KA'AHAHUI 'O KA NĀHELEHELE

a non-profit affiliate of the Dryland Forest Working Group

Dedicated to Revitalizing Dryland Native Plant Communities

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2010 Nāhelehele Dry Forest Symposium on Big Island

On Friday, February 26, the *2010 Nāhelehele Dry Forest Symposium* will highlight dry land forest ecology and restoration efforts in Hawai'i. The Symposium brings together researchers and conservationists to share their ideas on how to keep dry forest habitats healthy and how to restore them where possible. The primary audience for the symposium is conservation professionals and volunteers, but there will be many presentations and discussions of interest to the general public as well. This year the conference will emphasize managing human impacts on Hawaiian dry forests.

The stage for the full-day event will be set by Sam Gon, senior scientist and cultural adviser with The Nature Conservancy. Gon will talk about scientific and cultural perspectives on dry forest plants and ecosystems. Dry forest systems offer the highest tree diversity of the Hawaiian forested ecosystems, yet Hawai'i has lost roughly 90% of its dry forest by area, not only spatially, but in constituent species. Culturally the dry forest provided the lion's share of hardwoods, as well as an important seasonal food source, and more needs to be done to showcase and celebrate this cultural significance of dry forest.

Climate change and its effects on Hawaiian dry forest will be the subject of a talk by David Burney, Director of Conservation at the National Tropical Botanical Garden. Climate models suggest that greenhouse gas-driven change will result in warming of mid-Pacific islands, sea-level rise, falling water tables and probably increased dryness in the lowlands and a decreased area of high rainfall on mountains. Successful plant reintroduction strategies are needed to buffer against climate uncertainty through use of micro-irrigation, creation of new populations in suitable habitat, and possibly assisted migration strategies. Burney will discuss flexible and affordable ideas about saving as many species and ecological functions as possible.

Not all seedlings are equal and Anthony Davis from the Center for Forest Nursery and Seedling Research, University of Idaho will talk about growing the right plant for the site to improve outplanting success. To maximize plant establishment success, a seedling should be grown with the conditions at the outplanting site in mind. However, even with better methods, it isn't realistic to think that every field recovery effort for the nearly 300 endangered plants in Hawai'i will be successful. Bruce Keobele of Ka'ala Farm will propose backyard preservation as insurance for endangered plant recovery. Although backyard preservation is not as desirable as preservation in the wild, it can serve an important role in preservation efforts. Since 1998 when it became legal in Hawaii for the public to possess endangered plants, only 20% of these species has been commercially sold. Koebele will explore reasons for this, including rarity of source material, misconceptions about commercial nursery and public interests and abilities, and endangered plant tag issuance.

The symposium's afternoon session will include a variety of talks about threats to Hawaii's native plants. CTAHR invasive weed specialist Jim Leary will discuss invasive weed management. Lisa Ellsworth from University of Hawai'i Manoa will talk about the interaction of non-native grasslands, fire and native plants. Insect threats to native plants will be covered in Hawai'i Dept. of Agriculture insect specialist Pat Conant's talk, with a timely update on the naio thrip, a new pest introduced to the Big Island in spring 2009.

The challenges of large-scale restoration projects will be explored by Grant Gerrish, UH Hilo, and Melora Purell, Coordinator for the Kohala Watershed Partnership. Gerrish will talk about endangered plant preserves at the villages of La'i'ōpua, a DHHL housing project on the dry, leeward slopes of Hualalai. Twenty-one species of native plants occur here, including the critically endangered *aupaka* shrub and uhiuhi. Purell's talk will be about Watershed Restoration in a "Moonscape": It's all about the Plants. She will discuss key considerations for large scale dryland watershed restoration projects. These include choosing the plant pallet; finding seed and water sources, and creating a flexible and efficient planting design. Pelekane Watershed Management Project is just one example of a large scale restoration project. This large project includes restoration of 400 acres of native vegetation along 6 miles of stream corridors and installation of 100,000 native plants.

Three hands-on workshops will be held preceding the symposium on Thursday, February 25th. Workshops will cover native plant propagation techniques, identifying and dealing with invasive weeds, and the role of fire mitigation in native plant conservation. The plant propagation workshop will be held at Amy Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden and be led by propagation specialists from around Hawai'i. Presenters will discuss successes and failures in propagation efforts and provide some hands-on experience with some techniques. This workshop will be repeated twice (morning and afternoon) to keep group size small. A visit to the Waikoloa dryland forest project that is protecting a wili wili forest and on third of the remaining endangered uhiuhi population will show how the Waikoloa Outdoor Circle is mitigating significant wildfire threat to their restoration and preservation project. Further up the Waikoloa plains Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization will share what they are learning about the vegetation succession that has been occurring since the 2007 wildfires that burned over 10,000 acres. The invasive weed workshop will provide an opportunity to identify invasive weeds, discuss their effects on native plants, brainstorm about weed control and more.