

Hawai'i Island Native Seed Bank Co-operative Established



Caesalpinia kavaiensis seeds. Photo submitted by J.B. Friday

Hawai'i Island's dryland forests are the most endangered dryland forests in the world and wildfires have played a large role in their demise. A partnership effort, funded by the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization, is working to mitigate and reverse this loss by establishing the Native Hawaiian Seed Bank Cooperative. HFIA's nonprofit affiliate, the Hawai'i Forest Institute, is administering the funds and Jill Wagner, HFIA's Ka'upulehu Dryland Forest Biological Services Consultant, is coordinating the project.

Other partners in the co-operative include Ka 'Ahahui o ka Nāhelehele; the State Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Forestry and Wildlife at Pu'uWa'awa'a; and Amy B. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden.

Seeds from native plants will be collected and deposited in the seed bank and can be subsequently withdrawn for use in restoration projects and for use in wildfire mitigation projects. Alvin Yoshinaga, of the University of Hawai'i-Manoa's Center for Conservation Research and Training and the head of its Seed Conservation Laboratory

in Honolulu, has been advising the group on the development of seed collection and storage protocols.

Firefighter and Hawaii Wildfire Management Board Member Mike Tomich explained, “Many native plants do not carry fire as easily as invasive grasses. This seed bank, and restoring native habitats, can assist with breaking the wildfire cycle created by these alien grasses.” According to Tomich, the seed bank will also support the development of living fuelbreaks planted with native species, which Hawaii Wildfire Management is pioneering in Hawai’i. “Fuelbreaks are areas where highly flammable vegetation has been cleared or reduced. Living fuelbreaks using native plants can mitigate wildfire and protect communities, while reestablishing important habitat and environmental functions.”

For more information about the seed bank project, please contact Project Coordinator, Jill Wagner at (808) 325-2377.