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Healing Maui watersheds: Pollutants, runoff studied

By MELISSA TANJI, Staff Writer

KAHULUI – Two University of Hawaii researchers are trying to help Maui's community eliminate runoff and pollution problems in the Iao watershed in Central Maui and the Hapapa watershed in Kula and South Maui.

Peter Rappa and Megan Toaspern, UH Sea Grant staff, led presentations to residents in Kahului and Kihei last week to gather information on water-quality problems and environmental objectives in the two watersheds.

The smaller of the two, the Iao watershed, drains water from the Iao Stream in Wailuku and a portion of Kahului. The larger Hapapa watershed covers the southwest slope of Haleakala from the summit of the dormant volcano to the Kihei coastline between Kulanihako'i in the north to Iliiliholo near the Kamaole beach parks in the south. The area includes several major gulches, including Kulanihako'i, Waipuilani, Kaonoulu and Keokea-Waiohuli.

Rappa said the Iao and South Maui watersheds have been deemed "impaired" by the state Department of Health.

An abundance of muddy or cloudy water has been seen in Iao Stream, Rappa said. Offshore of Kahului, where water sampling was done, an abundance of murky water also was found along with chemical indicators of fertilizers or animal waste in the water. Rappa also said chlorophyll was found, which may be stimulated by the other pollutants.

"We are trying to find out where the sources of these (pollution) problems are so we can get the state waters into compliance," Rappa said at the Kahului presentation. "We are trying to find out from the residents what are the solutions."

At the Kihei meeting, which drew about 15 people, Rappa said the impaired water bodies in the Kihei area include waters at Cove Park, Kalama Park and Kalepolepo.

Rappa said multiple samples of South Maui waters also

found muddy or cloudy water, chlorophyll and evidence of fertilizers.

In South Maui, action is being taken by concerned community members and government officials who have already formed the Southwest Maui Watershed group, which is addressing erosion control and pollution.

Since August, the group has been assessing the Hapapa watershed problem as well as problems in two other watersheds in the area, Wailea and Mo'oloa.

The total area of the three watersheds is nearly 50,000 acres. The Hapapa watershed covers 33,000 acres. The other South Maui areas include Makena and Big Beach, said Richard Sylva, associate director of the Central Maui Soil and Water Conservation District, who is helping lead the South Maui group.

"It's all about water quality," said Sylva. "But in the Kihei area there is a serious impact on the reef ecology from land-based pollutants."

Sylva said the South Maui group has already identified water quality problems but can also use more information on the problems as well as solutions.

According to a report by the group, pollution problems stem from runoff of nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorus into the ocean as well as sediment, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, bacteria, boat waste, sewage, cesspools, as well runoff from tree trimmings, grass cuttings and leaves that drain into the ocean.

Toaspern and Rappa are working on a program by the state Department of Health and the University of Hawaii's Environmental Center in cooperation with the Maui Sea Grant Program and community colleges.

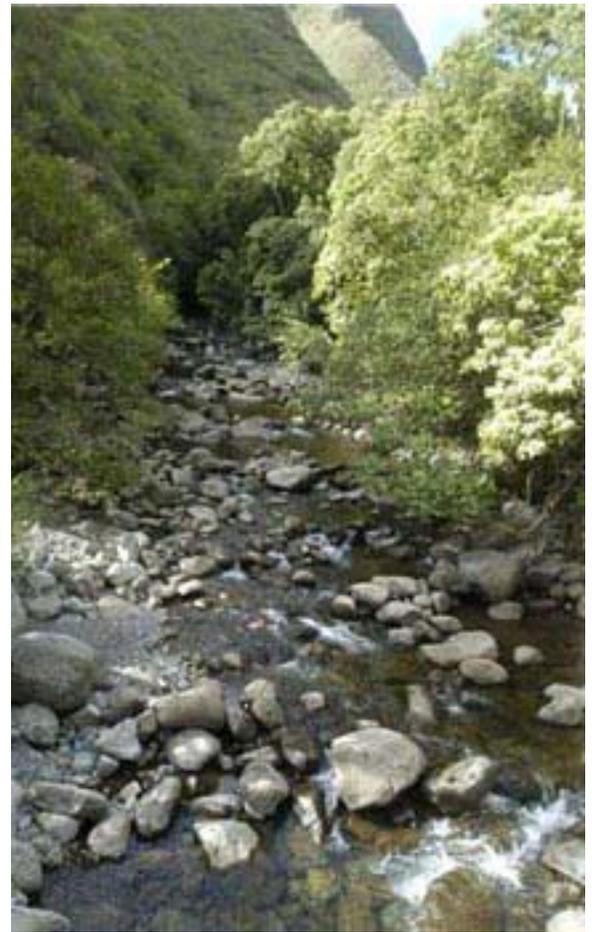
The watershed areas of Iao and Hapapa have been identified as contributing to the pollution of the coastal areas and are designated for federal restoration efforts through a Clean Water Act program.

Toaspern said the Southwest Maui group is making progress but more work needs to be done. The Iao project still needs more help in obtaining information as well as getting a group together.

At the Kahului meeting, the four people who attended the meeting identified a handful of problems with the Iao watershed.

Those included rats and invasive species. They also called on officials to identify the Iao flood plain to prevent developers from building structures in those areas.

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The group also discussed the capacity of the Iao aquifer.

Toaspern would like more public input on the problems of the Iao and Hapapa watersheds. She has surveys that can be filled out by residents.

For more information on the projects and to get information on the Southwest Maui group's next meeting, contact Toaspern at 573-5357 or send e-mail to toaspern@hawaii.edu.

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