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GOVERNOR OF HAWAII



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STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE
1151 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 325
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

March 23, 2021

Mr. Abraham Antonio
County of Hawaii Game Management Advisory Commission
25 Aupuni St, Suite 2603
Hilo, HI 96720

SUBJECT: Request for review of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) Division of Forestry and Wildlife (Division) proposed actions to expand firebreak roads within the Kaohe Game Management Area and the Mauna Kea Forest Reserve.

SUMMARY:

The Division is planning to submit the attached proposal to the Board of Land and Natural Resources requesting an exemption from environmental compliance to chip, grind and otherwise dispose of hazardous fuels and maintain firebreak roads within palila critical habitat. The removal of sheep and goats, together with several years of adequate precipitation has resulted in an increase in fire fuel loads in the area. The goal of this project is to minimize and mitigate the potential loss of native forests and palila critical habitat, the degradation of watersheds and public hunting areas, and to protect the public and neighboring landowners from potential wildland fire. We discussed the concept of this project with your commission on May 14, 2019 and received general positive feedback. Given the sensitive nature of this plan the Division is requesting the Hawaii County Game Management Advisory Commission review and comment on this proposed project.

Respectfully,

DAVID G. SMITH
Administrator

Attachments: Draft Board Submittal

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
Division of Forestry and Wildlife
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

July 29, 2020

Chairperson and Members
Board of Land and Natural Resources
State of Hawaii
Honolulu, Hawaii

Land Board Members:

SUBJECT:

REQUEST APPROVAL OF DECLARATION OF EXEMPTION FROM
CHAPTER 343, HRS ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS
FOR A FUEL BREAK EXPANSION PROJECT ON MAUNA KEA.

SUMMARY:

This board submittal requests exemption from environmental compliance for the Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) to chip, grind and otherwise dispose of hazardous fuels and maintain firebreak roads within Mauna Kea Forest Reserve and Game Management Area, Ka' ohe Mitigation Area, and Ka' ohe Game Management Area TMK Numbers 3-4-4-015-001; 3-4-4-015-002; 3-4-43015-004; 3-4-4-014-009 Hawaii County (Figure 1), pursuant to Chapter 343 Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS).

BACKGROUND:

Critical habitat for the endangered Palila (*Loxioides bailleui*) is located in its entirety within the Mauna Kea Forest Reserve and Game Management Area (the Area) and the adjacent Kaohe Game Management Area. United States District Court rulings in 1986, 1987, and 1999 required DLNR to eradicate sheep and goats from this this critical habitat. Efforts by DOFAW and public hunters to eradicate these animals have been largely successful, with current populations within critical habitat estimated to be less than 300.

The large removal of sheep and goats combined with the several years of good precipitation on Mauna Kea has resulted in an increase in vegetative fuel loads in the area. Fire is a major threat to palila critical habitat. Current conditions require fire pre-suppression actions aimed to reduce ignition points near roads and reduce the spread of fire across these fuel breaks.

DISCUSSION:

DOFAW plans to expand approximately 20 miles of fire fuel breaks within the Area by chipping, grinding, cutting, and mowing vegetation up to 10 meters away from existing roads and

firebreaks (Figure 2). Other roads in the area will also be cleared of vegetation that has encroached into the road corridor but will not be expanded. A pilot project to reduce fuel loads was completed in 2019 (Figures 3 and 4). All vegetative material to be treated will be left on site. The vegetation to be cleared will be a mixture of native and non-native grasses, shrubs, and trees. Native vegetation that will be cleared includes māmane (*Sophora chrysophylla*), naio (*Myoporum sandwicense*), 'ulei (*Osteomeles anthyllidifolia*), and 'a'ali'i (*Dodonea viscosa*). The benefit of reducing the reducing the potential ignition and spread of wildfire greatly outweighs the loss of this vegetation. A destructive wildfire could potentially decimate the Palila's core nesting area.

Palila Nesting and 'Ōpe'ape'a (Hawaiian Hoary Bat, *Lasiurus cinereus semotus*) pupping seasons

Mitigation:

Risks to palila nesting and 'ōpe'ape'a during the roosting and pup-rearing season (April 1 – August 31 and June 1 through September 15, respectively) include tree trimming and removal of woody plants greater than 4.6 m. Impacts will be avoided as follows:

- The areas where fire breaks will be expanded will be thoroughly searched for trees which would be suitable for palila nests and/or bat roosts (4.6m or above).
- No trees over 4.6 m will be removed between April 1 – September 15. These trees will be left with a 50-foot vegetation buffer and removed outside of the palila nesting/bat pup-rearing seasons.

Botanical Surveys

Botanical surveys to identify any threatened or endangered plants within the treatment site were conducted from March through May 2020. A minimum of two forestry staff walked parallel to each other on all Kahohe GMA roads. Field survey crews included at least one member who has seen the target species or can identify uncommon species. Other crew members were trained using photographs and living species before/during surveys. No threatened or endangered plants were found during the survey period. Project-area surveys are valid only for those species that are evident during the survey period. Before mulching and mowing begins, crews will perform another walk-through survey to ensure that no seasonal rare/endangered plants have established.

