



NRCS Emerging Leaders graduates - Photo (L-R): Matthew Wung, District Conservationist in Waimea; Kori Hisashima, District Conservationist in Hilo; Kahana Stone, Soil Conservationist in Kahului; Morri-Ann Nagata, Soil Conservationist in Lihue; and Laila Jayyousi, Soil Conservationist in Hilo.

Emerging Leaders Graduating Class of 2015

By Matt Wung, District Conservationist, Waimea Service Center

A leader is not a leader if there is no one to follow, listen, look up to, respect, and if there is no communication or dialog. The graduating class of FY 2015 Emerging Leaders learned valuable leadership skills during two full weeks of training on separate occasions. The Emerging Leadership program (ELP) is hosted by the Honolulu Pacific Executive Board and supported by the US Office of Personnel Management. The class was a mix of various Federal agencies that included the Honolulu Fire Department as a partner who provided the training space and accommodations.

The ELP course taught us about ourselves and how we interact with our families, co-workers, staff, supervisors, and anyone we work with. We learned that our personal views and values affect how we communicate and lead and how we can be better leaders by understanding other points of view. We also learned how others may react to not only verbal stimulation but with body language and other factors that may impede productive leadership and communication.

We were given task assignments in the form of book reviews, 360 assessments, and individual action plans to address a topic or system that needs improvement. The training was an intense course that taught us not only to become better communicators and leaders, it taught us to be resilient, innovative, be active in listening, thinking things out before taking action and to lead others for the benefit of the whole without being selfish. We were very fortunate and appreciate our supervisors and our agency for the opportunity and honor of being selected to attend this training. I encourage others to apply for this course if offered in the future as this was well worth the time. It will benefit our organization by working cooperatively, being positive, seeing things in a different perspective and making things better for everyone with good leadership.



Bruce Petersen, PIA NRCS Director

Message from the Director

Aloha and Hafa Adai,

This may seem repetitive from the PIA-wide teleconference in late September, but in the six months that I have been here I have learned enough of PIA NRCS history to recognize that the last several years have not been easy for you. I'm grateful that you've continued to persevere and deliver conservation in spite of all the uncertainty and personnel changes you have endured. Thank you for sticking with NRCS and helping me make Hawaii my home.

Another fiscal year in the books and it was a good one, at least from the stand point of fund obligations, goals, and satisfaction of clients and partners. No doubt those are important parts of our operation, but I am hoping to see improvement in the perception by the PIA staff that this is a safe and enjoyable place to work. It takes time to change attitudes and develop trust, but I am guardedly optimistic that things are better.

Going into fall and winter without raking leaves and shoveling snow will be a new experience for me. When you work in the north, the seasons changed and the growing season ends, field work stops, and there was opportunity to catch up on things. That's not the case here, there is no down time from field work or program, technical, and administrative delivery.

Last year PIA received more program applications than ever before. The increased interest and participation is a result of successful outreach. My experience has been that it's easy to do outreach, the challenge is meeting the expectations of new customers. I think PIA has created a climate in which NRCS can succeed. We have the structure and attitude in place to meet expectations. I have seen a willingness to work together and get the work done at all levels. I see improvements in our processes like toolkit, checklists, resources and engineering forms, and assistance from partners.

The work you do is important, but so is your time away from work. I think this is going to be a great year for PIA. Make sure the same is said about your non-work life. I hope there is opportunity for you to catch your breath, take some leave, and enjoy the holidays.

Bruce Petersen
PIA Director

Current Developments is a newsletter for employees and partners. You may submit articles and photos to:

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Customer Service Toolkit 8.0

By Cynthia Shishido, Soil Conservationist/State IAS Coordinator, State Office

It's finally here! The long awaited Customer Service Toolkit upgrade from Toolkit 7.0 to Toolkit 8.0!

Toolkit 8 was successfully released on August 25, 2015 via SMS updates that loaded the software automatically when computers loaded with Toolkit 7 were on the USDA network. So far, the feedback has been positive as field office staff make the transition to Toolkit 8.

