

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
Division of Forestry and Wildlife  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

September 28, 2012

Chairperson and Members  
Board of Land and Natural Resources  
State of Hawaii  
Honolulu, Hawaii

Land Board Members:

**SUBJECT:** REQUEST APPROVAL OF THE KA'Ū FOREST RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN, ACCEPTANCE OF THE FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE SUBJECT PLAN AND ISSUANCE OF A FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR THE PROPOSED PROJECT, TMKs (3) 9-7-001:001, 009, 013, 014, 015, 016, 017, 018, 019, 020, 021, 022; 9-6-006:009, 010, 015, 018; and 9-5-015:003 (por.), Hawai'i.

**SUMMARY:**

This submittal requests the Board approve a management plan for the Ka'ū Forest Reserve (Reserve), accept the Final Environmental Assessment (FEA) for the subject plan and approve the issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the project.

The Division of Forestry and Wildlife (Division) has prepared a management plan (the Plan) for the 61,641-acre Ka'ū Forest Reserve. The Plan is one in a series of site-specific plans to be prepared by the Division for individual forest reserves in the State of Hawai'i. These plans present a brief history of the specific forest reserve, a description of cultural and natural resources, and proposed management actions for the area. The Plan responds to a need to maintain and restore key watershed, preserve a unique ecosystem with critically endangered plants and animals, perpetuate natural resources vital to Hawaiian culture and practices, find a suitable site to reintroduce 'Alalā or Hawaiian Crow into the wild, and provide for continued and expanded public use.

A copy of the FEA, prepared by Geometrician Associates LLC., with attached Ka'ū Forest Reserve Management Plan has been separately provided to the Board Members. A copy of both these documents will be posted on the Land Board Website.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Division has management responsibility for the 61,641-acre Reserve as part of the State Forest Reserve System, which was created by the Territorial Government of Hawai'i through Act 44 on April 25, 1903. The more than 630,000 acres of land in the Forest Reserve System are

managed under the guidance of the Hawai‘i State Constitution, Hawai‘i Revised Statutes (Chapter 183) and associated Hawai‘i Administrative Rules (Chapter 104). Through these directives, the Division focuses its resources to protect, manage, restore, and monitor the natural resources of the Forest Reserve System. The Reserve was established by Governor’s Proclamation on August 2, 1906 to protect the forest on the lower slopes of Mauna Loa, with particular regard for water supply of the agricultural lands of Ka‘ū.

The Reserve is located in the Ka‘ū District on the southeastern side of the island of Hawai‘i, extending in elevation from about 2,000 to 7,000 feet above sea level. The nearest towns are Pāhala, Nā‘ālehu and Wai‘ōhinu. The properties involved are identified by Tax Map Keys: (3rd.) 9-7-001:001, 009, 013, 014, 015, 016, 017, 018, 019, 020, 021, 022; 9-6-006:009, 010, 015, 018; and 9-5-015:003 (por.).

The Division has identified the following key needs related to the Reserve:

- *Need to maintain and restore key watershed.* The Reserve is a critical watershed for the people of Ka‘ū. Water sources in the Reserve are used for domestic supplies as well as agriculture, and maintaining this water supply is important for the future viability of agriculture in Ka‘ū. The native forest replenishes springs and other groundwater, and reduces flooding and erosion. The water resources of Ka‘ū are threatened by invasive species of animals and plants, which degrade the native forest. Ungulates such as cattle, pigs, and mouflon sheep as well as invasive plants damage the native vegetation and soil, and lead to reduced quantity and quality of water.
- *Need to preserve a unique ecosystem with critically endangered plants and animals.* The Reserve is important for preserving Hawaii’s unique native forest ecosystems and its species. These include a wide variety of rare or endangered plants and animals. Survival and recovery of these rare native plants and animals depend upon preservation of habitat by reducing impacts from threats such as ungulates, disease-bearing mosquitoes and other invasive insects, non-native predators, introduced diseases and invasive plants.
- *Need to perpetuate natural resources vital to Hawaiian culture and practices.* The Reserve contains resources that are vital for maintaining Hawaiian culture and practices. Hawaiians considered native plants and animals as family and have a strong spiritual connection to the mountain landscape and the forest itself. Gathering plants such as ferns, maile, flowers, fruits, and other lei-making materials cannot be perpetuated into the future unless the forest ecosystem remains relatively pristine.
- *Need for suitable site to reintroduce ‘Alalā into the wild.* Up until the 1970s the Reserve supported the ‘Alalā (*Corvus hawaiiensis*). The ‘Alalā is listed as endangered and the species is extinct in the wild. The entire population of less than 100 birds is housed in two captive breeding facilities, making the ‘Alalā one of the rarest birds in existence. The ‘Alalā was restricted to the forests in the western and southern portions of the island, associated with ‘ōhi‘a and ‘ōhi‘a-koa forests with an understory of native fruit-bearing trees and shrubs. This understory is essential to the survival of the ‘Alalā in the wild, providing food as well as cover from natural predators such as ‘Io. The ‘Alalā Recovery Team has identified the Reserve as one of the high priority sites to restore this rare bird.
- *Need to provide for continued and expanded public use, especially for residents of the Ka‘ū District.* The Reserve is an important area for public use that includes hunting, recreational opportunities, cultural uses, personal gathering, and educational programs

