

Partnership plans to build fence around watershed lands

Thursday, January 26, 2006 12:15 PM

HANA – A draft environmental assessment has been published for the East Maui Watershed Partnership's project to build between 17 and 28 miles of conservation fencing to protect about 13,000 acres of watershed lands.

The project would connect into a system of existing fences adjacent to Haleakala National Park and in the Hanawi Natural Area Reserve. The fencing would go on some of Maui's most remote and rugged terrain to establish a barrier stretching from Hanawi Natural Area Reserve to the Kipahulu Forest Reserve.

The aim is to protect the watershed that provides more than 60 billion gallons of water per year for residences, businesses and farmers that use water in Upcountry and in East and Central Maui.

The fencing also would preserve native forests that are home to rare plants and animals that can be wiped out by the feral pigs and other hooved animals. Pigs, goats, axis deer and feral cattle damage the watershed by disturbing ground cover, eating and trampling native plants and paving the way for the introduction and spread of invasive weeds.

Alex Michailidis, project manager for the watershed, said the project is estimated to cost between \$2.5 million and \$3 million.

None of the funding has been lined up yet for the project, he said. All the money would be sought as grants from watershed partners and the state and federal governments.

The watershed partnership has eight staffers now, and another six to eight field technicians would need to be hired to tackle the new fencing project.

"The work is very physically demanding," Michailidis said. "It's extremely rough country."

Many areas where the fence will be installed can be reached only by helicopter, which cannot fly in rough weather, he said.

The partnership staff is finishing a 10-mile fencing project started in the late 1990s to enclose 10,000 to 12,000 acres above the 3,600-foot level in the Koolau Forest Reserve, Michailidis said.

The East Maui Watershed Partnership was created in 1991. Its partners include Maui County, the East Maui Irrigation Co., Haleakala National Park, Haleakala Ranch, Hana Ranch, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources and the Nature Conservancy of Hawaii.

The new project's draft environmental assessment is available online and can be viewed through

a link on the East Maui Watershed Partnership Web site at www.eastmauiwatershed.org. A summary of the project and its environmental assessment was published in the Jan. 23 issue of The Environmental Notice, a publication of the state Office of Environmental Quality Control.

A conservation district use permit for the project is required from the Board of Land and Natural Resources.

The deadline for public comments on the project is Feb. 22.

Comments may be sent to the East Maui Watershed Partnership at P.O. Box 431, Makawao 96768. A copy should be sent to the state Department of Land and Natural Resources at 1151 Punchbowl St., Honolulu 96813.

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