

## **Koa forest project proposed for ranch land**

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The state Board of Land and Natural Resources is considering approval of a project that would convert pasture land in Waimea into a koa forest over a span of 50 years.

The Kapoaula Koa Forest Management Plan is a proposed project by Paniolo Tonewoods — a partnership between guitar manufacturer Taylor Guitars and Washington wood supplier Pacific Rim Tonewoods — that would plant trees on 568 acres of former Parker Ranch land in an attempt to generate a sustainable source of koa wood to be used in the manufacture of musical instruments.

“I don’t think it’s a project that anyone can dislike,” said Paniolo Tonewoods manager Steve McMinn.

The project, McMinn said, was conceived out of two realizations. The first was that, contrary to conventional wisdom, relatively young koa wood can still be used to create quality instruments, he said.

The second realization was that the wood eventually will run out unless people make steps to plant more trees.

“We’ve been in an era of comparative abundance,” McMinn said. “But now, unless you plant it, that wood isn’t going to be there in a few years.”

With this in mind, Taylor Guitars owner Bob Taylor purchased 568 acres of pasture land roughly midway between Honokaa and Waimea.

If the project is approved, Paniolo Tonewoods will plant a variety of trees including koa and other native trees on the land with the intention to convert the land to “a semblance of the native koa/’ohi’a forest that once stood in this area,” according to the project’s environmental assessment.

The project also will include a mill that would process harvested trees on-site.

McMinn said that the project could proceed to planting within a decade, meaning that it could take nearly 40 years before any wood can be harvested. McMinn acknowledged that, at more than 60 years old, he may not live to see the forest reach maturity.

However, the environmental assessment for the project identified no significant negative impacts by the project, and several potential positive ones. For instance, the project has potential to improve native wildlife habitats and improve the site’s groundwater recharge.

McMinn also said that, when it comes time to harvest trees, the process will be sensitive to the health of the forest.

“I’m from clear-cut country,” McMinn said. “But with a forestry regime like they have in New England, or Germany, or Austria, we would keep nibbling at it, and it’s never not a forest.”

Source: <https://www.hawaiitribune-herald.com/2019/11/08/hawaii-news/koa-forest-project-proposed-for-ranch-land/>