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Hawaii Tropical Forest Linked To Global Research Network

HILO, Hawaii – Global climate change, the introduction of invasive species, landscape alterations from human development and periodic natural disasters aren’t exclusively unique to Hawaii, but studying their impacts here might have regional and global implications.

The newly formed Hawaii Experimental Tropical Forest recently received $72,000 to become part of a nationwide U.S. Forest Service initiative to monitor the long-term health of forest and rangeland ecosystems.  This is in addition to $300,000 given earlier in the year for developing the research site.

Deputy Chief of Forest Service Research and Development Ann Bartuska announced Friday, Aug. 10, that the Hawaii Experimental Tropical Forest is one of 18 Experiment Forest and Range sites to share $1.1 million to establish a transcontinental network to address large-scale concerns, such as climate and landscape change.

Research forests have traditionally addressed site- or region-specific questions.  The EFR network will use standardized data collected from multiple sites to research more singular issues of a transcontinental nature.

“Using a network of locations, we can conduct research on the same scale as the problems we face,” Bartuska said.  “We will be providing on-the-ground solutions to many of the global challenges our natural resource managers face locally.”

The funds granted to Hawaii will facilitate the establishment of stream gauging stations for long term monitoring of water quality and quantity.  In addition, funds are available to establish permanent weather and atmospheric monitoring stations.  Information from these stations will be made available via the internet for anyone interested in obtaining these results.

“Being part of a national and even global network is incredibly important for Hawaii,” Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry Director Boone Kauffman said.  “It increases our access and use of state of the art environmental equipment and science investigations, while also increasing our ability of increased future research to help resource management in Hawaii and the rest of the tropics.”

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The data will be integrated into a global monitoring program that has been operated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) since 1985 called the International Cooperative Programme (www.icp-forests.org). The Forest Service network will be the first U.S. sites to contribute specific atmospheric, hydrological and biological information that meets the ICP’s highest standards of data collection, called “Level II,” said Andrzej Bytnerowicz, a research ecologist for the Forest Service’s Pacific Southwest Research Laboratory in Riverside, Calif., and serves as the Forest Service’s program liaison.

“Level II monitoring is the Programme’s most intensive degree of monitoring and specifically tracts how air pollution and other factors influence forest ecosystems. This level of monitoring, among other things, detects unhealthy levels of nitrogen and sulfur deposited from the air,” Bytnerowicz said.

The data collected will be combined with that from 41 other countries which is stored at the program’s coordinating center in Hamburg, Germany.

Through this uniformed and extensive data gathering, Forest Service researchers hope to gain valuable insights into the vulnerability, resilience or ability of managed ecosystems to offset negative impacts from these global forces, Bartuska said.

The Hawaii Experimental Tropical Forest became the 80th and newest research forest on March 23. The Forest Service has been the world’s largest forestry research organization for almost 100 years. Its goals include understanding ecosystems, human influence on those systems, and land management for sustained and enhanced benefits.

In addition to the new scientific studies being established, a biological field station is being planned where scientists as well as students of all ages can come to study or attend educational courses focusing on the Hawaiian forest. The Experimental Tropical Forest is a joint effort with the Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife.

For more information about the Hawaii Experimental Tropical Forest, visit www.fs.fed.us/psw/hawaii.

**Experiment Forest and Range network sites:**
Fernow Experimental Forest (West Virginia)
Marcell Experimental Forest (Minnesota)
Silas Little Experimental Forest (New Jersey)
Santee Experimental Forest (South Carolina)
Crosset Experimental Forest (Arkansas)
Sierra Ancha Experimental Range (Arizona)
Fraser Experimental Forest (Colorado)
San Dimas Experimental Forest (California)
Casper Creek Experimental Watershed (California)
Tenderfoot Experimental Forest (Montana)
Hawaii Experimental Tropical Forest (Hawaii)
Bonanza Creek Experimental Forest (Alaska)
H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest (Oregon)
Luquillo Experimental Forest (Puerto Rico)
Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest (New Hampshire)
Coweeta Hydrologic Laboratory (North Carolina)
Niwot Ridge Biosphere Reserve (Colorado)
Baltimore Ecosystem Study (Maryland)

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