CHAPTER 343, HAWAII REVISED STATUTES – ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The Division activities to expand existing fire breaks will likely have minimal or no significant negative effects on the environment and will be improving the overall environmental health of the area by reducing the wildland fire risks; and are thus exempt from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment in accordance with Chapter 343, HRS and Chapter 11-200-8, HAR, under the Department's following exemption classes (Exemption List for the Department of Land and Natural Resources, reviewed and concurred upon by the Environmental Council on June 5, 2015):

§11-200.1-16 (a) (2)

Exemption Class No. 1 Item 29: Maintenance of existing boardwalks, trails and unpaved roads

Exemption Class No. 1 Item 33: Maintenance of state lands and waters to remove weeds, bushes, grass and other unwanted vegetation.

Exemption Class No. 4 Item 7: Clearing of new fuel breaks and other similar fire pre-suppression actions to reduce fire potential and minimize fire severity.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board approves:

- 1) Declare that, after considering the potential effects of the proposed dispositions provided by Chapter 343, HRS, and Chapter 11-200, HAR, this project will likely have minimal or no significant effect on the environment and is therefore exempt from the preparation of an environmental assessment.

Respectfully submitted,

DAVID G. SMITH, Administrator
Division of Forestry and Wildlife

Attachments: Figure 1, 2, 3, and 4

APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL:

