



DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RECENT WILDFIRES FOLLOWING DROUGHT CONDITIONS ACROSS HAWAII

(HONOLULU) – Severe drought conditions are now impacting the southern and western coastal areas of Maui. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor weekly reporting, this is the first time the severe drought designation has been noted in Hawai'i this summer.

DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife State Protection Forester Mike Walker said, "It's no surprise we're seeing wildland fires ignite in areas that are seeing worsening drought conditions. Forecasters continue to predict things will get worse before they get better, with an expectation that more severe drought conditions will plague larger areas of the state into late summer, early fall, and even through next winter."

In addition to south and west Maui experiencing severe drought, the West Maui Mountains and Central Maui are experiencing moderate drought conditions, while east Maui is designated as abnormally dry in the latest report released on Tuesday. Elsewhere in Maui Nui, the entire island of Kaho'olawe is abnormally dry, as is western Lana'i and west Moloka'i, with a thin strip of southwestern Moloka'i experiencing severe drought.

A week ago, the southern tip of Hawai'i Island was not seeing drought conditions, but is now considered abnormally dry, and firefighters fought a fire there this week. The North Kohala district continues to have moderate drought conditions and all east Hawai'i Island is termed as abnormally dry.

The Saddle Road area, the site of the 17,000-acre Leilani fire last year, appears to be green and lush now. However, DOFAW Hawai'i Island Branch Manager Steve Bergfeld commented after a recent aerial survey, "Even after rain, within a couple of days and the wind kicks in, the fuel dries out quickly. Though it looks green, invasive grasses can still

carry fire.” Non-native grasses like fountain grass cover 25% acres of Hawai‘i’s land mass.

On O‘ahu, the monitor shows abnormally dry conditions stretching along the southern and western coastlines from Hawai‘i Kai to Ka‘ena Point. Kaua‘i has a thin area of abnormally dry conditions along its southernmost coast.

Wildfires are a threat year-round in Hawai‘i due to climate-change fueled conditions. Firefighting agencies like DOFAW and county fire departments are urging people to be cautious and avoid igniting wildfires.

Virtually all wildfires in Hawai‘i are started by people, mostly by accident. The chief causes are:

- fireworks
- heat from vehicle exhaust that can ignite dry grass
- sparks from machinery like weed whackers, chain saws, grinders, welding equipment, and all-terrain vehicles
- unattended campfires or barbecues

The Hawai‘i Wildfire Management Organization is the state’s central clearinghouse for information on wildland fires. Its website has loads of information on being fire safe and how to sign up for a free wildfire property assessment.

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RESOURCES

(All images/video courtesy: DLNR)

HD video – North Kohala drought conditions (June 28, 2023):

<https://vimeo.com/840952064>

HD video – Leilani fire area aerials and Steve Bergfeld SOTS (June 30, 2023):

<https://vimeo.com/842003016>

HD video – Leilani wildland fire (August 11, 2022):

<https://vimeo.com/738887065>

Photographs – North Kohala drought conditions (June 28, 2023):

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ltm04u3eptcknl3p3qqgg/h?rlkey=kokcs5q0jr1lmcmz0d8zomdi&dl=0>

Photographs – Leilani fire (August 11, 2022):

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/kgknk4b5vvzmove64fyd3/h?rlkey=v2onxaorfdajldzpups5r7ivu&dl=0>

Learn more: <https://www.hawaiiwildfire.org/home>

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