and activities. There is currently limited public access to much of this large area, and existing access needs to be maintained as well as improved by working with adjacent landowners to provide additional access, particularly across State-leased and private land below the Reserve.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Based upon the identified management needs in the area, the general purposes of the Plan are to develop management actions for general and specific areas that protect and restore the watershed and native species as vital natural and cultural resources. The Plan describes the natural resources found in the Reserve, identifies the threats to those resources, and proposes management actions to address threats and better protect the area. Proposed management activities will benefit watershed, native forest ecosystems and unique native species as well as the people who use the area for recreation and cultural practices. The following management actions would be undertaken throughout or in selected parts of the Reserve as part of a 15 year management plan for this area:

- Fence management areas in an approximately 12,000 acre portion of the Reserve and remove feral and introduced ungulates from within fenced management areas for watershed and native ecosystem health.
- Remove high priority non-native, invasive plants.
- Implement non-native predator control.
- Restore 'Alalā to the wild.
- Continue forest bird surveys to assess changes in bird population and distribution.
- Survey and inventory rare native plants and animals (including insects and snails).
- Improve habitat and recover rare and endangered plants by propagation and re-introduction of plants into appropriately fenced and protected habitat.
- Maintain existing public access roads and develop new routes to increase access, particularly across private and state-leased lands below the Reserve.
- Continue to facilitate public hunting in the Reserve by developing new access routes to increase hunter access.
- Develop trails and recreational amenities.
- Hire outreach staff and work with partners to provide outreach and education (e.g. volunteer service trips, student internships, and school programs) for the community to enhance public understanding of the Reserve's unique native forest.
- Respond to fires, as needed.
- Monitor forest for insects and disease and conduct other management as required (control of damaging insects, slugs, and/or plant disease).
- Consider environmentally and socially appropriate ways to make the Reserve economically self-supporting to support protection and management.
- Work with adjacent private landowners on cooperative management to make better use of limited funding and resources and more effectively manage interconnected landscapes.

## ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Four alternatives are evaluated in the draft environmental assessment (DEA).

1. No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, the actions described in the Ka'ū Forest Reserve Management Plan would not be undertaken. General management would continue under the status quo, although a variety of new, minor actions that do not require compliance with Chapter 343, HRS, might also be undertaken on a piecemeal basis. The environmental assessment considers the No Action Alternative as the baseline by which to compare environmental effects from the project.

2. Action Alternatives: Three possible fenced area alternatives are considered, each comprising roughly 12,000 acres, which differ only in the location of the fenced management areas. In each alternative, the Division would subdivide the total fenced area into units of 2,000 to 4,000 acres. These would be fenced over time, as funding becomes available.

*Alternative A:* Implementation of all management actions, with fencing of approximately 12,000 acres of the southwestern portion of the Reserve above 4,000 to 4,500 feet in elevation.

*Alternative B:* Implementation of all management actions, with fencing of approximately 12,000 acres of the central portion of the Reserve above about 4,500 to 5,000 feet in elevation.

*Alternative C:* Implementation of all management actions, with fencing of approximately 12,000 acres of the northeastern portion of the Reserve above 4,500 to 5,000 feet in elevation.

