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Group hopes fence will protect forest

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KOKEE, Kauai » The Kauai Watershed Alliance, with some help from the state and federal government, is hoping to protect more than 2,000 acres of pristine native forest in Alakai Swamp and around Mount Waialeale, one of the wettest spots on earth.

A 4.5-mile fence in the most remote, northeast corner of the swamp would keep goats and pigs out of the area and keep the home of hundreds of species of native plants pristine, said Chipper Wichman, chairman of the Kauai Watershed Alliance, in a statement.

"The Alakai represents such a unique habitat for us in terms of the bog plants that have evolved there," he added. "It's not a habitat that's found anywhere else on our island."

The Board of Land and Natural Resources will hold a public hearing Wednesday on the group's application for a Conservation District Use Permit. It is scheduled to be held at the Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School in Lihue between 6 and 7:30 p.m.

An environmental assessment was performed by the Nature Conservancy of Hawaii. It found the project would have no significant impact.

Even hikers and hunters in the area are expected to experience little impact, especially since the nearest road is a dirt track more than seven miles away, and gates will be added to the fence to allow humans to access the area.

"The area is so remote that it's beyond the reach of most hunters. They usually catch pigs long before they would ever reach this area." said Trae Menard, Kauai program manager for the Nature Conservancy, in a statement.

The proposed fence, across state land and acreage owned by Alexander & Baldwin, would enclose two culturally sensitive sites for native Hawaiians - Lake Waialeale and Kaawako Shrine - according to the environmental report. However, the remote sites will likely be more protected from erosion as part of the project.

A FENCE FOR KAUAI

The state Department of Land and Natural Resources wants to install a fence around the Alakai Swamp atop Mount Waialeale on Kauai to protect the fragile ecosystem from feral pigs and goats.



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The fence is expected to take about a year to build and cost about \$700,000, according to Grady Timmons, spokesman for the Nature Conservancy. The project will rely on a combination of federal, state and private funds, Timmons added.

Contract workers, along with Nature Conservancy staff, are expected to supply the labor.

Helicopters will be used to access the area, and three small shelters and radio communications equipment are also slated to be part of the project, according to the environmental assessment.

The hope is that the fence, along with eradication of goats and pigs in the area, will keep weeds out of the area and keep it pristine.

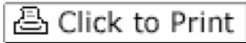
"It's one of the best methods we have to keep (the pests) out of areas we want to protect," Timmons added.

According to Nature Conservancy officials, the area is home to 202 different native species, 66 of which are found only on Kauai. A number of those are on the federally protected endangered species list or under consideration.

The area is also home to the source of much of Kauai's water - runoff from the area supplies four of Kauai's six largest watersheds, according to the environmental report.

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