

Native plant restoration project planned at Honolua

By TRAVIS KAYA, Staff Writer

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HONOLUA – Planning to restore a fallow pineapple field back to its roots, Maui Land & Pineapple Co. has proposed reforestation of more than 30 acres in West Maui with native Hawaiian plant species over the next six years.

“We wanted to turn it over and bring it back to how it used to be,” said ML&P Development Coordinator Kalani Schmidt.

The proposed reforestation site is an old pineapple field between the Honolua and Papua gulches, directly makai of ML&P’s Puu Kukui Watershed, the largest privately owned preserve in the state. Acquired by Honolua Ranch at the turn of the 20th century and sold to ML&P in the mid-1960s, the field was in pineapple production between 1968 and 2000, when planting operations were stopped and the property was reclassified to conservation.

Currently undergoing review by the Office of Environmental Quality Control, the Honolua Wao Kele conservation project will include removal of invasive plants that have taken root in the area as well as replanting of native species. ML&P hopes to recreate the region’s dryland forests with lama, koa and sandalwood, in addition to native ground cover to minimize erosion and provide filtration for runoff.

“We’re focusing on plants native to the area,” said ML&P Makai Stewardship Coordinator Megan Webster.

David Cole, CEO of ML&P, said last week that the replanting of native forests near the Puu Kukui Preserve will lay a foundation for sustainable logging.

But, according to Schmidt, any commercial operations involving native hardwood trees would be very far in the future and not at Honolua Wao Kele which is classified for conservation use.

Organized by ML&P’s Community Development Division, the reforestation project will bring Hawaiian cultural groups, ML&P employee volunteers and other community organizations together to work on the land while learning about West Maui’s native ecosystem and cultural practices.

According to Webster, a number of groups have already volunteered to collect seeds from native plants in nearby forests to prepare for replanting. In turn, the plants grown in Honolua Wao Kele may one day be used to produce seedlings for replanting native species elsewhere in West Maui.

“It’s definitely going to serve as a template,” Webster said. “It gives other opportunities for us to look at reforestation projects.”

With hopes of beginning the project during this year's rainy season, which starts in early December, ML&P plans to cooperate with volunteer groups to continue work at Honolua Wao Kele.

Although the area is usually shut off from public access, Webster said community members who volunteer to work are given the rare opportunity to experience the region firsthand.

"People are really excited to get involved in projects like this," she said. "It's important to take care of our land and have the community involved."

For more information or to volunteer on the Honolua Wao Kele project, contact ML&P at

665-5467 or log on to www.malamahonolua.com.

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