Training was no easy task, but we persevered despite risking dengue fever, traveling under stormy hurricane conditions, worrying about typhoon threats, and lugging heavy laptops all over PIA. Cynthia Shishido, State Toolkit Coordinator, and Amy Koch, State GIS Specialist, along with assistance from the PIA Toolkit Cadre, conducted Toolkit 8 training sessions across the Pacific Islands Area throughout the summer. Our last sessions ended with Amy and Pamela Aguon holding a session in Guam while Jessica Ludgate and Cynthia led a class in American Samoa.

A total of seven training sessions were held in various field offices (Hilo, Waimea, Guam and American Samoa) as well as the State Office for Aiea, Lihue, Hoolehua, and Kahului staff. A total of 47 participants - including District Conservationists, Soil Conservationists, Soil Conservation Technicians, Engineers, District Planners and Resource Conservationists - underwent an extensive 2 or 3 day hands-on training with Toolkit 8, complete with a final test!

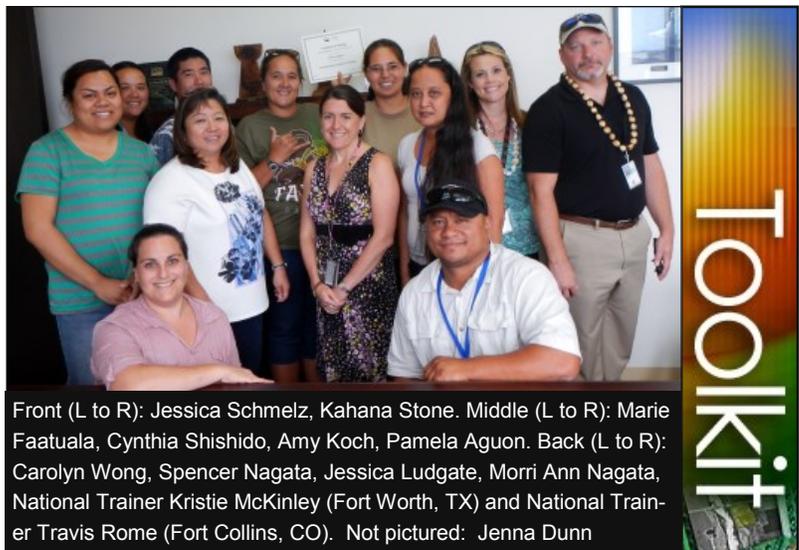
It all began through the efforts of former Acting Director Craig Derickson, who secured positions on the National Toolkit 8 Training Cadre for Cynthia and Amy. As cadre members, we attended the National Toolkit 8 training in Fort Worth, Texas in April. There we reviewed and revised the Toolkit 8 lesson plans, received Toolkit 8 training, and were provided with guidance on how to prepare for our state trainings (as well as were under several hurricane watches and storms during our brief 5 day stay!). It was rewarding to work side-by-side with the top Toolkit Coordinators in the nation who worked tirelessly for 6 months testing the software, identifying bugs, and developing the valuable training materials used for all of our courses.

The work that went into the entire Toolkit 8 training process and how things tied together was truly amazing! Countless hours were spent creating step-by-step videos and user's guides while National Toolkit 8 trainers, Kristie McKinley and Travis Rome, spent hours familiarizing themselves on the material covered well before our arrival in Texas!

Our good fortune continued when Tony Ingersoll was able to secure a National Train-the-Trainer session just for the Pacific Islands Area staff here in Hawaii led by Kristie and Travis in late July!

What's next for Toolkit 8, you ask? We expect three future releases in FY 2016. The first is scheduled as early as December 2015 with critical fixes and enhancements. The second, in May 2016 with an ArcGIS 10.3 upgrade, and a major release in August 2016 with a Practice Schedule Tool, Easement Reconciliation and an Integrated Erosion Tool.

For more information or assistance, please contact your local PIA Toolkit Cadre Team member, State GIS Specialist Amy Koch, or State Toolkit Coordinator Cynthia Shishido.



