



U.S. Army Garrison-Pōhakuloa

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Well tests for water at Pōhakuloa Training Area

POHAKULOA TRAINING AREA, Hawaii – A 6,400-foot-deep test water well is being drilled, here, in a first step to determine if the high-altitude base and its surrounding communities could be sustained by their own water supply.

“This project has applicability well beyond supporting the Army’s needs; it can benefit the entire Saddle region,” said Lt. Col. Eric Shwedo, base commander.

He added that this project could include properties owned by Hawaiian Homelands, as preliminary research has found potential well sites at both Pōhakuloa Training Area (PTA) and Hawaiian Homelands areas.

“The main problem is our inability to access water,” said Leimana Damate, Hawaiian Homes commissioner for West Hawaii. “We’re excited about this test well’s research for possible water in the Humuula area.”

She said if the data provided by this test proves out, Hawaiian Homelands could potentially go straight to drilling a water production well, if eventual funding could be procured.

“The Army gives the Hawaiian people hope,” Damate said.

“The potential benefit for the Army is that we would no longer have to truck water up to PTA on a daily basis, which is expensive and time consuming,” Shwedo said. “If the test well is successful, it could pave the way for production wells to be dug in the area.”

Damate noted that water has also been a challenge for ranchers in the region, who also truck in water.

The PTA test well, which began this month, is an initiative between the Army’s Corps of Engineers and the Cooperative Ecosystems Study Unit (CESO), a national consortium of federal agencies, state and local governments, tribes and academic institutions.

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2-2-2 PTA WELL TEST

In this case, PTA is partnered through CESO with the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

“We estimate the test well will take three-four months to drill,” said Dr. Donald Thomas, who was selected to head up the project.

A noted geologist on the island of Hawaii, with expertise studying volcano and subsurface phenomena, Thomas is excited about this effort.

“We hope (the well) will give us a more complete picture of the hydrology along the Saddle region,” he said. “There is great scientific value in learning what lies beneath us in this area, as much is unknown.”

Thomas said the well will reach a depth of sea level and test the feasibility of providing fresh water to both the Army and others in the region.

“The well will tell us at what depth we might find a sustainable and quality water source,” he said.

According to Thomas, a significant fresh water supply lies beneath the island, near sea level, and is refilled on a continual basis through rainfall. Some of this fresh water finds its way into the ocean far beneath the surface, but the high volume of island rains keep the underground freshwater reservoirs full.

“PTA conducted an environmental assessment prior to the test and is adhering to all environmental and regulatory requirements,” Shwedo said.

“There were no significant concerns found regarding sensitive biological resources at or near the site.

“If we’re successful,” Shwedo added, “this test can have an overarching importance on the Saddle region.”

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PHOTO OUTLINES:

PTA_West-Well_002

A 6,400-foot-deep test water well currently is being drilled at Pōhakuloa Training Area to determine if the high-altitude base and its surrounding areas could be sustained by their own supply of fresh water. *Photo by Shiela Yangilmau, U.S. Army Garrison- Pōhakuloa*

PTA_West-Well_003 (Worker climbing)

A worker assists with connecting a drill shaft to begin drilling a 6,400-foot-deep test water well at Pōhakuloa Training Area in search of a sustainable fresh water supply beneath the island. *Photo by Shiela Yangilmau, U.S. Army Garrison- Pōhakuloa*