The Division has selected Alternative B of the Plan for implementation because it offers the following:

- Provides habitat for rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species and only contains limited weeds
- A diversity of forest types including wet and mesic 'ōhi'a, and wet and mesic koa forests
- A highly suitable location for introduction of the 'Alalā, with an intact forest canopy, availability of preferred food plants, and accessibility for release, monitoring and care of released birds, as well as sufficient remoteness to help minimize human disturbance and edge effect
- Relatively abundant rare and endangered native birds such as Ākepa, Hawai'i Creepers, 'I'iwi, and 'Akiapōlā'au
- Fencing is already built on one side
- Relatively little reported use by hunters
- Potential partnership opportunities with two Nature Conservancy properties and two Kamehameha Schools properties, the most of any alternative

Several other alternatives were considered in the DEA and dismissed from further consideration, including larger areas for fencing and ungulate removal (e.g. entire Reserve, a combination of all the action alternatives). These alternatives were dismissed because costs would be far greater than the resources the Division believes will be available for the project over the next 15 years. Additionally, consultation indicated widespread community concerns over hunting impacts if the entire upper half of the Reserve or entire Reserve were fenced within 15 years.

## IMPACT OF ACTION ALTERNATIVES

The Action Alternatives were evaluated with respect to their potential effects to the valued environmental components, which include biological resources, geology, climate, soil erosion, watersheds, agriculture, economy, cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, recreation, public health and scenic resources.

### *Biological Resources*

Impacts to biological resources (flora and fauna) were evaluated and determined that the overall impact under all three action alternatives would be beneficial. Specific elements of the project such as fencing, ungulate removal, surveys, mapping, monitoring, propagating and reintroduction of rare plants and birds are aimed at directly benefitting biological resources. As indicated by prior monitoring for rare plants as well as planned training of crews, avoidance of sensitive areas and diligence during operations, negative impacts from fence construction, weed control and establishment of trails, shelters or other facilities will be limited and temporary. There are minor potential impacts to native species associated with the Plan, particularly the actions related to increasing agency and public access.

### *Wildfire, Pests and Disease*

Implementation of any of the three alternatives would provide substantial benefits in terms of reducing the effects of wildfire, pests and disease. The Plan includes specific management objectives meant to counteract the adverse effects of wildfire, pests and disease; including monitoring weather that could lead to fire and responding to fires. Management actions to protect watershed values and native ecosystems will maintain the overall health of the forest, which will make the forest more resistant to threats from fire, insects and disease, and there will be increased early warning monitoring activities in the Reserve for insects and disease.

### *Geology, Climate, Soil Erosion and Watersheds*

The three action alternatives include specific management objectives meant to preserve and enhance the watershed values of the Reserve. Each alternative would provide substantial watershed benefit, and each involves areas with considerable active or potential use of water from springs and tunnels. Actions proposed such as feral cattle removal and fencing and feral ungulate removal will maximize the watershed value of the area, reduce soil erosion/exposed soil, increase absorption and the yield from springs and tunnels, and reduce flooding potential. Any impacts of the three alternatives to geology and climate would not be significant or negative.

### *Agriculture and Economy*

Each alternative would provide benefits to watershed values, which will positively impact agriculture and the economy. No economic analysis has ever been done to determine the value of watershed services provided by the Reserve. However, most of the agriculture in Ka'ū, including coffee, macadamia nuts, and ranching, depends on a steady supply of water from the springs and tunnels in the Reserve.

### *Cultural Resources*

Keala Pono Archaeological Consulting prepared a comprehensive Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA) for the project. The CIA identified potential cultural impacts identified by participants for

the action alternatives, which included concerns about lifestyle changes, restricted access, excessive or inappropriate access, and the importance of watershed management.

The Division has analyzed the potential for impacts to archaeological sites. Management actions will likely not affect any significant historic properties for several reasons. The actions (primarily fencing) are proposed for areas in remote, heavily vegetated upper elevation rainforest terrain with no known archaeological or historic sites. They are limited in scope and involve minimal ground disturbance. Although the precise locations for proposed actions such as fencing, trails and 'Alalā management structures have not been finalized, these locations are flexible. Should any historic resources be found in the field, projects can be relocated to avoid disturbance.

The Reserve's native Hawaiian ecosystems and species are an essential part of the overall cultural-historical landscape. Protection and enhancement of the long-term survival of the natural resources in the Reserve through proposed management is the primary means to protect this valued cultural landscape.

