



Monthly News & Updates

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AUGUST, 2016

WILDFIRES???

At our recent PMKCA board meeting as well as at our annual picnic, we heard an interesting presentation from Pablo Beimler from of the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization (HWMO). HWMO is a non-profit that works with property owners and government agencies to mitigate fire dangers for communities at risk of damaging wildfires.

For those of us who live in an area that routinely gets 100 or more inches of rain in a year, the prospect of dangerous wildfires seems highly remote. While it is true that fire is much more frequent on the leeward side of the Big Island, wildfires in rainy areas can also occur, and when they do, the abundance of vegetative fuel can make for very dangerous fires.

After a severe drought in 1901, several large fires broke out in Hamakua, affecting areas from 'O'okala to Kalopa. The following excerpt from P. Quentin Tomich's Perspectives on Hamakua History describes the effects of these fires:

"...the first fire started on 3 July in lands of a Niupea homesteader, and spread through several coffee plantations as well as into government lease lands. Thence the fire branched into cane lands of 'O'okala and Ka'ala..., Kuka'iau and Kohola lele..."

A second fire started on homesteads in Pohakea and spread to lots in Ka'apahu.



PMKCA President Joe Clarkson

In addition to the 1901 drought, severe drought with accompanying fires affected Hamakua in the early and middle 1960s, with the 1965 drought being exceptionally extreme. It has been decades since a really severe drought has affected Hamakua, but one can and will happen, we just don't know when.

For tips on how to protect your home against wildfire, visit the HWMO website at hawaiiwildfire.org or contact Pablo Beimler at 885-0900.

FIREANT UPDATE

Treatment of the isolated fire ant infestation on Ho'okahua Road is ongoing.

A third blaze, largest in area, began in Ka'ohē and was traced to careless honey hunters smoking out bees. It destroyed much coffee and cane land and burned out only when it reached the broad gorge of Kalopa Gulch.

It should be noted that the burned areas included dense rainforest above 'O'okala to elevations of 4,500 feet, an area and type of forest that most folks would now think impossible to catch on fire. But it was observed at the time that there was "complete destruction of former existing tropical forest and great injury to soil by the depth (over six feet) to which the fire had penetrated".

Just imagine the fire potential of thousands of acres of eucalyptus plantations (including harvest areas full of debris and tall grass), fallow guinea grass range land, forests of ironwood and gulch jungles of dead rose apple and waiwi, all desiccated by months of severe drought.

The homeowner reports that most of the treatment area is ant-free, although a small area that missed initial treatment and is now being treated still has a few ants. A final verdict on complete eradication is still some months away.

HAWAIIAN TEL DSL UPDATE

I have still not been able to get details of the nature and scope of Hawaiian Tel's DSL improvements underway in the PMKCA area, but I have been informed by customer relations staff at Hawaiian Telcom that the improvements are scheduled to be completed by September of this year.

Sorry about that last moment change of venue Saturday for the Annual Picnic location. For the second time in two years, we were aced out of using the Kalopa Park Pavillion, **even though we had a valid reservation from the State!** Another group exercised a weird form of squatters' rights by showing up super early and occupying the Pavillion.

Luckily, we had anticipated this happening and had already reserved the NHERC conference room as backup. We intend to pursue this issue with the proper authorities to preclude the problem in the future.



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