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KIUC Submits Revised Short-Term Habitat Conservation Plan for Endangered and Threatened Seabirds

Līhu'e, Kaua'i, HI - 8/19/10 – Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative (KIUC) submitted a revised Short Term Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) yesterday, in support of its long-standing application for an Incidental Take Permit and Incidental Take License from the respective agencies. Under the terms of the Short-Term HCP, KIUC has agreed to spend more than \$11 million on measures designed to minimize and mitigate potential impacts of KIUC's facilities on the species.

KIUC previously submitted the HCP document to the agencies in summer 2009, and DLNR conducted a public review and comment process last fall. KIUC made revisions to the HCP document based on public comments received and feedback from numerous meetings with both agencies. In September, DLNR will present the revised Short-Term HCP to the state's Endangered Species Recovery Committee, and USFWS will open a federal public review and comment period.

The incidental take authorizations would be effective for up to five years, but would be replaced by the long-term Kauai Seabird HCP (KSHCP), which would include other Kaua'i participants in addition to KIUC. The wildlife agencies expect the KSHCP to be finalized and approved as early as late 2011 or early 2012. Take authorization is needed because some of KIUC's facilities have the potential to result in the incidental take of three federal and state listed threatened and endangered species: the Hawaiian Petrel, Newell's Shearwater, and the Band-Rumped Storm-Petrel. The HCP supports the issuance of these permits, and describes how KIUC will avoid, minimize, mitigate, and monitor the incidental take of the threatened and endangered species that may occur as a result of existing or future facilities and activities.

KIUC has already implemented many measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate the potential impacts on the seabirds. These include shielding all KIUC owned street lights to eliminate upward-projecting light that could disorient seabirds; pursuing opportunities to underground existing and proposed power lines; supporting and funding the Save Our Shearwaters (SOS) program; experimenting with methods to increase the visibility of power lines; supporting seabird predator control on Lehua Island; and carrying out extensive research designed to identify seabird breeding colonies, where measures can be taken to enhance the successful reproduction of the species.

(more)

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In the application KIUC agrees to provide \$6 million for new minimization measures at locations that State and Federal agencies have identified as constituting the greatest risk to the endangered or threatened species. These measures include undergrounding lines (the Wailua area, to be funded by federal stimulus money), reconfiguring (including undergrounding) lines at and near Keālia Beach, and reconfiguring numerous other distribution line segments to reduce the number of wire layers with which birds could potentially collide and lowering the height sufficiently to bring them beneath shielding terrain, vegetation, or structures.

KIUC will also provide an average of \$955,000 yearly towards general and species-specific mitigation measures which include:

- Continued funding for the SOS Program.
- Carrying out seabird colony management and predator control in Limahuli Valley and Hono O Na Pali Natural Area Reserve.
- Updating prior studies of estimates of at-sea seabird populations.
- Conducting a two-year auditory survey to locate additional seabird breeding colonies.
- Funding development and implementation of an underline monitoring program aimed at better understanding take by overhead utility structures.
- For each of the years that the Short-Term HCP remains in effect beyond Year 3, undertaking habitat management within Wainiha Valley or other suitable location and possibly providing financial support for the continuation of DLNR's existing radar survey program should other funding sources become unavailable.

Carey Koide, KIUC Support Services Manager, who is in charge of KIUC seabird mitigation efforts said, "this is an important step in obtaining a clear direction from the state and federal agencies on where KIUC should be investing its member's money in order to minimize and mitigate potential impacts of our facilities on the endangered and threatened seabirds that exist on Kaua'i. We have filed two HCP applications over the past three years which have not resulted in a finalized HCP and Incidental Take Permit/License. KIUC remains committed to completing this process, and with support from the governmental agencies we are optimistic that the HCP can be approved by the end of 2010."

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