#### *Socioeconomic Conditions, Hunting and Recreation*

Each action alternative would involve benefits for all recreational users, including hunters. Positive impacts include increased access, additional trails and other recreational facilities, and coordination with residents, neighboring landowners, and the National Park to leverage efforts to improve recreational opportunities. The sustainable use of natural resources for gathering will be enhanced by protection of native forest ecosystems through fencing, feral ungulate control and weed control. Public access would not be restricted under any of the proposed alternatives. There would be negative impacts to hunting in all alternatives because proposed management would fence and remove ungulates from management units, resulting in a loss of total available hunting area in each action alternative. The Plan includes opportunities for public hunters to assist with the removal of feral pig and sheep from fenced, management units.

Impacts of the alternatives to socioeconomic conditions include positive impacts such as protection of many of the resources of the Reserve, particularly water important to the agricultural economy in the region and protection of culturally important plants for gathering. Negative impacts include reductions of area available for subsistence hunting.

#### *Scenic Resources*

Implementation of the Plan would help restore and preserve the native vegetation of the Reserve which will positively impact scenic resources. It would also provide additional accesses and trails and other facilities to enable users to enjoy different vantages and vistas.

### MITIGATION MEASURES

There are no substantial differences in mitigation measures among alternatives.

#### *Biological Resources (Flora and Fauna)*

- For actions with potential to harm habitat or rare species: Prior monitoring for presence of sensitive species, crew training, and consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- For any action with potential to disturb plants: Prior monitoring for rare plants, crew

training, and adjusted alignment to avoid removing large native trees.

- For forest disturbance: Narrow fence corridor to avoid vegetation disturbance.
- For weed control: combination of control techniques (manual, mechanical and herbicides) to be based on target species, area sensitivity, and effectiveness of control technique(s). Herbicide use will follow labeling requirements and all biocontrol agents will be approved.
- For control of weed plants: Establish protocols for cleaning of boots, equipment and vehicles.
- For public use: focused education on native plants, weeds, etc., in brochures, kiosks, website and boot cleaning stations at trailhead.
- For bats: no barbed wire fencing, and avoid clearing large trees during pupping season.
- For non-native animal control: Use of toxic baits done in accordance with toxicant registration using approved baits with a low toxicity to non-target wildlife, enclosed bait stations to limit the availability of bait blocks to rodents only.

*Wildfire, Pests and Disease* - Management actions to protect watershed values and native ecosystems are actions that will reduce threats from fire, insects and disease.

*Geology, Climate, Soil Erosion and Watersheds* - Management actions protect watershed and prevent erosion.

- For actions with potential to disturb substantial soil areas: Best Management Practices to prevent erosion and sedimentation and conformance with Chapter 27, County Code.
- Consider warning signs emplaced at trailheads to advise potential users about geologic hazards and flooding.

*Agriculture and Economy* - The Division will work with water users to conduct environmentally sound repair, maintenance and use of the water sources.

#### *Cultural Resources*

- Implement actions in such a way as to maintain the local character, control, and involvement, or “Keep Ka‘ū, Ka‘ū.”
- Maintain local residents’ access to all areas of the Reserve; educate public about existing accesses and to provide appropriate and secure access *makai* of Reserve.
- Work with local residents to monitor access in order to prevent inappropriate access and provide security and sense of community stewardship.
- Work with cultural practitioners to find permanent solutions for gathering permit issues.
- Use local hunters as part of the first steps when removing pigs from a management unit.
- Look at establishing native plant nurseries in Ka‘ū to generate local employment and involvement and ensure the appropriateness of outplanted plants.
- Provide education to children (through schools and youth programs) and the general public to encourage involvement in forest management, incorporating volunteer opportunities to allow communities to be integral part of the management team.
- Maintain the Division’s presence in Ka‘ū.
- Ensure that no impacts will occur to archaeological sites. If evidence of past human activity is observed during fencing or other activities with the potential to disturb sites, Division staff will contact the State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD) and report

findings. SHPD will assist in determining age, function and significance of findings and determining appropriate mitigation. If findings are determined to have, or potentially have, traditional cultural value, the Division will consult with Native Hawaiian Organizations and knowledgeable individuals.

