

Hawaii

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Plans for Kulani take shape

Former prison may be converted into a training facility for military

By **JASON ARMSTRONG**
Tribune-Herald staff writer

The former Kulani prison could become a training base for a 150-soldier company to learn how to detect roadside bombs, perform emergency aerial evacuations and make forced entries into buildings.

That's according to a proposal from the Hawaii Department of Defense, which also wants to operate a quasi-military program for at-risk teens.

Those activities, along with a live-firing range, would occur on roughly 600 acres of the minimum-security facility closed last

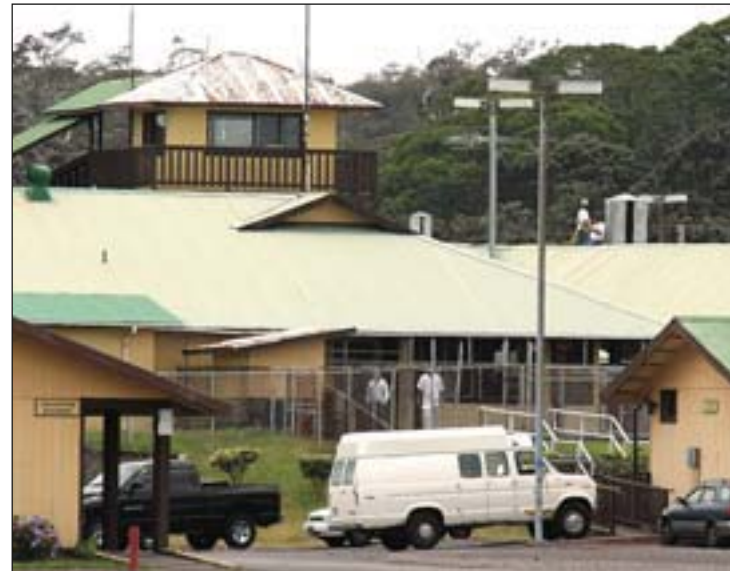
November to save money, according to the DOD's proposal.

The state Board of Land and Natural Resources is scheduled to take up the request during its 9 a.m. meeting Thursday in Honolulu.

Also under board consideration is a proposal to add 6,600 acres of the old prison site to the Puu Makaala Natural Area Reserve to help preserve critical habitat.

The board's recommendation on both requests will go to Gov. Linda Lingle. To finalize the proposals, she or her successor

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The former Kulani prison could become a training facility for the military, under a proposal by the Hawaii Department of Defense.

WILLIAM ING/
Tribune-Herald
file photo

Environmental director picked

By **NANCY COOK LAUER**
Stephens Media

Mayor Billy Kenoi has reached into a related department to fill the vacancy created by the resignation earlier this summer of Environmental Management Director Lono Tyson.

Frank DeMarco, 57, an engineer in the county Department of Public Works, began his new job Tuesday. He still faces confirmation by the County Council.

DeMarco is a licensed professional civil engineer in Hawaii and California, a certified flood plain manager and an IRS enrolled agent.

The annual salary for the director of the Department of Environmental Management is budgeted at \$100,488 this year.

It's a big job. The Department of Environmental Management oversees 21 transfer stations, two active and two inactive landfills, garbage haulers, county sewer systems, vehicle disposal, recycling and all other environmental management projects in the county. Environmental Management was split from Public Works by a ballot initiative several years ago.

One of the first orders of business, DeMarco said, is looking into a way to bring all Hilo employees in the 210-employee depart-

DeMarco has been with the county since 2007, working primarily with the flood plain management program since February 2008. Before that, he was employed 26 years by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board.

His experience includes drawing plans and specifications for wastewater treatment plants and landfills and setting requirements for regulating discharges from wastewater treatment plants, solid waste landfills, underground storage tanks and hazardous waste sites, according to the Mayor's Office.

Kenoi said he received applications from the mainland and interviewed several Hawaii candidates before finding the best fit for the job right here.

"After an exhaustive, wide-ranging search and thorough review of many well-qualified applicants for this position, I was pleased to find such a high-caliber talent within our own county to accept the responsibility for this very important position," Kenoi said. "I've heard nothing but good things about him."

DeMarco has a bachelor's degree in construction engineering from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. A proposed charter amend-

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From front page

— Lingle's tenure is term-limited and set to end Dec. 6 — would have to sign an executive order approving the free, perpetual use of the land, which would remain state property.

Military training was not mentioned in July 2009. That was when state and military leaders announced plans to close the Big Island's only prison located off of Stainback Highway, about 20 miles south of Hilo.

"In conjunction with the Hawaii Army National Guard training on the 600 acres, DOD intends to develop and operate a short-distance range, conduct Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT) at the former boys' school, conduct company-size and lower-level training along roadways and the pasture area, and develop landing zones in the pasture and near the camp for emergency evacuation and training," states the supportive recommendation of Laura Thielen, DLNR chairwoman.

A former quarry would be converted into a live-fire pistol range to replace the one that's closed at the guard's Keaukaha Military Reservation in Hilo, said Brig. Gen. Gary Ishikawa.

"It's obviously not only the military that we're looking at," he said of allowing police and other law enforcement personnel to use it.

Urban training would

focus on forced entries into the old boys' school closed years ago due to fire damage and involve a company of between 150 and 170 soldiers, Ishikawa said.

The DOD's "vision" also calls for teaching soldiers how to identify improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, he said.

Teams would seek out simulated, non-explosive copies of the home-made bombs while on a test mission to free "hostages" taken in a faux terrorist situation, he said.

"All these technologies are important in battles we are currently fighting," Ishikawa said.

A final component would be landing zones to practice "touch-and-go" aerial maneuvers and mass evacuations, he said.

"I will tell you there's absolutely no firm plans at this time," Ishikawa said of the proposed training site.

There is, however, movement on plans to open a Hawaii National Guard Youth Challenge Academy on the old prison grounds.

Similar to the program the guard has run at Kalaeloa, Oahu, since 1995, it would offer a 22-week residential phase followed by a yearlong post-residential phase for kids ages 16 to 19.

Classes on farming, auto mechanics, cooking and woodworking would be offered to the volunteer participants, who would not be

required to join the Hawaii National Guard or any other military branch, Ishikawa told the Tribune-Herald last December.

Still, about a third of participating students do enlist in the military, he said Tuesday.

The first group of employees, mostly senior-level people and the program commandant, will start Monday, he said, noting about 50 workers will be needed to run the youth camp.

"We're definitely going to accept (the first students) in January," Ishikawa said.

Maintenance responsibilities for Stainback Highway and internal roads, along with what types of public access will be permitted, will be determined in an agreement the DOD will have to reach with the DLNR's Division of Forestry and Wildlife and present to the land board within three months, according to

the department's requirements.

In a separate request, DOFAW is asking the land board to add 6,600 acres of the former prison site to the Natural Area Reserve System to allow for research and species preservation.

The target area is roughly 6 miles long and up to 3 miles wide, ranging from the 4,600-foot elevation to the 6,229-foot level.

It's "probably the finest and highest quality forest on the Island of Hawaii," according to the NARS Commission's proposal.

Besides containing large tracts of koa and ohia forests, the area also is home to 11 endangered plant species and serves as federal critical habitat for seven types of birds, according to a letter from Paul Conry, Forestry and Wildlife Division administrator.

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