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Scattered showers will hang around, help relieve drought

By EDWIN TANJI, City Editor

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WAILUKU - The high-pressure system that sent rain clouds scudding up against the windward slopes of Maui over the weekend will be easing off today as a southeasterly wind pattern is expected to begin moving in.

The scattered-but-frequent showers that marked Christmas and New Year's in Maui County are expected to hang around, relieving yearlong drought conditions in Central Maui and West Molokai.

The frequent showers in the watersheds also restored the Upcountry reservoirs and appeared to have revived the East Maui watershed, with a steady flow recorded through the past week in the Wailoa Ditch, which provides water to Upcountry residents via the Kamole Water Treatment Facility.

For the week, water use around the county was down dramatically to under 30 million gallons a day, with the Central Maui usage down to 19.38 mgd - 20 percent below the midsummer peaks of 25 to 26 mgd.

"Central Maui customers have really shown what their actual consumption is like," Water Director Jeff Eng said in his weekly water use report. "Water production demand under 20 mgd is excellent. West Maui water usage has been very good too."

He noted the flows in the Wailoa Ditch of 160 mgd, 80 percent of capacity, while the steady streamflows also are filling up the Upcountry reservoirs - holding 169.3 million gallons Friday.

"Our reservoirs are slowly filling up, which we normally see earlier in the year," Eng said. "I hope the late start will mean the rains continue into the spring. The rain has really helped to keep consumption in check."

The Climate Prediction Center offered a positive assessment, forecasting above-normal rainfall in January and continuing through March.

The forecast was based on observations of neutral conditions in the equatorial waters of the Pacific or possibly a cooling that would cause a La Nina, when a slight drop in sea surface temperatures in the eastern Pacific tend to cause wetter conditions in Hawaii.

Whether the equatorial conditions are a factor, the National Weather Service said the shift in the trades will likely result in frequent showers when remnants of a cold front drift over the islands possibly by Wednesday.

The front is associated with a low-pressure center near the Aleutians that may generate a northwest swell during the week as well.

The late December rains already have boosted rainfall totals. Since Dec. 25, both the Puu Kukui rain gauge in West Maui and the West Wailua Iki gauge in East Maui have recorded between 20 and 25 inches.

For West Wailua Iki, the more than 30 inches of rain recorded in December easily topped the 20.9-inch average for the month. Also at about 31 inches, Puu Kukui was short of its December average of 36.3 inches.

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Article Photos



The Maui News / MATTHEW THAYER photo
On New Year's Eve, Haiku residents Vicki Schulte and Lili Anderson deal with a steady downpour along Haiku Road. But with Maui still rated as abnormally dry, they said the weather was inviting, even for dog Bandit, on their 4.6-mile route. "It's perfect; it's wonderful," said Schulte.

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