*Socio-Economic Conditions, Hunting and Recreation*

- Maintain and improve public access for recreational uses, hunting, and traditional and cultural practices by developing easements, land acquisition or public access agreements with adjacent landowners, with particular attention when private lands *makai* of and adjacent to the Reserve are sold and/or developed.
- Work cooperatively with National Park Service on additional trails and access routes through Park.
- Work with community to get additional input on development of and appropriate locations for additional recreational amenities for the Reserve, such as picnic and camping areas, trail development and public cabins/shelters.

*Scenic Resources* - No mitigation is warranted as the Plan improves visual quality.

*Secondary and Cumulative* - The Division will monitor hunter reports and determine whether additional actions might be necessary to acquire and/or manage non-sensitive land in Ka'ū for hunting.

*Consistency with Plans and Policies* - No mitigation is warranted as the Plan is consistent.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Division incorporated the involvement of the public and partner organizations throughout the plan development and compliance process. Public outreach has been conducted through formal early consultation letters, a series of several dozen informal meetings, and phone/communications with parties who have inquired about the project. The Division, its partners and its consultants contacted approximately thirty-seven agencies, organizations and individuals by mail, email or phone during early consultation (complete list of individuals and organizations contacted are included in the FEA).

In addition, consultation included six all-day field trips with several dozen hunters and general community members in order to share information about the project area and its resources and the proposed actions.

Cultural consultation included mailing of an early consultation letter to SHPD, Office of Hawaiian Affairs and other organizations. Additionally, the preparation of the CIA included interviews with community members.

The draft environmental assessment for the Ka'ū Forest Reserve Management Plan was published in the Office of Environmental Quality Control (OEQC) Bulletin of May 23, 2012. DOFAW issued a press release on May 23, 2012 that was published in numerous print and on-line media outlets announcing availability of the DEA and requesting comments. A public meeting was held June 2, 2012 in Na'alehu to provide information on the project and get additional public input.

The FEA includes copies of all written comments received in response to the DEA during the 30-day comment period as well as the responses of the Division to each letter.

### SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

The Division received 64 written comments on the DEA for the Plan during the public comment period and prepared responses for all comments. All written comments and complete responses are included in the FEA. The following provides a brief summary of the major comments received and responses provided grouped in general themes:

**Theme:** Support for the management plan and protection and management of watershed, native species and ecosystems.

**Response:** Thank you for your support and comments.

**Theme:** The scale of the Plan is not adequate to protect and restore native ecosystems, species and the watershed; the Division should be fencing and removing ungulates from a much larger area (e.g. entire Reserve, various combinations of the three action alternatives, and other alternatives including more area, lower elevations and greater elevational range).

**Response:** The Division acknowledges that environmental degradation is likely to continue in areas not protected by fencing and ungulate control, which will have adverse impacts on watershed, native ecosystems and species. However, fencing and removing ungulates from the roughly 12,000 acres within the rugged and heavily vegetated preferred alternative area is a very large and expensive undertaking over the time frame of the Plan. Implementing the preferred alternative will have significant beneficial impacts to watershed, important ecosystems and protected species. The Division works with limited financial resources and must evaluate the use of these funds throughout the State of Hawai‘i in such a way to maximize benefits and minimize losses to other areas. Implementing a larger alternative would ultimately involve a tradeoff for management of critical resources elsewhere in the State.

**Theme:** The Reserve should be managed for the protection of watershed and native species instead of being used to provide public hunting to a small percentage of the public.

**Response:** The Division will be managing the Reserve for the primary purposes of watershed and native species protection. Implementing the preferred alternative does not limit the Division from implementing additional conservation actions in the future. Many residents of Ka‘ū expressed concerns over alternatives that propose a large fencing and ungulate removal project that may limit other uses in the Reserve at this time. If the proposed project proceeds as planned, the Division believes that monitoring will demonstrate to the community the positive benefits to watershed and native species and minimal impacts to hunting. If this occurs, many residents may be more supportive of additional forest protection.

**Theme:** Hunting bag limits and restrictions in the Reserve should be removed as there should not be take restrictions in a conservation area.

**Response:** Hunting restrictions in the Reserve are already liberal with hunting allowed year round, daily with no season limits and all means of take. Management goals for lands under the jurisdiction of the Division are identified in the draft management guidelines, which are now more than 10 years old and in need of revision. The draft management guidelines provide

direction on appropriate activities and uses, particularly those with conflicting resource demands or user groups. The Division prefers to defer changes to the bag limits for the Reserve until the draft management guidelines have been revised in order to ensure consistency with those revised plans.