Front (L to R): Jessica Schmelz, Kahana Stone. Middle (L to R): Marie Faatuala, Cynthia Shishido, Amy Koch, Pamela Aguon. Back (L to R): Carolyn Wong, Spencer Nagata, Jessica Ludgate, Morri Ann Nagata, National Trainer Kristie McKinley (Fort Worth, TX) and National Trainer Travis Rome (Fort Collins, CO). Not pictured: Jenna Dunn

The Queen's Challenge Taro Competition

By Kahana Stone, Soil Conservationist via Alton Arakaki, CTAHR

Queen Emma Kalanikaumakaamano Kaleleonālani Na'ea Rooke, born in 1836, was much loved by the people of Hawai'i. Most are familiar with the work of the Queen and her husband, King Kamehameha IV, Alexander Liholiho, which resulted in the creation of what is now Queen's Medical Center. After the death of her son in 1862 and her husband a year later, Queen Emma became involved in many humanitarian efforts. She died at the age of 49, in 1885.

Emma has been described as a devout Christian, a Victorian woman who wore widow's weeds, gardened, patronized charities, gave dinner parties, and a skilled horsewoman. "Yet, she remained quintessentially Hawaiian. She wrote exquisite chants of lament in Hawaiian, craved Hawaiian food when she was away from it, loved to fish, hike, ride and camp out (activities she kept up to the end of her life) and, throughout her life, took very seriously her role as a protector of the people's welfare" (G. Kanahele, 2000, *Queen Emma: Hawaii's remarkable queen*).

Queen Emma was also an expert in the planting and growing of kalo.

In an unpublished manuscript (nd) written by the Queen perhaps in the 1860's entitled *Observations on Varieties and Culture of Taro* (Bishop Museum Archives), she describes in detail the planting methods, varieties favored at the time, the harvesting of kalo and preparing of poi, as well as an important discussion on the "productiveness" of the kalo. It is here that her knowledge of the conditions and practices of growing kalo shine. And, it is here that the challenge to the taro farmers of today lays wait, for she is clear that it is in the caring of the soil that the greatest of taro sizes can be achieved.

No chemical fertilizers were used. Hawaiians were skilled practitioners of mulching and fallowing production systems.

By her own hand, Queen Emma writes:

"The size of the roots depend upon the depth of loose soil, and the care bestowed on its cultivation. I have produced kalo which averaged twenty-two inches in length and the same in circumference when it was cultivated under my own eye, but far less in the same locality when the cultivation was somewhat neglected by my konohiki."



Queen Emma Kalanikaumakaamano
Kaleleonālani Na'ea Rooke

The Queens Challenge Taro Competition is held each year at selected sites around the State in honor of Queen Emma Kalanikaumakaamano Kaleleonālani Na'ea Rooke, who recognized the value of the Hawaiian taro varieties and has written in detail on the methods she used to produced large kalo.

This year Moloka'i has been selected for The Queens Challenge Taro Competition. On September 19, at the Field Day, the participants will be submitting one of Hawaiian taro variety into the competition.



Kalo Varieties.

Health & Wellness

USDA is committed to fostering both a physically and mentally healthy workplace by offering support and services to assist qualifying employees enhance their overall well-being both at work and away from the office through preventative measures that encourage healthy lifestyles and supportive assistance in times of need.

Photo from HDOA.



For information regarding the USDA Wellness Program, email wellness@dm.usda.gov, or to locate your [Mission Area/Agency Wellness Coordinator](#) visit.

Health & Wellness for USDA Employees

By Jolene Lau, Public Affairs Specialist, State Office

Our partners at the Forest Service graciously invited our employees to participate in a workshop that they conducted in July. "Comprehensive Well-Being and Resiliency" was a full day focused on optimal health and stress reduction.

When you are faced with crisis, we are encouraged to thrive and survive by thinking "S.T.O.P." This means:

Slow your breathing to help anchor you in the present.

Take note of what you are thinking or feeling.

Open up and give space to your thoughts and feelings.

Pursue your values and find a mental state of mindfulness.

