

Distinguished Service Award Nomination 2015
Submitted by Michelle Mansker, Oahu Army Natural Resource Program
For Alvin Char, retired Army Environmental Division Chief

Mr. Char began his environmental career in 1977 as a temporary employee at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a Biologist. Mr. Char started with the Army Garrison Hawaii as a Biologist in 1979 and spent over 35 years with the Environmental Division before retiring in 2013. When he began his career with the Army, it was him and 2 other people running the entire show. Under Mr. Char's direction and vision, that Environmental Division grew to over 250 staff, with most of them biologist. Mr. Char was instrumental in starting the Army down the path of being good stewards of their natural and cultural resources. The Army is responsible for managing more than 100 endangered species and their habitat, 1/3 of the State of Hawaii's listed species! In many cases, Army lands are the last refugia for these species. Without Mr. Char's leadership and conviction to do the right thing, many of these species would more than likely have gone extinct. Mr. Char began his career during a time when environmental stewardship and Army training did not go hand in hand. The environmental movement was still in its infancy and the idea of balancing the military mission with natural and cultural resource management was virtually unheard of. It was because of Mr. Char's persistence and tenacity that an agency whose focus was not the environment began to take the lead in doing so. Under Mr. Char's leadership, the Natural Resource Program grew to a staff of more than 100 trained field biologist on Oahu and Hawaii Island. Under his watch, the Natural Resource Program's budget grew to over \$11 million per year to manage nearly 200,000 acres of land. He also supported construction of Oahu's largest ungulate free enclosure (over 1,800 acres) at Schofield Barracks West Range in 2012 and helped lead the effort of eradicating all goats from Makua Valley in the early 2000's. Under his direction, the Army in Hawaii was the first to really reach out to a large variety of partners and look at natural resource management on an ecosystem scale. Through his vision, the Natural Resource Program staff partner with numerous private land owners such as Kamehameha Schools, State Department of Land and Natural Resources, Board of Water Supply and are members of various conservation groups such as Coordinating Group for Alien Pest Species, Hawaii Rare Plant Restoration Group, Oahu Invasive Species Committee, and the Hawaii Conservation Alliance. Mr. Char was also one of the founding members of the Koolau Mountains Watershed Partnership on Oahu. Under his direction, the Natural Resource Program is helping to educate Hawaii about the plight of its natural resources through an intensive outreach program that touches over 7,000 members of the public and military family members at their 40 annual events. He is also responsible for helping to grow the next generation of conservationists with an active internship program in most program areas within the Environmental Division. In 1999, Mr. Char helped establish the 'Imi Pono no ka 'Āina Environmental education program. The program was aimed at working with island youth to educate about native ecosystems. Specifically it was to educate hunters and hunting families in hopes of improving the relationship between conservation community and hunters. At the time, fence cutting was very prevalent. This program was one of three partnership programs housed at the National Park. Today 'Imi Pono is the outreach program for the Three Mountain Alliance watershed partnership and has served hundreds of island youth over the years and has changed the lives of numerous people. Finally, Mr. Char is responsible for bringing the Army's Compatible Use Buffer Program to Hawaii. The ACUB Program provided funding to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the State DLNR to purchase lands with a conservation benefit. The program helps the Army offset some of its impacts to the environment and to "buffer" its training lands. Mr. Char helped to secure Pupukeya Paumalu, Waimea Valley, and the former Honouliuli Preserve in perpetuity as lands set aside for natural and cultural resource preservation. Mr. Char's dedication to the natural resources of Hawaii facilitated growth of a program that is recognized as one of the leaders in the field within the not only the State of Hawaii but in the nation. Under his leadership, the Natural Resource Program won the coveted Department of Defense and Secretary of the Army Natural Resource Team Awards in 2011 and 2012. They also won the US Fish and Wildlife Service Conservation Partnership Award twice in a three year period of time, beating out all other services in the US. The Cultural Resource Program was awarded the 2004 Secretary of the Army Environmental Award. Mr. Char's individual federal service awards include the 2008 Installation Management Command DPW Support Executive of the Year Award, the Superior Civilian Service Award and the Commander's Award for Civilian Service. Mr. Char embodies all the qualities of a true Distinguished Service Award recipient and has forever changed the face of natural and cultural resource management for the US States Army.