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Press Release

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HI State Department of Health Continues to Support Watershed Restoration on Kaho'olawe

The Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC) has begun a three-year watershed restoration project in Kamōhio Watershed on Kaho'olawe, made possible through grant funding from the Hawai'i State Department of Health (HDOH), Surface Water Protection Branch, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Restoration of Kamōhio Watershed Phase I project will take place from 2025 through 2028 and focuses on reducing sedimentation and improving water quality in Kamōhio Bay and surrounding nearshore waters.

The 45-acre project site is located in the middle reaches of Kamōhio Watershed, one of 24 watersheds on Kaho'olawe. The phase one of the project site is located on the southeast slope of Kaho'olawe between 1,100ft and 1,200ft in elevation and contains both Tier One-surface cleared and Tier Two- 4 foot removal depth of UXO clearance areas. Restoration activities include the installation of erosion control best management practices such as wattles and check dams, the establishment of irrigated planting corridors, invasive species management, and the outplanting of approximately 22,500 drought-tolerant native Hawaiian trees, shrubs, and grasses. Together, these efforts are projected to reduce sediment loads by an estimated 22.5 tons per year while increasing native vegetation cover and improving soil infiltration.

Kamōhio Watershed was the first to receive approval on its watershed-based plan by the new Surface Water Protection Branch. Although Kaho'olawe is not listed as impaired under the State's water quality assessments, sedimentation from decades of land degradation remains the primary nonpoint source pollutant affecting Kamōhio Bay. Restoration of native dryland ecosystems has been shown to significantly reduce stormwater runoff, sediment transport, and nearshore turbidity.

"This project represents an important step forward in restoring Kamōhio Watershed and protecting downstream marine resources," said KIRC Restoration Manager Paul Higashino. "By

combining proven erosion control techniques with native plant restoration and long-term monitoring, we can reduce sediment runoff while rebuilding a resilient, self-sustaining ecosystem.”

The project will also incorporate extensive monitoring, including rainfall and stream stage measurements, soil erosion pin transects, vegetation plots, soil infiltration testing, and drone-based imagery to document changes in vegetation health and landscape stability over time. Volunteers will play a critical role in implementation, working alongside KIRC staff during scheduled access trips to Kaho‘olawe.

KIRC Executive Director Michael Nāho‘opi‘i added, “Support from the Department of Health, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the many volunteers who contribute their time and energy is essential to fulfilling our mission. These partnerships allow us to protect and restore Kaho‘olawe’s cultural, historical, and environmental resources for future generations.”

This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under assistance agreements C9-96978720-0, C9-96978721-0, C9-96978722-0, C9-96978723-0, and C9-96978724-0 to the Hawai‘i State Department of Health, Surface Water Protection Branch. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the EPA, nor does the EPA endorse trade names or recommend the use of commercial products mentioned in this document.

KIRC Project: Restoration of Kamōhio Watershed Phase I

Grantor: Hawai‘i State Department of Health, Surface Water Protection Branch

ABOUT THE KIRC

The Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC) was established by the Hawai‘i State Legislature in 1993 to manage the Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve while it is held in trust for a future Native Hawaiian sovereign entity. The KIRC establishes policies for the use of the island and its surrounding waters through comprehensive restoration, monitoring, and cultural programs. The Cultural Program integrates a Native Hawaiian perspective into all activities. The organization is governed by a seven-member Commission and supported by a dedicated staff.

Administratively attached to the Hawai‘i State Department of Land and Natural Resources, the KIRC receives limited state and federal funds for its responsibilities related to the preservation, protection, and rehabilitation of Kaho‘olawe’s land, surrounding waters, and cultural resources. The majority of funding is secured through grants and charitable contributions. For more information, call (808) 243-5020 or visit www.kahoolawe.hawaii.gov. To make a donation to the Kaho‘olawe Rehabilitation Trust Fund, please visit kahoolawe.hawaii.gov/donations.