Being mindful of your physical and emotional health, affects how well you work with others. Hopefully you are able to handle adversity by practicing a few simple techniques. For example, consider using meditation and yoga to increase positive disposition and decrease stress or anxiety.

We were also reminded to eat healthy and consider nutritious snacks. It is very important to have balanced meals in the right portion size. Being physically fit also means being properly hydrated and having enough sleep. Just admit it, we've all been tired or grouchy on occasion right!

For many of us, we are sitting long periods of time behind the computer. This is not ideal for your eyes, wrists, or back! Instead, we were encouraged to stand up every 45 minutes to at least get our blood flowing. Each workshop participant received a resistance band that we could use to stretch and re-energize.

The main take-away from this session was to keep a balanced life. Not just physically but also emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. In the same way that we maintain our cars, we should be taking care of ourselves. According to our instructors, that means eating healthy at the right time. Ever heard of "hangry?" It's a real word to explain when you're hungry and angry. Folks, the teachers said not to neglect your lunch breaks. Let's be reasonable and compassionate when it comes to scheduling meetings around lunch time.

Thank you Bequi Livingston and Michelle Reugebrink from the Forest Service, for holding sessions in Honolulu and Hilo.



Agricultural Fair at the Sabalu Market in Susupe.

Agricultural Fair Showcases Farm Animals, Plants

By Richelle Agpoon-Cabang, Marianas Variety News Staff

MORE than 50 ranchers and farmers participated in this year's Agricultural Fair at the Sabalu Market in Susupe on Saturday.

Farm animals and plants were showcased during the event which also featured young farmers.

Fruits and vegetables were displayed as well as pigs, goats, cows, bulls, roosters, hens and ducks.

In an interview, Saipan and Northern Islands Agriculture Fair Association president Michael Ogo expressed his gratitude to those in the community who participated in this year's event.

"This is a time for the farmers to get to know each other. It is a time for them to be engaged with different government agencies that can assist them with their farm needs" Ogo said.

Ogo and association chairman for rules Isidoro Cabrera said they were thankful to the CNMI government and the U.S. Department of Agriculture for providing the necessary resources the farmers need.

Among the booths that were set up during the fair were those of Northern Marianas College-Cooperative Research Extension and Education Services, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council.

Cabrera said demand for local produce is high.

"We have the grocery stores, the community itself, the public schools, the hotels and restaurants. What is needed is for ranchers and farmers to consistently produce to meet the demand," Cabrera said.

Ogo said the CNMI government, NMC-CREES and the U.S. Department of Agriculture are "working closely with our farmers so I encourage them to take advantage of the support system available to them."

In an interview, youth participants Nathaniel Torres and Jesus Dela Cruz shared their experiences in this year's fair.

Dela Cruz won second prize for his vegetables and is proud to be a young farmer.

"I encourage my fellow youth to take part in community activities that support the local farmers," he said. "Without local farmers there will no fresh food on our table."

He planted his vegetables on his small farm on Capital Hill.

An incoming 11th grader at Marianas High School, he said farming "is a good physical activity and we get to eat what we produce."

Torres, for his part, said he did not join the competition this year but he supported Dela Cruz because he also believes in supporting local farmers and ranchers.

"Local produce is better because it is fresh. These days there are a lot of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes. Eating healthy is a good way to prevent such diseases," he said.

Controlling Feral Ungulates to Protect our Native Hawaiian Plants & Animals

By Michael Hooper, a Baldwin High School senior - Senior Project (PowerPoint)

