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Hawai'i Volcanoes News Release

For Immediate Release
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Prescribed Burn to Regenerate Growth of Native Plants at Cultural Landscape

On Wednesday, June 3, 2009 Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park will conduct a prescribed burn at Kealakomowaena, located near the end of Chain of Craters Road on the southeast coast of Hawai'i Island near the western boundary of the District of Puna. The prescribed burn will regenerate the growth of native grass and other plant species, as well as reveal a cultural landscape once occupied by families living in the ahupua`a of Kealakomo.

Pili (*Heteropogon contortus*), a lowland grass, once dominated the coastal areas of the main Hawaiian Islands but is becoming increasingly rare due to invasive species. Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park is testing a strategy to maintain or expand pili grasslands using controlled fire. Historically, prescribed burning within National Park lands has shown fire in this ecosystem can reduce the dominant alien woody species and temporarily reduce the alien grasses. With the reduction of invasive alien species, a



window of opportunity is created to increase the native plant populations by directly planting the seeds of native species.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park Botanist Sierra McDaniel says, "The results gained from this experiment will expand managers' understanding of the role of fire in determining plant composition in the pili grassland system and are a necessary first step towards formulating a comprehensive restoration plan for the coastal lowland system."

Kealakomowaena is a kipuka, or island of vegetation, found at the middle section of the Kealakomo ahupua'a. Here, Hawaiians lived and worked the land, growing sweet potato in the numerous agricultural features spread across the landscape. During the pre-contact and historic periods, this area was important to the survival of families that lived in the ahupua`a. At the nearby coastal zone of the Kealakomo ahupua`a, families harvested fish for drying and salt which was traded outside of the ahupua`a for resources that could not be found in this part of the island.

The prescribed burn at Kealakomowaena will help re-establish the traditional cultural landscape of the area which is now dominated by invasive species.

The burn plan is set to be done in a manner to preserve the numerous house sites, trails, walls, and agricultural features. According to Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park Archeologist Jadelyn Moniz-Nakamura, "The burn is a positive step towards removing the invasive species that now cover a majority of the archeological sites." She added, "It will open up the area so that we can see the sites better and thus be able to record and preserve them, as well as



open up the area for interpretive purposes.” The burn will fortify the cultural landscape by stimulating the growth of native vegetation, including pili, which was traditionally enhanced through repeated burning.

A 14–person Fire crew from Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park will administer the prescribed burn planned for the 103-acre kipuka. There will be a pullout along Chain of Craters Road at the top of Holei Pali where park visitors may stop and watch the controlled burn taking place throughout the day. Park entrance fees apply. For information, call 985-6011.

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