

PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA



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Hawai'i Students Help Restore Native Forests during Navigating Change Field Trips

(Hilo, Hawai'i) Hundreds of students from seven Hawai'i Island schools get their hands dirty as they help restore native trees and plants in two distinct Big Island forests. The students are participants in this year's Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument's Navigating Change program. Navigating Change brings conservation stewardship values into Hawai'i schools during year-long classroom support including field trips and restoration experiences. During the 2008/2009 school year, several O'ahu schools ended their Navigating Change experience by planting native plants at Paiko Lagoon Wildlife Sanctuary. For the 2009/2010 school year, the Big Island students are planting native plants and trees, and removing invasive species at the Keauhou Ranch wetland forest adjacent to Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park and at the Ka'upulehu Dryland Forest in the North Kona District. Restoration efforts at Ka'upulehu, Hawai'i's largest and one of its last remaining tropical dryland forests, have been underway for nearly 20 years. Forest restoration at Keauhou Ranch began after active cattle raising operations ended five years ago. According to Navigating Change Coordinator Matt Limtiaco, there are seven restoration field trips for the Hawai'i Island schools participating in Navigating Change. "Getting rid of invasive species and bringing in natives is a consistent theme for all restoration trips," said Limtiaco. Such field trips help students understand what should be growing naturally in a specific place and what should not be there and how prevalent invasive species can be. Limtiaco hopes the kids can go back in 5, 10 and 20 years and see for themselves how their work today made a difference. In addition to the practical value of having dozens of eager young people planting trees, Mililani Browning of the Three Mountain Alliance feels it is a wonderful way to help them and their families understand the interconnectivity of all ecosystems. The Three Mountain Alliance, which has partnered with Navigating Change this year, includes nine agencies and organizations dedicated to preserving watersheds on nearly one million acres of the Big Island. When meeting with the young restoration groups, she uses this analogy: "The forest is like a giant water catchment system. Without a healthy canopy of native trees to catch rain and divert it into underground aquifers or lenses, the water simply runs off, causes erosion and allows invasive species to take hold." The ultimate goal on the 34-thousand acre Keauhou Ranch is to restore a native forest of trees that also supports numerous native species of birds and animals. Much of the ranch was deforested and converted to pastureland to support cattle operations, while logging and grazing by invasive ungulates like feral pigs and goats contributed to the disappearance of endemic trees and plants. The Hawai'i Island schools participating in Navigating Change this year are: Hawai'i Academy of Arts and Science; Kamehameha Schools; Hawai'i Preparatory Academy; West Hawai'i Explorations Academy; and Chiefess Kapiolani, Kalaniane'ole and Keaukaha Elementary Schools.

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Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Three co-trustees – the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, and State of Hawai‘i – joined by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, protect this special place, which is now being considered for inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 2010 Papahānaumokuākea marks “10 Years of Ocean Protection” by commemorating the 10th anniversary of the designation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. For more information, please visit www.papahanaumokuakea.gov