<p>What is feral ungulates?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A feral animal (from Latin fera, "a wild beast") is an animal living in the wild but descended from domesticated individuals. • Ungulates are animals with Hooves. 	<p>Why were they going to the agriculture farms?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When drought occurs these feral ungulates need to find water so they go to the farms. • After the problem is fix at one farms, the animals go to the next because they no longer can eat and drink water at the location they we're already at. So that's how the problem gets so big.
<p>Different feral ungulates in Hawaii</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feral Axis Deer • Feral Pigs • Feral Goats • Feral Sheep • Feral Cows 	<p>How did they control the problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put up 6 1/2 ft fences • Farmer opened up night hunts. Only using bow due to residential area. • Now the problem no longer exist because of the night hunts and 6 1/2 ft fencing. 
<p>What is feral ungulates?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Goats and European hogs were brought in 1778, sheep in 1791 and cattle in 1793 by Captain Cook and Captain George Vancouver. • The axis deer, California black tail deer, antelope and mouflon sheep have been introduced to the islands for hunting game by different land owners allowed by the state. 	<p>Problem on Ulupalakua</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wild cattle, pig, deer, and goats problem • Tearing up a lot of the native Hawaiian plants and environment. • Decline in amount of Native Hawaiian plants. • Causing erosion.
<p>Effect they have on our Native Hawaiian land</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They dig up native Hawaiian plants. • Grazing and rooting caused amage of ground cover and growth of native plants. 	<p>Project on Ulapalakua Ranch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native Hawaiian Restoration • 20 different types of native plants • 10 acres of 8ft fence around native Hawaiian plants. To protect the plants from feral ungulates. 
<p>Effects they have on our agriculture fields</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage crops and rip out irrigation drip lines. 	<p>Different and Effective ways they control the feral ungulates in Ulupalakua</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mustering • Culling • Trapping • Hunting with Dogs 
<p>Project on Benny Yamamoto farms in Kula</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deer and Pig problem. • 20% - 30% production lost • Lost of thousands of dollars every season. • This problem were happening daily. 	<p>I hope this presentation have provided reasons and methods on why we should control these feral ungulates because if we don't make a change to this problem the beauty of Hawaii will never be the same.</p> 





One of the workshops during the 17th Biennial State Conference.

17th Biennial State Conference

By Karl Mikasa, Management Assistant, State Office

The Aloha State Association of the Deaf (ASAD) State Conference is geared towards State, County, and Federal agencies; Medical, Disability, and Rehabilitation Professionals; and Teachers of the Deaf, Special Education, and Community. I was invited to attend the 17th Biennial State Conference by ASAD, held at Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu, Hawaii on August 20, 2015. During this one-day conference, the workshops covered topics of EEO, civil/legal rights, Honolulu Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Police Department (HPD) access to 9-1-1 communications, and movie captioning requirements. All of the keynote speakers were outstanding. The highlights of the conference were:

- Mr. Howard Rosenblum, CEO of National Association of the Deaf (NAD) emphasized the strategic decisions that were made on the federal level and explored ways that we can work together to obtain full recognition of our civil, human and linguistic rights to achieve proper equality.
- Hawai'i State Representative James Kunane Tokioka, Google engineer Ken Harrenstien and NAD CEO Howard Rosenblum discussed the current status and challenges of achieving 100% captioning access to all videos including the movie theater, on television, on the Internet, and all other areas. They focused discussing successes in legislative and policy efforts as well as in engineering breakthroughs. They also discussed the barriers that remain with ideas and dialogue on possible ways that we can work together to remove those barriers.
- Glory Gervacio Saure, Director EEOC in Honolulu Local Office, highlighted the overview of the EEO laws and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) about the laws enforced. She also provided a deeper understanding of the ADA and demonstrated how to avoid and report discrimination, harassment & retaliation in the workplace.
- The Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC), is the agency responsible for enforcement of state laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, public accommodations, and access to state-funded service. Executive Director Bill Hoshijo, Enforcement Attorney Robin Wurtzel, Investigator Connie Yonashiro, and Disability & Communication Access Board (DCAB) Executive Director Francine Wai highlighted the specific requirements of the laws, the rights of persons, the HCRC complaint process, and the right to an American Sign Language interpreter when required for effective communication.
- The Hawai'i Public Access Room (PAR) focused and provided an overview of the Hawaii State Legislature and Legislative Session, how a bill becomes law, information on how to use the Legislative website and how to best participate in the legislative process.
- Honolulu Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Honolulu Police Department (HPD) showed and provided forces to educate about the new technologies improving access for the deaf/hard of hearing people who cannot access to 9-1-1 through traditional voice communications and provide updates on the Next Generation (NG) 9-1-1, Text to 9-1-1 and Smart911 services.

Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC)

Hispanic Heritage Month

By Kara Nelson, Resource Conservationist, State Office



Hispanic Heritage month (September 15 through October 15) is a time to explore the cultures, histories and contributions that Hispanic Americans have made to the United States. Hispanic Heritage month started as a week-long observance in 1968, but was later expanded to a full month in 1988. The reason for starting the observance on September 15 is because there are a number of Latin American countries that celebrate their independence (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) on that day and the independence day for Mexico, Chile and Belize are also within a few days from that date.

Even the Pacific Islands Area has a long history of Hispanic influences. Don Francisco de Paula Marin, a young sailor, was the first documented presence of a Hispanic in the Hawaiian Islands and became a resident of Honolulu around 1793. Today, he is best remembered for being King Kamehameha's attending physician and introducing many of the food plants grown in Hawaii, like pineapple.

In 1830, black longhorn cattle were becoming a nuisance on the Island of Hawaii so Kamehameha III brought over 200 Mexican cowboys (vaqueros) from California to teach Hawaiians how to herd wild cattle. Paniolo, the Hawaiian term for cowboy, came about from the interaction of the Mexican cowboys with the Hawaiians. Hawaii had their first cowboys approximately 30 years before the contiguous United States.

In the early 1900s, the Hawaii Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) brought in the first Puerto Ricans. 5000 workers were brought in from Puerto Rico to work on sugar plantations. Many settled and adapted some of their traditional foods to fit into the Hawaiian Islands.

Today, around ten percent of the population in Hawaii identifies as Hispanic or Latino and is the fastest-growing ethnic group counted by the US Census. Despite the recent growth, the percentage of the population is still lower than that of the contiguous United States.

A few local events have been and are being held related to Hispanic Heritage month. The Island of Hawaii hosted the Paniolo Parade and Hoolaulea in Waimea on September 19th and the Hispanic Cultural Festival in Kailua-Kona on September 20th to celebrate Hispanic culture in Hawaii and to unite the Hispanic and Latino communities with the larger local community. Upcoming events are the Hispanic Heritage Festival and Health Fair at the Honolulu Hale on October 10th from 10am to 9pm, and the Lahaina Plantation Days at the Pioneer Mill Smokestack & Locomotives site on October 16 and 17 from 5 to 10:30pm.

The National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

By Alicia Greene, Civil/Agricultural Engineer, Hilo SC

The National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is an annual awareness campaign that takes place each October. The purpose of NDEAM is to educate about disability employment issues and celebrate the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities. This year's theme is "My disability is one part of who I am."

The history of NDEAM traces back to 1945, when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October each year "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." In 1962, the word "physically" was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to "National Disability Employment Awareness Month".

"This year's theme encapsulates the important message that people with disabilities are just that — people," said Jennifer Sheehy, acting assistant secretary of labor for disability employment policy. "And like all people, we are the sum of many parts, including our work experiences. Disability is an important perspective we bring to the table, but, of course, it's not the only one."

Reflecting this year's theme, the PIA Disability Emphasis Program Manager will host a presentation by Brianne Burger, the National NRCS Reasonable Accommodations and Selective Placement Program Manager. The presentation will take place on Monday, October 26 at 1 pm Hawaii HST (Tuesday, October 27 at 9 am Guam ChST). Attending this event will count as an EO/CR special emphasis activity for PIA employees in their "Civil Rights, EEO and Diversity and Inclusion" performance element.

Learn more about how to participate in National Disability Employment Awareness Month and ways to promote its messages — during October and throughout the year — by visiting www.dol.gov/ndeam.





Plants Materials Workshop

By Cynthia Shishido, Soil Conservationist / State IAS Coordinator, State Office & David "Kawika" Duvauchelle, Natural Resources Specialist, Hoolehua PMC

This past April, Acting Plant Materials Center Manager David "Kawika" Duvauchelle and Plant Materials Liaison/Toolkit Coordinator Cynthia Shishido attended the Plant Materials Workshop in Fort Worth, Texas. There they helped develop the next stage of the strategic direction for the Plant Material Program, increase the cohesiveness and coordination amongst the PMCs and as well as strategize ways to enhance the sustainability of the PM Program.

