



## **Koa Stewardship —North and South Kona**

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For those of you who have suffered through the torrential rainstorms of the last couple of weeks, all of us on the islands from Moloka'i to Hawai'i extend to you our aloha and wishes for a speedy recovery from the devastation. However, that ill wind did blow us some good by bringing rain to our drought stricken areas on Hawai'i.

North and South Kona, which is the area about which I am reporting this morning, has had several years of excruciating drought, which finally broke about July this summer. The rains have continued into what is normally (although I don't think there is a normal anymore) dry fall season. The impact of the prolonged dry weather prior to the last few months on the forests of Kona has not been good. At the very least, growth and regrowth has been fairly static. Add the vog that has saturated Kona since 1983, creating acid rain and acid fog in the upper elevations, and you find that our forest areas are suffering from natural causes.

That is the bad news. The good news is that the stewards of land in Kona are very slowly moving in a more positive direction toward appreciation of our forests as an asset and as areas that can and do generate economic value. It is still a hodge-podge out there, without any hard numbers, but I want to share with you some of activities our Kona landowners and lessees are doing. Several large mauka areas encompassing tens of thousands of acres have been sealed off from cattle, sheep, and goats with the express intent of encouraging reforestation.

Both passive management and active replanting of koa are proceeding in these areas. Logging of koa is sporadic and in all cases selective. No one is clearcutting. After logging, various methods are used to reforest. In some cases the scarified areas are left to natural koa seed germination. Where it is anticipated that cattle will graze the area, one logger piles the slash, which acts as an impenetrable barrier to the livestock until the koa seedlings are too big for the cattle to eat. By that time the log piles are rotted. In these piles tree ferns, mamaki, and other native plants also grow. Another West Hawai'i

landowner is planning to put tree corridors between his pastures, a practice he observed in Scotland. The tree corridors provide windbreaks and songbird and gamebird refuge. Selective logging can be done as the trees mature to ensure maintenance of the tree corridors.

On the Kona Coast there are five logging activities, and only one of these could be considered a substantial logging operation. Other activities within the forest areas are just starting. Ecotourism is one of them, where the operator takes small groups into specific forest sites to show visitors and in some cases local folks our birds, plants, and insects. Along with the visual enjoyment, the tour leader usually provides his customers with a wonderful dose of history and lore—and Kona coffee. Pig hunting as a sport, for food for local families, and as a management effort is prevalent from one end of the Coast to the other. There is limited hiking and horseback riding for pay. Landowners are looking at other activities, like mountain-biking and picnicking.

In summarizing the situation in North and South Kona, I would say that koa stewardship is in slow-motion forward. By forward I mean more area is being considered for foresting and managed forest preservation with ancillary activities. One large landowner expressed his feeling this way: "My goal is to develop sustainable economic activity that does not interfere with the quiet enjoyment by my family of this property, nor does it damage the integrity of it." The native forest property tax incentive recently passed by Hawai'i County now gives the landowner or lessee a viable option for maintaining native forest (65 percent endemic species with at least 25 percent tree canopy) or for developing a transition plan to change from pasture to native forest. The property tax rate of native forest is now the same as the lowest agricultural rate in the county, i.e., livestock grazing. This is probably the single most important factor for the future of koa forests on Hawai'i.