

MINUTES OF THE JULY 30, 2015 NATURAL AREA RESERVES SYSTEM COMMISSION (NARSC) MEETING, HONOLULU, O‘AHU

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

DRAFT subject to approval

Dr. John Sinton, Chair
Ms. Marie Bruegmann, Vice Chair
Mr. Trae Menard (joined meeting from DOFAW offices, Kauai)
Dr. Jonathan Price (joined meeting from DOFAW offices, Kauai)
Mr. Ronald Rapanot, Sr. (joined meeting from DOFAW offices, Maui)
Mr. Leo Asuncion, Acting Director, Office of Planning
Ms. Janis Matsunaga, for Chair, Board of Agriculture
Dr. Sheila Conant, for President, University of Hawai‘i

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

Dr. Carl Christensen
Ms. Robin Newbold
Mr. Nathan Yuen
Mr. Kekoa Kaluhiwa for Chair, Board of Land and Natural Resources

STAFF:

Ms. Emma Yuen, Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) Admin.
Ms. Katie Ersbak, DOFAW Admin.
Ms. Kirsty Gallaher, DOFAW Admin.
Ms. Tanya Rubenstein, DOFAW Admin.
Mr. David Sisco, DOFAW Admin.
Ms. Jenny Prior, DOFAW Admin.
Ms. Lara Reynolds, DOFAW O‘ahu Branch
Ms. Marigold Zoll, DOFAW O‘ahu Branch
Dr. Fern Duvall, DOFAW Maui Branch

VISITORS:

Lisa Ferentinos, Ko‘olau Mountains Watershed Partnership

ITEM 1. Call to order and introduction of members and staff: Chair Sinton called the meeting to order at 2:30p.m. followed by the introduction of all present.

ITEM 2. Pia Natural Area Reserve: Receive recommendations from Division of Forestry and Wildlife, if any, and approve, defer, make other recommendations, or deny to the Board of Land and Natural Resources and the Governor, the proposal for the Pia Natural Area Reserve, TMK 3-7:03:03, O‘ahu. Staff Zoll presented the proposal for the Pia Natural Area Reserve, which presents a unique opportunity to preserve a gem of the Southern Ko‘olau Mountains. It was hoped to be designated as a Natural Area Reserve (NAR).

At this site 12 years ago, O‘ahu Plant Extinction Prevention Coordinator Susan Ching had requested permission from the landowner (James Pflueger and family) to collect plant genetic material. In the past four years, with the hiring of the O‘ahu district botanist, there has been

increasing interest in the land, and more surveys completed, resulting in the discovery of more rare plants and snails.

Susan Ching, requested that the land be fenced, as pigs had been seen there. The landowner expressed interest in donating the land, then David Smith (DOFAW O‘ahu Branch manager, and Ricky Cassidy, representative of the Limited Liability Corporation), met to discuss the process of donation of land to the state. The due diligence needs to be completed, and the DOFAW land designation needs to be determined. The Division of Forestry and Wildlife is extremely grateful to the Pflueger ‘ohana for initiating this.

A Powerpoint Presentation with further details was given:

- Land consists of 300 acres in the upper portion of Pia valley.
- Contains over 20 federally-listed rare plants.
- Four federally listed snails and one listed bird.
- Threats include pigs, rats and weeds, with pig presence being confirmed using camera traps.
- Valley holds a unique topography, diverse assemblage of species and rare mesic forest.
- Assessed as the best candidate for ecosystem protection in the southern Ko‘olau.
- Currently, no mesic forest is protected in the southern Ko‘olau.
- Pia could serve as the recovery location for all 20+ rare plants and animals.
- Important for watershed protection.
- To the west side of Pia is state land, with Tiana Partners owning the land to the east (active participant with Ko‘olau Mountains Watershed Partnership (KMWP) and DOFAW conservation partner). This would make a contiguous band of conservation land from Wiliwilinui ridge all the way to Kuliouou ridge.
- Designated Conservation resource zone.
- A fence could protect the upper area of Wailupe and Pia valley. DOFAW hopes to design the fence so it would not impact the Hawaii Loa ridge trail.

