Staff members also continue work to restore Kahoolawe, with KIRC funding almost gone, to bring in drinking water. This year marks a significant crossroads for Kahoolawe Island Reserve Commission. Until now, the commission has drawn its funds from a $44 million trust fund the federal government set up when it turned over 75 percent of the island before turning it to the state in 1994. The federal government then spent about a decade and $530 million clearing unexploded ordnance from about 75 percent of the island’s surface. Only about 10 percent of the island, or 2,647 acres, was cleared to a depth of 4 feet. About 8,652 acres of the island’s surface remains littered with munitions. Unexploded ordnance is unsafe.

Visitors are reminded to remain close to staff, be aware, and, most importantly, “if you don’t drop it, don’t pick it up.” Such was the case during a visit to the land last week. Mayor Alan Arakawa and several state Senate members toured Kahoolawe’s Kihei Small Boat Harbor to Kahoolawe on Tuesday to tour two solar photovoltaic-powered facilities that the county has sponsored in the last three years.

KIRC secured three county Office of Economic Development grants since 2013, each worth $25,000, county officials said. Those funds went toward installing a solar system to power housing facilities for staff and volunteers who are working to manage and restore the island over the next 10 years.

But more work needs to be done, and the commission can’t do it alone. KIRC can’t do it alone. Such was the case during a visit to the island as a spiritual center and navigation marker, said Guest Paul Higashino, KIRC’s environmental restoration manager.

He added that, on a clear day, onlookers can see not only Maui and Lanai, but all the way to Hawaiian Islands. From this vantage point, it’s not hard to see why the KIRC employees have worked tirelessly to manage and restore the island over the last decade. Now, Kahoolawe looks different from the barren land that was turned over to the state in 1994.

KIRC staff and volunteers have planted native species like a‘ali‘i, aweoweo, aki aki, kōkio‘o, pu‘ale‘ale, and blackberry, as a shelter for overgrown kiawe trees. They also plant brush and trees on the island. The goal is to return Kahoolawe as its native Hawaiian dryland forest, KIRC spokes-

woman Kelly McGugh said. But more work needs to be done, and the KIRC can’t do it alone. Until now, the commission has drawn its funds from a $44 million trust fund the federal government set up when it turned over the island to the state. The funding came with the caveat that the island would be transferred to a future sovereign Hawaiian nation.

This year marks a significant crossroads for the commission. Unless state lawmakers approve a new funding source, it is expected to run out of money for its operations by next year. It might be forced to shut down restoration efforts and discontinue volunteer and staff trips to the island. KIRC’s demobilization would also cease patrol of the waters around the island, possibly leading to overfishing.

“Why is it important to continue restoring Kahoolawe’s national landscape, preserving our cultural resources, monitoring and protecting the public from the inherent dangers of unexploded ordnance?” (That) is what funding the KIRC will do.

Commission Chairwoman Michelle McClan said “Restoring endangered and na-

tive plant and bird habitats, protecting impor-
tant cultural sites and ensuring the continued health of Kahoolawe’s waters are valuable to all of us.

Arakawa agreed that Kahoolawe is a his-
toric, traditional and cultural asset to the coun-
try and the state.

“After all that has been through, we can’t abandon Kahoolawe,” Arakawa said. “As a county and state have a responsibility to help funding the KIRC so we can continue its work. Still at least 4 nautical miles from the former Target Isle, passengers aboard the foot aluminum landing craft look for breaches in the hull of the island. No whales, but a white speck behind the boat serves as a reminder of the site’s dangers.

The bombing stopped only after members of the Protect Kaho‘olawe Ohana began occupying the island in 1976. The protest spurred a lengthy lawsuit in U.S. District Court, President George H.W. Bush finally ordered an end to live fire training on the island.

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