

# Reversing extinction, one plant at a time

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by Big Island Weekly

Just 30 individuals of a rare native bellflower once thought extinct were rediscovered on Parker Ranch lands in North Kohala in the summer of 2010. A year later, seeds that had been collected from those plants were germinating and growing at the Rare Plant Facility in Volcano. And just nine months after that, 169 keiki plants are now residing back in their home range on Kohala Mountain, effectively multiplying the wild population by about seven times.

This flowering shrub, *Clermontia singuliflora*, one of the genus of plants known in Hawaiian as oha wai, was once common in wet forests on all parts of the island of Hawaii. Its population shrunk due to deforestation, and was further reduced by the presence of cattle and other hoofed animals. This oha wai was last seen in forests on the Hamakua Coast about a hundred years ago, and since the 1970's was presumed extinct.

To fund the restoration effort, the Kohala Watershed Partnership (KWP) received a \$7,550 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which covered most of the cost of a protective fence, and the labor to prepare the 10-acre site, and install and monitor the plants.

"Some people think that an endangered plant or animal is destined for extinction, that it's weak or unable to adapt, and that its time is up," said Melora Purell, Kohala Watershed Partnership coordinator. "But I think that's backwards. These are the strong ones, the survivors. Now we have a chance to show our respect for these natives, and help them re-establish their populations."

The project is taking place on land owned by Parker Ranch, one of the founding members of KWP, a coalition of nine private landowners and public land managers founded in 2003. KWP partners and staff jointly work to protect the forested watersheds of Kohala Mountain from threats like invasive plants, feral ungulates, and fire.

Parker Ranch and other private land owners in KWP have set aside some of their land for the purpose of regeneration of native forests, said Brandi Beaudet, land manager for Parker Ranch, Inc. "We are proud to partner with KWP in this effort to rebuild the population of this rare plant," he said.

To learn more about the project and KWP, visit [kohalawatershed.org](http://kohalawatershed.org) or contact Melora Purell, coordinator, at 333-0976 or [coordinator@kohalawatershed.org](mailto:coordinator@kohalawatershed.org).