

## Kona SWCD Names Future Forests Nursery Forester of the Year

**Contributed by: Kealakekua Field Office**

Nestled on the leeward slope of Hualalai is a hidden gem of an intact remnant native dryland forest called Palamanui Preserve. This 55-acre parcel was set aside as a preserve during the planning process for the surrounding 1,116-unit residential and university campus slated for development. Since 2014, Future Forests Nursery has been working to protect, enhance, and manage the rare habitat and its endangered plants.

Palamanui Preserve represents one of the few remaining examples of this unique and highly diverse forest type in the world (Critical Habitat: Hawaii-Lowland Dry-Unit 33). Working in close partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and with the necessary permits from DOFAW, Future Forests Nursery has planted hundreds of rare plants including hala pepe, ko’oko’olau, kauila, noho kula, maoloa, and ‘aiea, which is the host plant for the endangered Blackburn’s Sphinx Moth. Through careful management, including the removal of invasive haole koa, silk oak, and fountain grass, other uncommon species such as maua, ‘ohe makai, maiapilo, and wiliwili are also increasing their numbers.

Although the Preserve has been fenced, continued pressure by feral goats in the area was causing breaches and threatening the native plants. EQIP funding for the 643 management practice, Restoration and Management of Rare or Declining Habitats, allowed Future Forests Nursery to reinforce the existing wire fence with plastic deer fencing. This not only shored up the gaps in the fence but has prevented goats from getting their horns stuck in the wire.

“NRCS funding supports monitoring of previously restored areas and plantings. This will enable me to check the health of the plants more regularly and do seed collections, as well as hand weeding around T&E species. The funding also helps with clearing new areas each year, and maintaining previously restored areas,” said Jill Wagner, Palamanui Preserve Manager.

Addressing the challenge of successfully establishing plants in a site with low natural precipitation, the 612 Tree and Shrub Establishment “dry site” scenario was utilized to enable the installation of a temporary drip irrigation system. Its design has improved the success rate of plantings so effectively that it has been shared and used by other landowners.

To acknowledge their ongoing efforts in continuing the hard work necessary to maintain this fragile ecosystem and preserve these native species for future generations to enjoy, the Kona SWCD has named Future Forests Nursery the 2021 Forester of the Year.

For more information about Jill’s work to reverse climate change, read: [A simple climate crisis solution? Plant trees | WIRED UK](#)



**Jill Wagner, owner, Future Forests Nursery, and Preserve manager, bagging seeds of endangered ‘aiea, for later collection**