

Friends of the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge

April 2018 Newsletter



President's Perch Spring 2018

Greetings from Hakalau! I am happy to be back on the Board after serving as Secretary and Treasurer from 2011 through 2016. Joining me on the 2018 Board are Don Romero (vice-president), Pat Hart (secretary), Cathy Lowder (treasurer), Mililani Browning, Jack Jeffery, Ken Kupchak, Creighton Litton, Eben Paxton, Patricia Richardson, George Robertson, and Lisa Hadway Spain.

My day job is as Extension Forester for the University of Hawai'i Cooperative Extension Service, and most of my work these days is trying to figure out how to protect forests from Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death (ROD). The good news is that we have not yet found any of this devastating disease in the main unit of the Refuge. We do know that trees need to be wounded in order for the fungus to get into the tree, and in many forests around the island we see trees that are wounded by feral animals becoming infected by the fungus. Because Hakalau is fenced and ungulate free, at least in the upper portion, the 'ōhi'a trees are protected, and I think that has resulted in a healthy forest. (For more on ROD, see www.RapidOhiaDeath.org).

It was a sad moment last fall when the 'i'iwi was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Populations of 'i'iwi are declining statewide, except at Hakalau! The knowledge that native forests and native bird populations all over the state are declining makes it all the more important to protect the forests we still have, such as Hakalau. The Friends have developed an Endowment fund precisely to protect the Refuge; see www.friendsofhakalauforest.org/donate for more on the Endowment and instructions as to how you can donate.

In January we said goodbye to Jim Kraus after his serving for ten years as Refuge manager. During his tenure the Refuge greatly expanded production of rare and endangered plants and began the long process of fencing and restoring the Kona unit. Jim has been dedicated to the Refuge and the outstanding staff who manage it and we will miss him. Mahalo to Cashell Villa who is stepping up as Acting Refuge Manager (in addition to her regular duties!) while a replacement for Jim is sought.

Although the Refuge is not holding large Open Houses because of concerns about Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death, we have scheduled a number of work trips for members, both during the week and on weekends. Please see the schedule below and email us at friendsofhakalauforest@gmail.com to reserve a slot. We are also planning a series of community talks, for those of you on Hawai'i Island.

Aloha and thank you all for all you do in protecting our forests.

J. B. Friday, 2018 President, Friends of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge

Aloha Jim!



2017-18 My Last Refuge Manager's Report

Signing off and officially passing the baton for 2018

As the Project Leader for the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge and Big Island NWR Complex from August 2008 through January 1, 2018, it was my privilege to be involved in some unique work on the Big Island of Hawai'i that allowed me to cross paths many dedicated and diverse talents being applied to the high stakes endangered species conservation and ecosystem management. This report is something more of an essay or recap reflecting on significant milestones from these years. No doubt I will unintentionally omit individuals who were important contributors to all this so I will apologize in advance if that happens.

As a recently retired refuge manager I can compare notes with many colleagues who shared similar challenges in careers throughout the United States of "doing more with less" as budgets are adjusted (usually downward) and staff attrition with retirements, realignments, further consolidation of complexes etc. So the challenges don't diminish, rather they change as new discoveries of invasive species, diseases, effects of climate change, or new models based on the latest science providing new insights that will play into finding a way forward.

In 2008-2009 we were engaged in fast tracking the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) process and launching the Kona Forest Unit Boundary clearing contract (in planning for several years) which bulldozed a path for boundary fencing of lands purchased in 1997, but had been limited in access and the subject of prolonged litigation. This was a necessary precursor to the construction of the boundary fence enclosing 5300 acres in three adjacent units.

2010 saw the completion of the CCP and laid out refuge priorities for the next 15 years (the established planning cycle called for in the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997). We are now more than half way through that planning cycle (proof that time indeed flies).

In 2012 another important landmark for the refuge was met in completion of the Land Protection Plan for the expansion of the Big Island Refuge Complex. This effort at its inception, had strong support from both Senator Daniel Inouye and then Congresswoman Mazie Hirono, who each introduced legislation to their respective houses of Congress, on the matter. The Nature Conservancy was our staunch ally from day one in promoting and advocating for this expansion, as well as identifying potential landowners.

The Kona Fence Contract, phase 2, ran from 2015-16 and was completed after a gap in funding. Another important addition was the second greenhouse at Hakalau, funded by a grant from the Service's Cooperative Recovery Initiative program. The newer greenhouse is dedicated to housing Plant Extinction Prevention Program (PEPP) species, the rarest of the rare, so that the refuge could expand propagation and outplanting efforts.

By 2016 much of our focus was on understanding Rapid Ohia Death (ROD) and its implication

for the Refuge lands on the Big Island. Discovering ROD on refuge lands in Kona last year required a very quick adjustment of priorities at the Complex. That promises to be a long term concern as the disease runs its course and more is learned, hopefully more innovative means of controlling it will be available and resources brought to bear on the expanding scope of the problem. The Friends can help in this matter by remaining engaged in contact with all levels of government and the Service to reinforce members concerns about this very real threat to refuge resources. Don't be shy about advocacy because it is vital for decision makers to hear from our support organizations first hand.

Cattle removal in the Kona unit was a big priority last year after ROD concerns escalated and I expect will continue concurrently with ongoing pig control at Hakalau Forest. Extensive Rare plant surveys were also completed in 2017. Another newcomer to refuge landscape in 2017 were Moufflon sheep. One was caught earlier by contractors in a pig snare, followed by a second sheep, detected and shot by staff. Because of this development the refuge is not only grappling with controlling ROD through cattle reduction but now we must address the fact that our 48" fences will not keep out the sheep displaced from higher elevations.

