



**T**hanks for checking in! The PFX newsletter is our chance to share the work and perspectives of the PFX and its partners and inform the broader Pacific Island community of the challenges facing wildfire management in our region. Over the past year, the PFX has been busy overhauling its internal structure to better serve our Pacific Island community.

In 2015, the founding PFX partners – the US Forest Service (USFS) Institute of Pacific Island Forestry, Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization (HWMO), and the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (CTAHR-UHM) developed and finalized a charter to formally outline the objectives, scope of work, and structure of the PFX. Based on the recommendations of our sponsor, the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP), we have also expanded our leadership to include more management and practitioner representation on the PFX Steering Committee.

The PFX also recently launched a [new website](#) to serve as a platform for the dissemination of fire-related information and events for the Pacific region.

Last but certainly not least, we'd also like to officially welcome our new PFX Coordination Assistant, Melissa Kunz, to the Pacific fire management community. Melissa is based at HWMO and has been working closely with Clay Trauernicht at CTAHR-UHM to develop and disseminate PFX products, plan activities, and manage communications.



Attendees of the April 2016 CNH Field trip at Waimea Canyon on Kauai. The trip was co-hosted by PFX and DOFAW. Photo: C. Trauernicht

## Sizing up Fire Season 2016

This year's strong El Niño is behaving just as predicted, with rainfall well below average across the Pacific Island region. States of emergencies were declared in **Palau, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia** for lack of drinking water. **Guam** and the **Northern Marianas Islands** are closely monitoring freshwater supplies. In **Hawaii**, the region-wide drought recently spurred the National Interagency Fire Center to declare above average "Significant Wildland Fire Potential". The abnormally dry conditions have already contributed to large wildfires on the islands of **Oahu, Maui, Hawaii, Guam** and **Yap**.

Despite recent rains, the drought is forecast to persist across the region through the summer.



## A Preparedness Push

The fire danger came as no surprise to the fire management community in the Pacific. The PFX released a fact sheet outlining the association between El Niño, drought and increased fire activity on Pacific Islands in November 2015.

Using this information, HWMO and CTAHR-UHM began coordinating public messaging across fire response agencies with the Big Island Wildfire Coordinating Group and Oahu Wildfire Information and Education group. The end result is the statewide "Wildfire & Drought Look Out!" campaign. [Check it out](#) and tell your friends!

Elsewhere in the Pacific, our partners at the US Forest Service are supporting new

wildfire coordinator positions with Guam Forestry (PFX Steering Committee member Christine Fejeran) and the Palau Protected Area Network. They also continue to support outreach and management efforts led by the Yap Forestry Department.

Thanks to the efforts of PFX partners, the current level of cooperation and the quality of available resources for wildfire prevention and preparedness across the region is continuing to improve. This coordination will contribute to reducing wildfire impacts, and no doubt the lessons learned this year will help improve efforts in the future.



Nanakuli Fire, Oahu. March 2016. Photo: Clay Trauernicht

PFX is committed to providing fire-related information based on the needs of our end-users. Please reach out to us with your own ideas for fire-related products or events.

[info@pacificfireexchange.org](mailto:info@pacificfireexchange.org)  
[trauerni@hawaii.edu](mailto:trauerni@hawaii.edu)  
808-956-6875

# Recent PFX Activities

- Published fact sheet on [El Niño and fire weather](#) for Pacific islands
- Hosted a webinar - [“Pre-Fire Planning for Land Owners & Managers”](#) with 15 attendees
- Created [“Grazing to Reduce Blazing”](#) fact sheet
- Attended the April 2016 California-Nevada-Hawaii (CNH) Fire Conference on Kauai
- Co-hosted a field trip to the 2012 Waimea and Hikimoe Burn sites on Kauai with DOFAW at CNH Conference, with 30 field trip attendees
- Hosted field trip for UH Natural Resource and Environmental Management faculty at Nanakuli Valley burn site

## Partner perspectives

Getting to know the diverse people, roles, and views of fire management in the Pacific



**Jack Minassian**  
Fire Science Instructor  
Hawaii Community College  
University of Hawaii

### What first sparked your interest in fire?

I liked working outdoors, so I figured I'd work outdoors and someone would pay me. I started off with the US Forest Service then ended up with the National Park Service. I fought my first wildland fire when I was 18 years old. You know, when you're that age, you like all the action. That's what firefighting is all about - just getting out there. As I fought more fires, I realized there was more to it than just putting fires out and there was more to learn - how fire ecology works.

### Share an experience you've had in partnering with others to meet a fire management goal

Before I started teaching, I was the Pacific Fire Management Officer at Volcanoes National Park. When I first came here there was very little interaction between different agencies. I would meet firefighters from different agencies casually and they'd say "What's going on?" I'd say "We just had this training," and they'd say "Oh, my people needed that training too!" It wasn't that we weren't working together - there was just no coordination and communication.

We eventually developed the Big Island Wildfire Coordinating Group so all the Federal, State, local agencies here on the island could meet, be able to communicate, coordinate, and work together. On this island we have limited resources, so we all have to help one another. The partnerships are essential.

### What is your favorite way to spend the weekend?

Relax! If it's football season, I like to watch football during the weekend. Other than that, I do projects around the house. Actually, I'm into karate and I practice that. Twice a week, I work out. I've been doing it for 9 years. They advertised in the local paper. I met and really enjoyed the sensei, and just liked the exercise. That's one thing I always promote for my students - physical fitness. Firefighting is a lot of stress - both physically and mentally, so I've always been an advocate for being physically fit and active.

### Share one thing most people don't know about you

I have a black belt in karate.



**David Smith**  
Administrator  
Division of Forestry and Wildlife  
HI Dept. of Land & Natural Resources

### Did a particular event spark your interest in fire?

Around 2000, there was a fire at Kaena Point on Oahu. The area had been converted into a grass fire matrix with scattered native plants. The fire burned through the grass and scorched a bunch of natives. On the one hand, it was a clean slate. All the introduced grasses had been burned off, and here was this tremendous opportunity to go out and replant it with natives. Yet we weren't geared up to do that - there weren't any resources for it. Kaena Point was a real eye-opener of how, one, we need to change the grass-fire regime, and two, we need to get back in and do rehab of burned areas.

### Share an experience you've had in partnering with others to meet a fire management goal.

The best management for a lot of species, ecosystems, and landscapes is not just going to be managing to your border. Looking across borders and at landscape-scale management and maintenance is what we've really focused on in the last 20 years.

As an example, the Waianae Mountains Watershed Partnership (WMWP) on Oahu involves a number of landowners. We're working across boundaries to look at watershed protection, native forest and native ecosystem protection. WMWP is out in Waianae Kai - where we've had a lot of these grass fire issues - and they're starting to install fuel breaks. We're figuring out how to restore stream courses, waterways, and drainages to break the area up into manageable chunks, breaking up that grass-fire cycle and starting to put in shade trees.

### What is your favorite way to spend the weekend?

My favorite way to spend the weekend is paddling outrigger canoes.

### Share one thing most people don't know about you

I am a certified arborist. I climb trees and do tree maintenance on the side. I do consulting, I get paid to trim people's trees, and I do a lot of volunteer work for community organizations and that kind of thing. It's fun.

Want to share your own perspective?  
We'd love to hear from you! Email [melissa@hawaiiwildfire.org](mailto:melissa@hawaiiwildfire.org)