Over 50 PMC Managers and Plant Materials Specialists were in attendance, including the three NTSC Directors, Deputy Chief for Science & Technology Wayne Honeycutt and Director of Ecological Sciences Division, Terrell Ericson.

As in any meeting or conference, networking was one of the highlights! It was great to finally put a face to the voice at the other end of the conference line and get acquainted with one another.

During the workshop, we also reviewed Plant Materials Program policies and was given the opportunity to provide input on how things can be improved. One big change that affects the Pacific Islands Area is the reassigning of the Hoolehua PMC from the Northwest Regional Plant Materials Advisory Board to the Southeast Regional Plant Materials Advisory Board. This is a positive change since the PIA's climate, activities, and natural resource concerns are a lot more similar to the Southeast Region of the United States.

The new Southeast Regional Plant Advisory Board now includes the Hoolehua PMC and Plant Materials Liaison in Hawaii, the Brooksville PMC and Plant Materials Specialist in Florida, the Jimmy Carter PMC in Georgia, the Jamie L. Whitten PMC in Mississippi, and the Plant Materials Specialist in Puerto Rico.

Plant Material Centers across the country are focusing on aligning our activities with NRCS needs by tailoring plant materials information to specific initiatives and activities, redefining how the PM programs provides training to field staff, increasing interaction with SRCs and State Specialists and increasing effective communication with the field/field offices.

Hanohano Hawaii Kuauli - 23rd Annual Hawaii Conservation Conference

Celebrating Collaboration and Wisdom Across Hawaii's Ecosystem

By Reese Libby, Geographer/Cartographer Technician, Soils.

I was given the opportunity to attend the 2015 HCC conference held in Hilo August 3 through 6. This conference was held in Hilo for the first time in the 20 years since the conference began. It was 3 days of learning and hearing about conservation in Hawaii from people who work in it every day. I met many people from all different sectors of the community and the different islands. The foremost feelings amongst everyone was the need to do all we can to save our precious environment in Hawaii. The amount of young people involved also inspired me not to give up. They are the ones that will be taking over and it is their job to help out as much as they can.

I went to many presentations, including some that were GIS related. I liked looking at all the maps and learning about the data that were generated in GIS, which encourages better decisions to be made about resource management. I listened to the keynote speakers speak about the importance of the work we are all doing and how we all play a part in the process of saving these islands. This gave inspiration to continue on with this cause.

In short, this conference was well suited for any NRCS-PIA employee to attend. I am hoping that many more employees will be given the same opportunity that I had to attend future conferences.

Reflections on the Hawaii Conservation Conference

By Laura Nelson, Soil Conservationist, Kelakekua Service Center.

The annual Hawaii Conservation Conference was held in Hilo for the first time. This was a great opportunity for those of us on the Big Island to attend this important meeting because it's usually held in Waikiki. However budget constraints made it possible for only five NRCS employees to pay to attend. Instead, the rest of us were given permission to volunteer to staff an NRCS booth so that we could network with our colleagues and outreach to the public. Soil Scientist Jacky Vega and I went on the exhibit and poster day when some of the sessions were open to the public. We took turns staffing the booth so that we could sit in on the talks. I attended talks on climate change and invasive species and their impacts on effective conservation in Hawaii. The invasive species talks I heard were on the prevention and monitoring of little fire ants and brown treesnakes, and on the coordination of the major albizia eradication efforts happening on the island. I watched videos taken from a drone that is being tested to detect invasive plant targets.

I was impressed with the caliber of all of the speakers and how well they relayed their information. I feel that I not only benefitted personally from learning about the subjects first hand, but my clients will benefit by my increased knowledge of the subjects. In fact, as soon as I returned to the field, I shared the latest information about the diagnosis and pathways of the disease that causes Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death, because I had heard the pathologist who has done extensive testing on the organism talk about it. Outreach about this devastating disease will be more effective if all agencies tasked with getting the word out refer to it the same way (for example, it is again being referred to as Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death instead of 'Ōhi'a Wilt).