From 2016 through 2018 land acquisition became a major focus, building the planning done years several years before. We were fortunate to obtain significant funding for acquisition after a visit by the NWR System Realty Chiefs who later supported funding the top ranked project in the U.S. on the Big Island as part of the multi-agency Island Forests at Risk spearheaded by Charlie Parrott and Chuck Houghton in the Portland Regional office.

Much thanks to the Friends of Hakalau Forest for the steady support in volunteering so much time to the refuge. There is simply no way the Service can get the job done without citizen support. Those individuals who were willing to lead the Friends for a year or two or three deserve special mention and my gratitude as a manager. Sheila Conant, Lorrie Ellison, Dick Wass, Rick Camp, and Layne Yoshida have all been awesome to work with over the years and very cognizant of the importance of being in step with refuge needs and direction. I would be remiss not to mention Rob Shallenberger, J.B. Friday, Mike Scott, Pat Hart, Cathy Lowder, Emily Needham, Pat Hart, Rob Pacheco, and numerous others contributing to the Friends' success.

The staff at HFNWR has been excellent to work with. Long time employees Lynne Hanzawa, Andy Kikuta, and Baron Horiuchi have been at Hakalau for more than 2 decades and their institutional memory there has been invaluable to those coming after them (myself, first and foremost). Steve Kendall, Cashell Villa, Kaiulani Leialoha, and Tim Cusack have been hired since my arrival and I am grateful for their constant efforts. Our field crew has included Leland Jardine, Mackey Bishop, Damien Arcangel, Ian Clark, Ben Ikeda, Kawika Waxman, and numerous others whose hard work has protected habitat and removed invasive species on a constant basis, a tough and many times thankless job, but they all know the importance of the work, and they grind away at it with real grit. I am extremely proud of the staff at Hakalau and they know it. MAHALO.

Special thanks to Cashell Villa for stepping up and sharing the management burden after staff reductions and to Steve Kendall for filling the shoes of our original biologist Jack Jeffrey and taking on additional supervisory duties. Our long time Volunteers have helped to create a landscape level conservation success with untold hours of collective effort over 30 years and the proof is there to see. It takes a village to save a forest. Community support doesn't get any better than that!

My tenure here is done, I have no doubt the next manager will have great support from all of you and will be successful. The mission is, in a sense a sacred one, if we care about stewardship of this world we inherited, full of so much wonder that we all want to preserve and pass on to future generations. No better place exists than Hawai'i to fight that battle, and it is a battle because *extinction is forever*, and so much has already been lost in the islands. It's been inspiring to meet and work with so many great employees, volunteers and agency partners here on the Big Island and it gives me hope that my grandkids and theirs can visit the refuge in the future and see the same birds and plants we have today.

Farewell and Aloha Friends

Jim

Manager's Update

Since the beginning of the year, the Refuge has hosted a number of volunteers, both new and returning. No matter what projects are worked on, staff ensures that volunteers get out into the forest to connect with the land. This allows our volunteers to see the resources they are helping to protect and the value of their contributions.

The Refuge continues to host The Teaching Change Program which brings school groups to the Refuge on a monthly basis for a 2-day overnight immersive environmental education experience. This year we have hosted two groups in January and February.

There have not been any recent sampling efforts to test potentially infected trees for Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death (ROD) at either refuge unit. Crews for the State completed additional aerial surveys in December and January. We will work with BIISC crews to identify potentially infected trees found during this survey in order to continue sampling efforts.

Over the next several months, the Refuge will be recruiting for 3 positions. The former Project Leader's position vacated by retiring Jim Kraus on December 31, 2017, is currently going through the approvals process. We are hopeful that it will be filled by the end of summer. The other two positions are a Crew Leader position, which will be responsible for the day-to-day oversight of field operations, and a Mechanic to maintain the Refuge's administrative site buildings and infrastructure (a position that has been vacant since 2012).

Acting Refuge Manager
Cashell Villa

Happenings

Scheduled Events

Upcoming Friends Member Opportunities:

The Refuge's Outreach Intern, Loreto Villegas-Villeza will be organizing a number of Friends of Hakalau trips over the next few months. The trips will incorporate both weekend and weekday trips to allow for more flexibility among members. The following types of trips will be offered:

Outplanting Trips: Trips will include outplanting on one day then bird tour the next morning. Trips may also include help with seed collection or greenhouse maintenance/cleaning.



Invasive Species Removal: Trips are aimed at educating FOH members regarding invasive species found on the Refuge and the problems they pose to native and endemic bird habitats. Current target species *P. mollissima* in the Maulua Tract, or *Ilex aquifolium* located in Pua Akala. Includes invasives removal on one day then a bird tour the next morning.

Refuge Tours: Trips will focus on greenhouse propagation of native and endemic plant species, outplanting efforts done in the field, birding etc... This will be an all day trip.

Dates

Invasives Trip.....March 27th & 28th, 2018....Tuesday/Wednesday

Outplanting.....April 10th & 11th, 2018.....Tuesday/Wednesday

Refuge Tour.....May 4th, 2018.....Friday

Refuge Tour.....July 7th, 2018.....Saturday

Invasives Trip.....**May 31st & June 1st, 2018**....Thursday/Friday
Outplanting.....**August 15th & 16th, 2018**.....Wednesday/Thursday

Please e-mail friendsofhakalaforest@gmail.com to reserve your place.