

News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



Big Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex
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Final Environmental Assessment Completed For Fence Construction at the Kona Forest Refuge Unit

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces completion of the final Environmental Assessment for construction of 88,500 feet of fence to create three management units to enclose 5,300 acres at the Kona Forest Unit of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge.

The EA evaluates the potential environmental effects associated with three fence construction alternatives. Pig and cattle-proof fences (5-foot tall) will be constructed around the two lower units and pig, cattle and sheep-proof fences (7-foot tall) will be constructed around the upper unit under all three alternatives. Alternative 1 would provide a 15-foot wide, bulldozed access corridor along the entire fenceline. Alternative 2 would be identical to Alternative 1, except with a 6-foot wide, hand-cleared access corridor, instead of a 15-foot wide bulldozed corridor, at the 3,400-foot-elevation cross fence. Alternative 3 would provide a 6-foot wide, hand cleared access corridor along the entire fenceline, where wider access corridors do not already exist. Alternative 1 is selected for implementation in the Final EA.

Fence construction supports the management plan approved in 1997 when the Kona Forest Unit was established. Management is focused on endangered species recovery actions including biological research and monitoring, prevention and suppression of wildfires, and habitat restoration through reforestation, feral ungulate control, non-native predator control, and invasive plant control.

The Kona Forest Unit is located in the South Kona District, Island of Hawai'i on the leeward slope of Mauna Loa at elevations between 2,000 and 6,000 feet. It supports four species of endangered forest birds, the endangered Hawaiian hoary bat, and a high diversity of native plant species, of which several are threatened or endangered. Until 2002, the Kona Forest Unit also supported the last wild 'alala or Hawaiian crow.

A Draft EA was widely distributed to government agencies, community groups and the general public. Eleven comment letters were received. None of the letters opposed fence construction and most favored Alternative 1. Concerns included access for traditional cultural practices, corrections to ethnographic information, minimizing removal of native trees and rare plants, and safe vehicle and heavy equipment access from the state highway. The Final EA addresses these concerns.

The EA is available for review on the Big Island NWR Complex website:
<http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/wnwr/bignrindex.html>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.