I appreciate the staff members who encouraged us to volunteer at the meeting so that we could benefit from these talks. It was also great to have an outreach presence with the booth, where I steered at least two new potential clients to the Hilo NRCS office to learn about our programs.

23rd Annual Hawaii Conservation Conference

By Kara Nelson, Resource Conservationist/Economic Contact, State Office.

The 23rd annual Hawaii Conservation Conference (HCC) was held this year at the University of Hawaii at Hilo on the Island of Hawaii. It is a major event in which like-minded environmentalists/scientists present their research or current activities regarding conservation in the Pacific basin to other scientists, natural resource managers, students etc. This year's theme was, "Celebrating Collaboration and Wisdom Across Hawaii's Ecosystems." It is the sharing and collaborating of knowledge and activities across disciplines that has allowed conservation efforts to be successful. HCC allows people to network to exchange ideas that may allow for collaborative management efforts in the future.

NRCS employees also participated in the event in a number of ways. A presentation was given at the general session about the NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants program, several employees volunteered to help out at the outreach booth that provided information about NRCS, others volunteered to assist with conference logistics and others participated as students to learn about the conservation efforts going on in Hawaii.

This year, there were a lot of presentations that related to climate change and what efforts can be made now. There were discussions about how climate change will impact the Hawaiian Islands in the coming decades and the use of models to predict which areas will be most affected by sea level rise. Coastal ecosystems will likely change and become inundated. However, research and models suggest that new ecosystems can be formed and will likely move up in elevation. This means that land could be protected ahead of time to plan for future habitat. Similarity, there were many presentations regarding the numerous invasive plant, animal and fungi species in the Hawaiian Islands. Discussions included different management strategies for minimizing impacts from feral ungulates, kahili ginger, albizia, little red fire ant, the fungus that causes rapid Ohia death (ROD), and invasive algae on coral.

Employee Spotlight: Susan Kubo



Certification of Appreciation presented to Susan Kubo. L-R; PIA Director, Bruce Petersen, Susan Kubo, and Drew Stout.

“I’ve enjoyed working with everyone, and I admire them all for the conservation work they are doing out in the PIA.”

- Susan Kubo

Here’s a brief summary of Susan Kubo’s Federal career:

- USDA SCS: Started as a Student Trainee (Engineering), 1/5/81 in Salinas FO, CA
- USDA SCS: Upon graduation, she became an Agricultural Engineer, 7/11/83 in Napa FO, CA
- USDA SCS: Reassignment to Honolulu, HI on 11/24/85
- Air Force: Appointed Civil Engineer in Air Force, Hickam, HI on 3/12/89
- USDA SCS: Transferred to Civil Engineer with SCS in Honolulu, HI on 4/22/90
- USDA SCS: Soil Conservationist in Honolulu, HI on 7/15/90
- USDA SCS: Reassignment to Civil Engineer in Roosevelt FO, UT on 1/27/91
- USDA SCS/NRCS: Returned to HI (Aiea FO) in 1996
- USDA NRCS: Reassignment to Bangor, Maine on 9/6/15

Personnel Update

Outgoing:

- ◆ Flores, Jacqueline, West Area Office, Resignation, 8/10/2015
- ◆ Kubo, Susan, Honolulu SC, Transfer to Bangor, ME, 9/6/2015
- ◆ Rosenkrans, Arlene, Pohnpei, Retirement, 9/1/2015
- ◆ Ventura, Leonard-John, Guam SWCD, Resignation, 8/3/2015

Incoming:

- ◆ Elisara, Maryanne, District Planner, American Samoa. EOD 7/1/2015
- ◆ Maguire, Douglas, Grants & Agreements Specialist, State Office. EOD: 9/21/2015

Awards:

- Length of Service - 5 years: Valerie Russell
- Length of Service - 20 years: Adam Reed

October is National Disability Awareness Month.



Thank you to the ten offices with 37 active Earth Team volunteers contributing 908 hours!