SUZANNE D. CASE, Chairperson
Board of Land and Natural Resources

Figure 1: Project Area

Legend

Roads to be expanded

- R-13
- R-1
- R-14
- R-15
- KMARoad
- washouts

Firebreaks to be expanded

- FB-1
- FB-4
- ~~FB-5~~
- FB-3

Hunting areas

~~Paliia Critical Habitat~~

N



0 2.25 4.5

Garmin, NGA, USGS, Earthstar
CS

- Unit A
- Unit G
- Unit K
- Roads and firebreaks to Maintain

9 Miles

Esri, HERE
Geographi

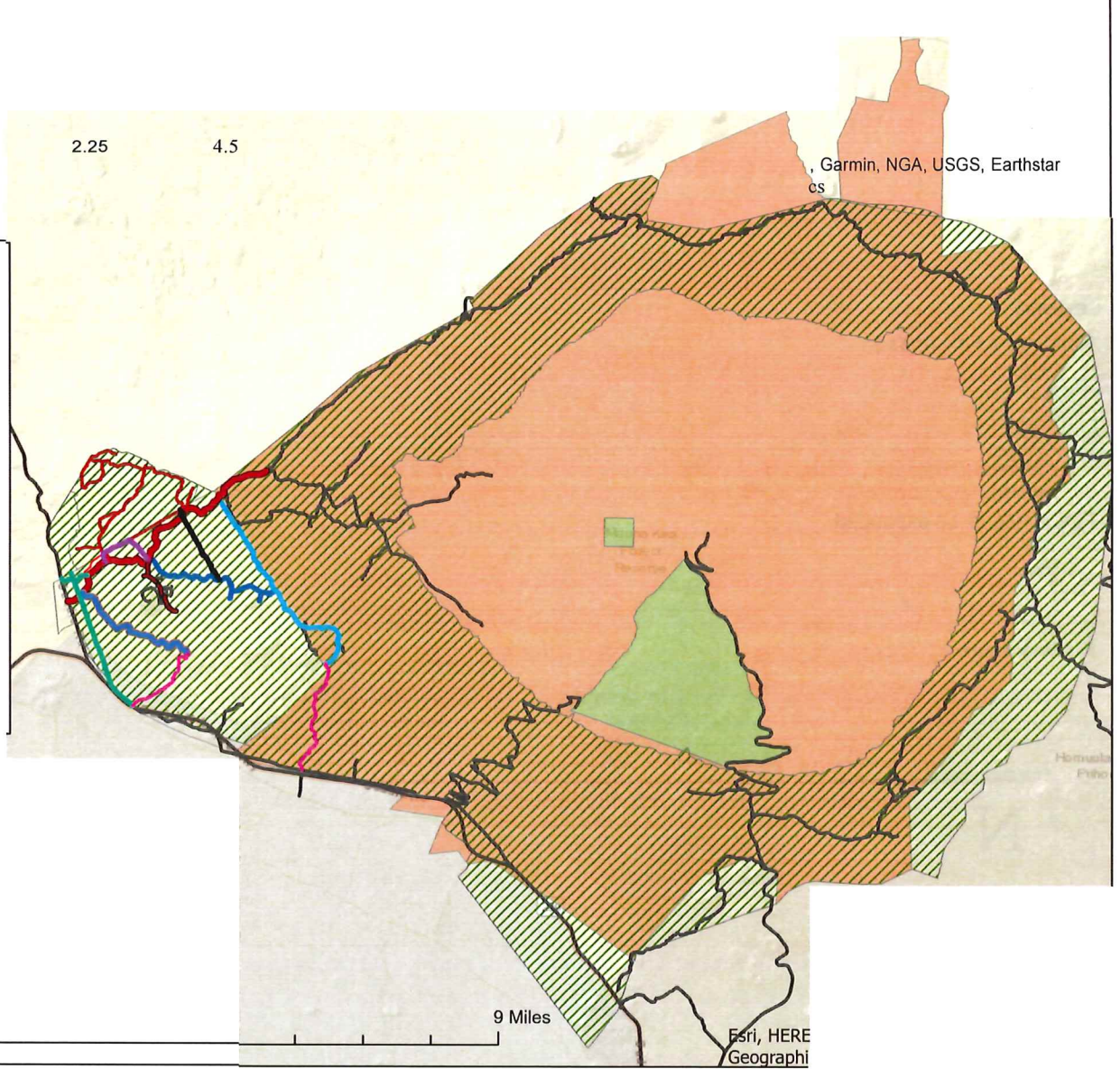


Figure 2: Proposed Road and Fuel Break Expansion on Mauna Kea

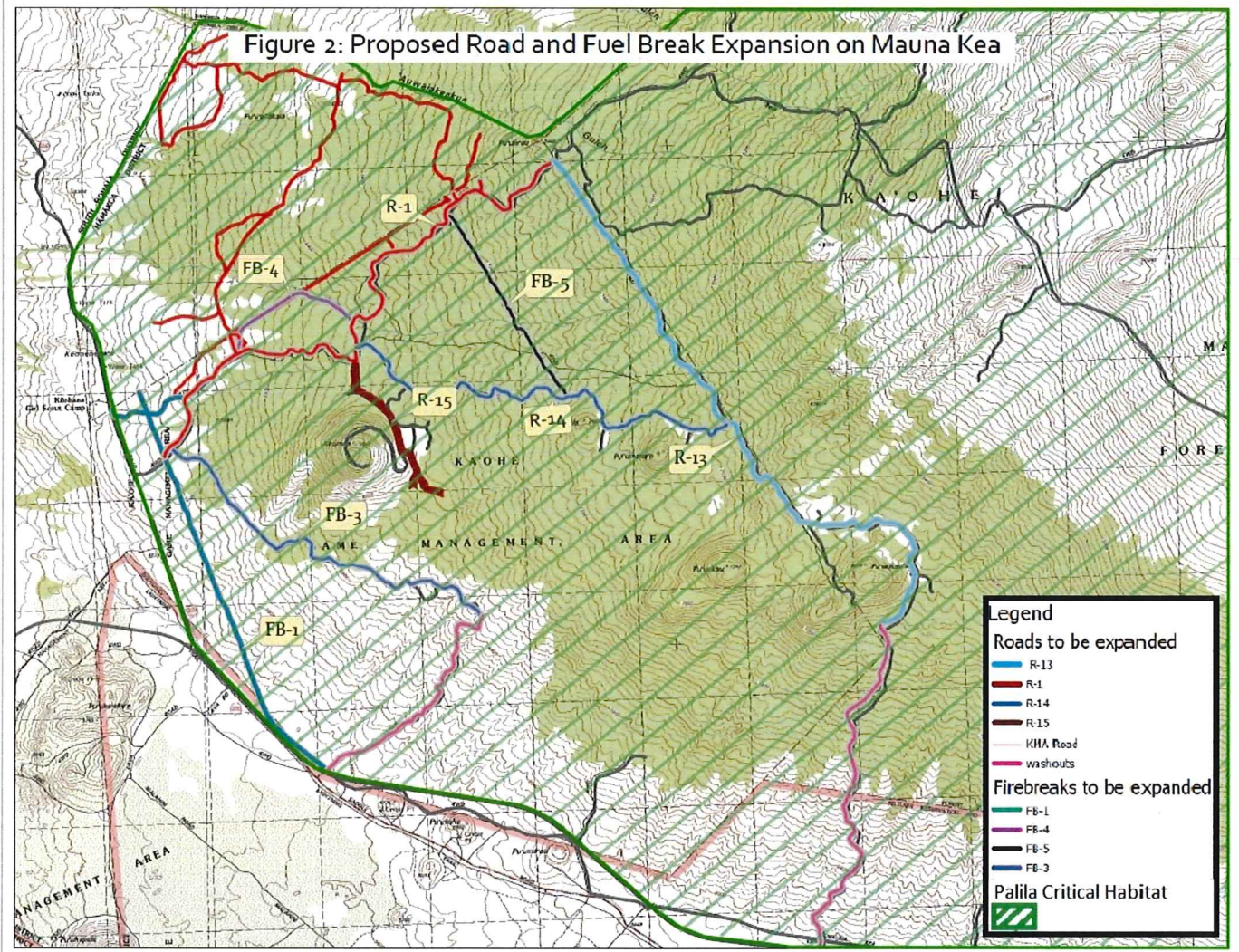


Figure 3: Pilot Project Before Treatment



Figure 4: Pilot Project After Treatment



