



## **Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) of Hawaii**

Francis Pacheco, Hawai'i Association of Conservation Districts

The Soil Conservation Act was enacted by Congress in 1935 to control soil erosion and promote water conservation during the "Dust Bowl" conditions of the 1930s. This Act instructed the states and territories to form Soil and Water Conservation Districts to care for the farm lands. There are nearly 3000 districts which have been created in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Marianas, and Micronesia. The appropriate role of the districts is to take available technical, financial, and educational resources and focus them to meet the conservation needs of the local land users. In this regard, the directors of the SWCD assist the farmers with their conservation plans to meet the requirements of

county grading ordinances, the state's Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Plan and the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act.

The authority to establish the districts as governmental subdivisions of the state is in Chapter 180 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes. To achieve their mission, Chapter 180 permits the districts to aid land users with equipment and materials for construction work; conduct surveys and investigations; initiate, construct, improve, or maintain projects; sell, acquire, or manage properties; effect agreements or litigation; develop or approve conservation programs and plans; establish fees for services; and require or receive materials, services, or funds to extend services.

## **Natural Areas Working Group**

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The Natural Areas Working Group (NAWG) began as a means of involving various community interests in discussions regarding the management of state-owned Natural Area Reserves on the Big Island. Through monthly facilitated group meetings, coupled with community meetings, the NAWG published a report in March 1995 outlining its process of issue identification, recommendation development, and specific action formulation. A primary action taken has been the development of regionally-based groups having the same functional

representation as the NAWG. Hunters, land managers, resource users, environmentalists, researchers, landowners, and elected officials now make up two separate regional groups: the Kohala Forest Management Group and the Upper Puna Volcano Regional Forest Management Advisory Council. These groups represent what may be the cutting edge of public land use planning. At a minimum, they offer an opportunity for dialogue and shared information exchange.