

Hawai'i Conference Foundation Forms Nature Conservancy Partnership



A partnership between the Nature Conservancy and Hawai'i Conference Foundation is providing a unique opportunity for the stewardship of God's creation. The Conservancy, the nation's largest environmental group, purchased a conservation easement for a piece of land owned by the Foundation located off Saddle Road on Hawai'i Island.

The land, informally called Kīpuka 10 because it is a forest opening around the 10 mile marker on Saddle Road at Mauna Loa, is a 922-acre forest reserve rich with biodiversity and endangered ecosystems. However, invasive species such as feral pigs and strawberry guava have steadily degraded the environment, threatening to permanently change the landscape over the next decade or two.

"We have so many special properties that it becomes difficult to be good stewards of all of them," said Conference Minister Charles Buck at an October 20 celebration of the Conference-Conservancy partnership. "We are enormously grateful for this partnership because if we are not careful we will lose these outdoor sanctuaries that God has given us."

The non-profit Conservancy plans to fence off a portion of the kīpuka to keep out non-native animals, install a boardwalk, perform educational outreach, and expand scientific research by the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, said Suzanne Case, Executive Director.

Having never been developed or used in any capacity, the kīpuka is listed within the Conservancy's portfolio of "highest priority native landscapes." An astonishing variety of native plants, including rare loulu palms, are abundant in the forest. The area is habitat for native birds as well as the jewel and golden spiders and the picture-winged fly. Underlying the kīpuka is an aquifer believed to contain high quality drinking water. The water surfaces for fifty meters along the site, forming one of Mauna Loa's only perennial streams.

The kīpuka was acquired by Titus Coan through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions during the Great Mahele in 1849. His widow granted the title to the Hawaiian Evangelical Association (now the Hawai'i Conference UCC) in 1902.