**Theme:** It is important to have recreational access for hikers, campers and all forest users (concerns about restrictions to public access)

**Response:** The Division supports recreational uses of the Reserve, and will continue to emphasize low-impact activities and minimal improvements to infrastructure that are consistent with its remote, wilderness nature. Low-impact activities have minimal impacts on natural resources and watershed health, and include activities such as hiking, hunting, camping and gathering for personal use. Currently there are no designated trails or camping areas within the Reserve; however, these types of recreational amenities may be appropriate in certain areas of the Reserve. Ka'ū residents indicated a high interest in additional recreational amenities and have been incorporated in the management plan. Expanded public use of the Reserve may include establishing picnic/camping areas and public cabins/shelters, new access routes for four-wheel drive access (using existing roads), and re-establishing historic connecting trails.

**Theme:** The Division should prepare a programmatic environmental assessment (PEA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the project.

**Response:** The intention of Chapter 343, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is to provide a forum for public input and to evaluate environmental impacts during the planning process of a project, thus the Division believes that the DEA for the Ka'ū Forest Reserve Management Plan is in line with the intent and requirements of the law and a PEA and/or EIS are not required. The project actions as described in the DEA are defined to the greatest extent possible and the Division has identified specific regions within the Forest Reserve for the proposed actions; this allows us to adequately account for potential impacts, evaluate their significance, and propose mitigation measures as needed. The Division has used the most recently available information and knowledge to evaluate the potential environmental, economic and cultural impacts of the project and found that none of them are significant.

**Theme:** Concern/opposition to fencing and ungulate control and any restriction on hunting in Reserve for various reasons (gathering rights, ungulates a natural resource that should be preserved, ungulates are not a threat to native ecosystems, etc)

**Response:** The Division is entrusted with managing the natural resources of the Forest Reserve System, which are primarily center on watershed protection. Management actions proposed for the Reserve are widely accepted practices for protecting and restoring watershed health, native forest habitat and species from threats such as feral ungulates and invasive species. The preferred alternative leaves approximately 80 percent of the Reserve open for hunting use. Locations for fencing and ungulate management were chosen in areas where few hunters currently access due to the remoteness of the site in order to minimize any significant impact to major hunting areas. Impacts to hunters will be mitigated by increasing access to large portions of the Reserve still available for hunting and by involving hunters in ungulate removal activities.

**Theme:** Concern about reintroduction of the 'Alalā - should be introduced elsewhere or not at all because it is bound to fail and will restrict other uses of the Reserve.

**Response:** The Division is charged with carrying out programs for the conservation, management, and protection of endangered species and their associated ecosystems. The ‘Alalā is a state and federally listed endangered species that is extinct in the wild. The state currently manages approximately 100 birds in captivity at two breeding facilities. Reintroduction into the wild is recommended in the Revised Recovery Plan for the ‘Alalā with the recovery goal being restoration of multiple self-sustaining populations within its historical range and to ultimately delist the ‘Alalā. The recovery plan further recommends identifying suitable habitat, managing threats and establishing new populations. The Reserve was chosen as a potential reintroduction site for ‘Alalā because it historically supported ‘Alalā and contains the appropriate forest type and size.

Reintroduction of captive-reared birds is an active area of conservation research and often requires multiple attempts and innovation before success is achieved (‘Alalā Recovery Plan). Analysis of past releases indicate that a successful release site will require fencing a management area and removing ungulates to protect existing forest and enhance regeneration of understory vegetation; erecting holding or release aviaries at release sites; predator control; restoring food plants of the ‘Alalā at the release site; and control of invasive species.

The public benefit of reintroducing the ‘Alalā is addressed in Hawai‘i Revised Statutes (HRS) 195D Conservation of Aquatic Life, Wildlife, and Land Plants. HRS 195D states “all indigenous species of aquatic life, wildlife, and land plants are integral parts of Hawaii's native ecosystems and comprise the living heritage of Hawai‘i, for they represent a natural resource of scientific, cultural, educational, environmental, and economic value to future generations of Hawaii's people... To insure the continued perpetuation of indigenous aquatic life, wildlife, and land plants, and their habitats for human enjoyment, for scientific purposes, and as members of ecosystems, it is necessary that the State take positive actions to enhance their prospects for survival.”

