

Protecting the Realm of the Gods

Hahai nō ka ua i ka ulu lā'au.

Rains always follow the forest.

– HAWAIIAN PROVERB

Kamehameha Schools signs on to the Hawai'i Alliance of Watershed Partnerships

"In the Hawaiian concept of the ahupua'a, it really extends beyond the mountain to the sea. It stretches from the heavens to the horizon. And those heavens come down to us, or touch us, at the highest peaks of our mountains. So these became very special, sacred places – the realm of gods, or wao akua."

– NEIL HANNAHS '69

Director, Kamehameha Schools Land Assets Division

With a goal of saving and restoring Hawai'i's upland forests - which are the source of much of the islands' fresh water - Kamehameha Schools was one of 50 public and private entities which joined forces in April to create the Hawai'i Alliance of Watershed Partnerships.

The partnership, whose primary purpose is to bring together private and public landowners to address common threats to *ma uka* forested watersheds, is designed to promote and foster coordinated stewardship of watershed lands in Hawai'i to protect water resources for future generations.

The alliance marks the 100th anniversary of the state's forest reserve system, with 2003 designated the "Year of the Hawaiian Forest."

Other participating agencies include The Nature Conservancy, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, Board of Water Supply, Alexander and Baldwin, Castle and Cooke, Bishop Museum and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Six partnerships have organized themselves

around the concept of managing a watershed, with Kamehameha Schools participating in the West Maui Mountains, Ko'olau Mountains, East Moloka'i and Kaua'i partnerships, where much of Kamehameha's conservation land exists.

Kamehameha Schools is also a member of the huge 420,000-acre 'Ōla'a-Kīlauea Partnership, an award-winning entity with a mission not only of watershed management, but restoration of critical habitat and species recovery as well.

"Each partnership has its own management plans, and its own funding to achieve those purposes. The alliance was created with the hope that at some point it would be good to tackle certain of the management plan items on a collective basis," said **Neil Hannahs '69**, director of Kamehameha's Land Assets Division.

"If each watershed partnership tries to do a public service announcement or television commercial on its own, it's probably not going to have the kind of impact they'd have if they pooled their resources and did something on a statewide basis," Hannahs added.

"Sometimes the ability to attract resources, like major grants from foundations or government sources, is benefited by a larger critical mass and a sign that the involved entities are cooperating."

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Neil Hannahs '69



According to *Last Stand: The Vanishing Hawaiian Forest*, published by The Nature Conservancy, a watershed is an area of land, such as a mountain or valley, that catches and collects rain water. In Hawai'i, forested mountains serve as the primary watersheds, with the forest's dense canopy providing an umbrella that intercepts rain. The thick forest understory acts as a giant sponge, soaking up water, while tree roots grip the mountain and anchor the soil, reducing erosion and enhancing surface water quality.

The Ko'olau Mountains Watershed Partnership is the state's largest, spanning over 100,000 acres with an estimated sustained yield of 135 billion gallons of fresh water annually.

Kamehameha Schools Asset Manager **Kalani Fronda '88** said since the inception of the East Moloka'i Watershed Partnership in 1999, more than \$1 million worth of projects, including a major commitment from The Nature Conservancy, have been completed to protect the watershed.

"We've constructed a seven-mile fence from the *ahupua'a* of Kamalō – which includes 4,000 acres owned by Kamehameha Schools – to the *ahupua'a* of Kapualei to protect the native vegetation from feral animals," Fronda said.

"The greatest threat to our lands on both Moloka'i and Kaua'i is the feral goat and pig population that destroys forest vegetation, causes waterborne disease, increases soil erosion and siltation, and spreads watershed-threatening weeds," he said.

"These ungulates migrate to adjacent lands during reduction activities like hunting, and

Clockwise from top: 1. Workers direct a helicopter dropping fencing material atop Kamalō gulch on Moloka'i. The fence prevents goats and pigs from entering protected areas. 2. Using a global positioning system, Craig Clouet of Kamehameha's Land Assets division descends a rocky mountaintop as he determines a fence line. 3. Kamehameha Land Manager Kalani Fronda (second from right) is among a group surveying a site in Kamalō. 4. Although this photo was taken not long after this fence was constructed, vegetation can already be seen growing opposite a hillside made barren by goats and pigs. 5. This streambed in Lumaha'i is located within the Kaua'i Watershed Partnership. 6. A healthy Hawaiian forest.

Kamehameha Schools has budgeted \$180,000 for fiscal year 2003-04 to help protect land located in four watershed partnerships on Kaua'i, Moloka'i, O'ahu and Maui.

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– KALANI FRONDA

Kamehameha Schools Asset Manager

return when the activities are completed. That’s why the collective efforts of all major landowners are necessary to achieve meaningful results.”

Fronda has been Kamehameha’s point man in establishing the newest watershed partnership on Kaua‘i.

“The Kaua‘i Watershed Partnership is still in its infant stages and is in the process of completing its management plan,” Fronda said. “Kamehameha Schools sparked the initial efforts of the partnership by completing a species survey of its conservation lands and constructing necessary improvements to support future research, education and restoration projects. Kaua‘i has accomplished 100 percent participation from all of the landowners in Kaua‘i’s watershed.”

With 38 percent of Kamehameha’s 365,000 acres in Hawai‘i zoned for conservation, Fronda is all for the establishment of the watershed alliance.

“It’s very advantageous for Kamehameha to participate in these partnerships because we’re able to work collaboratively with adjacent landowners and funding partners, educate other major landowners about the watershed’s highly sensitive environmental and cultural values, and nurture our youth toward specializing in environmental resource management,” he said.

Hannahs agrees.

“As a perpetual trust, Kamehameha Schools of all organizations should be interested in the sustainability of our natural resources so that future generations will have the same opportunity to have a quality environment,” Hannahs said.

“And because some of the best conditions for watershed management involve the native forest, it gives us a tremendous opportunity to protect, preserve and expand our native forests.

When you’re expanding those native resources, you’re really giving an opportunity for our culture to survive as well.

“Our Hawaiian culture is resource-based, and without the resources it becomes just an intellectual memory, rather than something we can use to perpetuate our cultural activities and practices.”

Hannahs said the ancient Hawaiians were well aware of the value of these watershed areas.

“*Wao akua* is just a Hawaiian way of recognizing and expressing that what happened in these special places - such as the retention of water - really needed to happen without a lot of competition from man. Nature and the gods needed to be allowed to prosper and enjoy these areas, and if they did, man would enjoy the resources that the gods provided.”

