly dry year. If there is no rainfall soon, water will have to be hauled from the refuge's Pua Akala Tract for greenhouse use. So where is that greenhouse water tank the Friends were working on? Well, there's news & an update just below.

A CHALLENGE COST SHARE GRANT with FWS will provide 50% of the greenhouse water tank cost! Yes, refuge manager Jim Kraus wrote and received a FWS grant with Friends of Hakalau Forest being the refuge's 50% partner. Each will provide \$7,500 in the construction costs for the water tank. To all Friends members MAHALO for making this possible and certainly MAHALO to those of you who contributed to the water tank fund. The fund total is \$5,218 and the balance (\$2,282) will come from Friends of Hakalau's unencumbered funds. Presently the necessary paperwork prior to construction is done with the exception of a few more signatures. So the greenhouse water tank is close to becoming a reality. The tank site is on the Mauna Kea summit side of the greenhouse. Look for signs of construction when you visit during Open House; hopefully you just may see some "on the ground" progress!

THE DRAFT COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN & ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT - What is this all about? It is a comprehensive plan that provides vision, goals and strategies for management activities on & for Hakalau Forest NWR. It will guide the management of wildlife, plants, habitats and [various] public uses for a period of 15 years which makes it an important document for all concerned with the refuge. It is quite an enormous undertaking and if you haven't seen nor heard from refuge manager Jim Kraus, it's because he's been working incredibly long hours to meet deadlines for this document. Planning Update 3 for Hakalau Forest NWR just finished the public review and comment period on September 15<sup>th</sup> and the final CCP was approved and signed by Acting Regional Director Richard Hannan on Sept 30<sup>th</sup>. HOORAH!

We also completed the **Preliminary Project Proposal (PPP)** for our America's Great Outdoors initiative which is basically an expansion plan that coincides with the Hirono legislative proposal. This is a prerequisite for any acquisition that may occur.

NEW HIRES FOR THE VACANT PEST CONTROL (MAINTENANCE CREW). Two hires started on Oct 4<sup>th</sup> (Kawika Waxman and Tristan Ressurreccion), and two more will start in the near future. These folks maintain the fences, control invasive plants and do much of the routine maintenance on the refuge. Now we will have a crew again in the field on a continual basis dealing with fence and ungulate issues!

ANOTHER REASON TO CELEBRATE - Hakalau Forest NWR was established in 1985 to protect and manage endangered Hawaiian forest birds and their rain forest habitat. The 32,733-acre Hakalau Forest Unit supports a diversity of native birds and plants equaled by only one or two other areas in the State of Hawai'i. **It will be 25 years old on this month so come to the Open House and get a slice of celebratory cake!**

Membership Application: **Friends of Hakalau Forest NWR**

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Contributions gratefully accepted and are tax-deductable)*

**Annual membership dues:**

Student  \$10. Senior  \$10. Individual  \$25. Family  \$35. Sponsor  \$100. Corporate  \$250.

New Membership:

Renewal:  (please circle) with / without information changes from last membership.

Donation:  (please circle) with / without membership at this time.

Tribute:  In honor of \_\_\_\_\_.

Tribute is regarding \_\_\_\_\_.

Membership \$\_\_\_\_\_ + Donation \$\_\_\_\_\_ + Tribute \_\_\_\_\_ = **Total** \_\_\_\_\_.

*Please make checks payable to Friends of Hakalau Forest NWR & mail to:*

Friends of Hakalau Forest NWR, P.O. Box 6065; Hilo, Hawaii 96720

Periodically the Friends of Hakalau Forest NWR sends out a newsletter and updates via e-mail. We are grateful for you allowing us to send these by e-mail as it saves money, time and paper. For those who do not have e-mail we will send by regular mail and for those who would prefer nothing be mailed/e-mailed *please indicate by checking below.*

Please do not send newsletters and updates.

I do not have e-mail and need to have correspondence sent to my mailing address.

Please send to me by e-mail. This way more of my contribution will go to the Refuge.

Care to help out? We'd be happy to have you participate!

Volunteer Interests: (please circle)

- Memberships' Database      Fundraising      Special Events      Outreach
- Newsletter      Grant Writing      Public Speaking      Education      Publicity
- Website Design-Maintenance      Accounting      Interpretive Trail Maintenance
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_.

Questions? Suggestions? Write to us at: P.O Box 6065, Hilo HI 96720 or [friendsofhakalauforest@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofhakalauforest@gmail.com)