**Theme:** Concern about insufficient public involvement of people from Ka‘ū and/or statewide.

**Response:** Initial feedback on the proposed project was obtained through pre-consultation letters, several dozen informal meetings with community groups or members, field trips and phone communications with parties who inquired about the project. The list of individuals and organizations consulted is included in the FEA. The DEA process, early consultation and public comment period, provided the public a venue for input and recommendations. The Division received numerous valuable suggestions and staff will continue to seek community input informally as planned actions are further developed.

**Theme:** Reserve should be made into a cooperative game management area and managed sustainably for ungulates/hunting; concern that there is no game management plan.

**Response:** The Division develops and revises an operational game management plan every five years as part of its use of federal Wildlife Restoration funds and that plan includes activities conducted in the Reserve. The plan is made available for public comment every five years. The plan will be posted on the Division’s web page so that it may be readily accessible to interested parties. The plan identifies objectives and specific tasks for each district and provides detailed budgets and schedules of activities. The Division does acknowledge the need for strategic and site specific management planning for game birds and mammals. The department also notes, however, that the Endangered Species Act (1973, as amended, 16 U.S.C. § 1531-1543) prohibits

the use of federal funds for activities that would adversely affect species listed as threatened or endangered, and state law (Chapter 195D, Hawai‘i Revised Statutes) prohibits any actions that result in “take” of species that are listed as threatened or endangered by the state or federal government. Activities that increase the survival or reproductive success of game mammals that kill endangered plants may be considered take under those laws. Therefore, the Division does not conduct management activities designed to increase the survival or reproductive success of game mammals in areas where those activities are likely to result in take of listed species, unless legal authorization for such activities has been obtained. The Reserve supports many listed species that may be impacted by game mammals and is an area in which enhancement of game mammal survival and reproductive success is inconsistent with state and federal laws and Department management policy. Game mammal management goals in the Reserve include efforts to enhance public hunting opportunities whenever safe, feasible, and effective. This is accomplished through the establishment of liberal hunting conditions and measures designed to increase access to the hunting areas.

#### DISCUSSION:

The Division of Forestry and Wildlife has reviewed the DEA for the subject project as well as the comments received during the 30-day public comment period, and anticipates a FONSI determination. Proposed actions in the Ka‘ū Forest Reserve Management Plan are expected to have primarily positive effects on the environment. No significant adverse effects to the biological resources, geology, climate, soil erosion, watersheds, agriculture, economy, cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, recreation, public health and scenic resources are anticipated.

The Division is conducting ongoing planning efforts to develop and update management plans for various forest reserves statewide. Management plans are intended to be consistent across the State and serve to organize field management, assist in budgeting and funding concerns, and to incorporate the involvement of the public and partner organizations.

The Division will periodically prepare management plans for Board review and approval. Board approval of the Ka‘ū Forest Reserve Management Plan is intended to trigger some or all of the following actions:

1. Division efforts to secure operational and planning funding for plan objectives.
2. Prioritized implementation of plan objectives by the Division.
3. Periodic solicitation of requests for proposals or bids for implementation of plan objectives, including issuance of permits, licenses, or contracts (Hawai‘i Administrative Rules §13-104-22), as necessary.

The planning and compliance documents prepared for Reserve conform with the purpose of the Forest Reserve System and the Ka‘ū Forest Reserve, in particular as stated in Hawai‘i Revised Statutes (Chapter 183) and associated Hawai‘i Administrative Rules (Chapter 104), to protect, manage, restore, and monitor the resources of Forest Reserve System for the public benefit.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Board of Land and Natural Resources:

1. Approve the Ka'ū Forest Reserve Management Plan as a guiding document for the management of the subject reserve.
2. Accept the Final Environmental Assessment for the Ka'ū Forest Reserve Management Plan.
3. Based on review of the Final Environmental Assessment and the comments received during the 30-day public comment period and the Division of Forestry and Wildlife's responses, find that the project will not have a significant effect on the environmental, economic and/or cultural resources of the area and approve the issuance of a finding of no significant impact for the proposed project.
4. Authorize the Chairperson to publish a finding of no significant impact for the proposed project in the Office of Environmental Quality Control's The Environmental Notice.

Respectfully submitted,



Roger Imoto, Acting Administrator

APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL:



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William J. Aila, Chairperson