Member Price stated that he had visited this area, adjacent to Hawaii Loa ridge trail, and it represented a wet-mesic transition, including halapepe and sandalwood. It was a cloud-swept lowland wet forest, in steep terrain, and in quite good condition, even in the bottom section. Member Menard agreed that it had a lot of rare plants.

Member Price had seen *Tetraplasandra* lower down and in the drier areas, and asked about how many plant species mentioned during the presentation were actually on the property. Staff Zoll suggested that the mesic forest went higher than the map depicted and added that anything that was on the list was actually on the property, either historically or currently extant.

Member Menard asked if the boundaries of the parcel coincided with the proposed NAR. Staff Zoll confirmed this. DOFAW management guidelines show that there is relatively native forest, as well as the management guideline’s Conservation class in this area. Wailupe ranked high for high-quality forest as well as ‘Elepaio nesting habitat. She was confident that the management of Wailupe would be for conservation due to it being identified in the O‘ahu Management

Guidelines too; it would also be strategic for fencing purposes. The upper portion of the parcel is largely intact and has a hanging valley with a waterfall partway down, which may have restricted ungulate movements. While the lower portion of the parcel has a lot of guava, and does not have an important population of 'Elepaio, it is important as a buffer zone around the best native habitat and has the potential for restoration.

The site contains a unique Lama-*Labordia* forest (found recently) and 29 rare species of plants. Rare animals include *Achatinella* snails and 'Elepaio. *A. fuscobasis* and *A. fulgens* are only found in Pia valley. The current 'Elepaio status in Pia valley is unknown, although they are found in Wailupe and Kului adjacent to the site.

There was a chance of the Tiana Partners parcel to the east being donated as well. In the meantime, the landowner has been very supportive of conservation management, and DOFAW has a fence there currently.

The next steps include obtaining approval to acquire the parcel and to conduct a public hearing. In the meantime DLNR-DOFAW had already done a rockfall assessment and title report and was working on a Phase 1 Environmental Assessment in addition to a boundary survey. An Executive Order would be required as the final step.

Member Menard suggested that the acquisition of this parcel should be expedited. Member Price asked if, given the broader purpose of the NARS, any cultural resources had been identified in the valley or parcel. Staff Sischo stated that he had observed rock walls lower in the valley, but not in the proposed NAR.

Staff Reynolds wished to emphasize the importance of this site due to the uniqueness of the area, and potential use as a restoration site not only for those species currently present, but for those that would have previously been found there. The only fenced area in southern Ko'olaus was a six acre site in Manoa cliffs and five acres in Wailupe. This presented an opportunity for substantial recovery work. Member Menard added that if a 600 acre fence was built, species outside of the area could be brought in.

Staff Sischo added that the fact that this valley held two of the remaining ten *Achatinella* species was a testament to the importance of the area. This would be one of the areas that would likely remain mostly native habitat in the years to come.

Vice Chair Bruegmann stated her support for the project as she has wanted to conserve rare plants in the southern Ko'olaus for so long and there wasn't currently much management occurring there.

Member Rapanot asked how often hunters visited the valley. Staff Zoll replied that she was unaware of the frequency of visits to Pia valley. There was a parcel that separated the proposed NAR from the residences. If hunters were currently visiting the site, it wasn't legal. Wailupe is one of the more popular hunting areas.

Member Menard asked if hunter access could be increased to reduce pressure on the outside of the fence. Staff Zoll replied that DOFAW would like to incorporate public hunting. If there was a

portion of Pia that wasn't fenced, they'd like to designate it a public hunting area with liberal bag limits so people would have the opportunity to hunt. If the fence was built to include Wailupe, then the trail wouldn't be impacted, which would be appreciated by hikers.

Chair Sinton entertained a motion to designate the parcel as a NAR.

MOTION: CONANT/BRUEGMANN moved that the Natural Area Reserves System Commission recommend that the parcel be designated as a Natural Area Reserve.

Motion carried unanimously.

ITEM 3. Adjournment. Chair Sinton adjourned the NARSC Meeting at 3:30p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Kirsty Gallaher
Native Ecosystem Protection and Management Program Assistant