

# KAHO'OLAWE

KO HEMA LAMALAMA | Newsletter of the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission | Winter & Spring 2025



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Welcome to *Ko Hema Lamalama*, the newsletter of the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve. Uncle Harry Mitchell interpreted this name as **the southern beacon**, which served as a source of light to weary travelers voyaging beyond the pillars of Kahiki. Let *Ko Hema Lamalama* aid us in sharing a source of light from Kaho'olawe and the restoration of Hawaiian culture across Hawai'i nei. *This issue is made possible by supporters like you. Mahalo for helping us share Kaho'olawe.*



# FROM THE DIRECTOR



Executive Director  
Michael K. Nāho'opi'i

## Funding KIRC Operations

The Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC), created in 1993, was initially funded by a portion of the Navy's cleanup funding so that the State of Hawaii can implement environmental restoration programs and to manage the natural and cultural resources of Kaho'olawe. From 1994 until 2004, funds were deposited into a state trust that was able to sustain and fund the KIRC operations. This allowed the KIRC to plan for its future and develop the technology and skill set necessary to take over full-time management and restoration efforts when the Navy's cleanup ended in 2004. Since that time, the KIRC utilized the balance of the trust to develop pioneering planting methods to overcome the limitations of the Navy's unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance as well as develop a robust UXO safety program for Kaho'olawe.

Knowing the trust was limited and would eventually run dry, the KIRC began looking for alternative funding sources starting in 2010. Initially, the KIRC sought means of generating its own revenue to replenish the diminishing trust fund. Due to restrictions in the KIRC's statutes, the KIRC is restricted from any commercial activities within the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve. This forced the search to seek funding through existing fees or taxes that supported environmental restoration. From 2010 to 2015, the KIRC, working with our legislative supporters sought a variety of fees that could help our efforts. Bills were introduced to collect a portion of the conveyance tax (tax on land transfers), asset forfeitures (vessels seized violating Kaho'olawe laws) and a fee on Molokini users (adding Molokini to the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve). These efforts were unsuccessful but brought the needs of the KIRC to the attention of our government leaders.

In 2016, the KIRC finally received general funds for its operations. This lump sum was an initial investment by the state that took several years to solidify as a reoccurring support for the KIRC. To establish this level of funding, the KIRC underwent a State Auditor's financial and managerial audit as well as developing a Financial Sustainability Plan. In this plan, the KIRC proposed state funding for personnel and infrastructure to support the KIRC's restoration and management efforts. It also proposed seeking various state, federal and county grants to conduct specific on-island restoration projects and creating a membership organization to generate charitable donations that can augment existing sustainability and restoration projects.

In 2025, the federal funding opportunities have been significantly reduced as the direction of federal funding has shifted. To adjust to this change, the KIRC is seeking new ways to generate additional revenue within the restrictions of its statutes. Over the last few years, the KIRC has been seeking state funding to build a multi-purpose education and operations center at its Kihei base yard to generate a new revenue stream for Kaho'olawe's future. This new facility will consolidate all KIRC operations to a single location and eliminate the expense of leased office spaces on Maui. Additionally, various revenue generating opportunities are possible through the planned museum, education and conference center and other marketing venues built into the site. Over the next few years, the KIRC will be seeking the support of our government leaders, legislative supporters, and community friends to help build this future for Kaho'olawe. Please follow along and support us as we start a new journey for Kaho'olawe's future sustainability. I Ola Kanaloa!

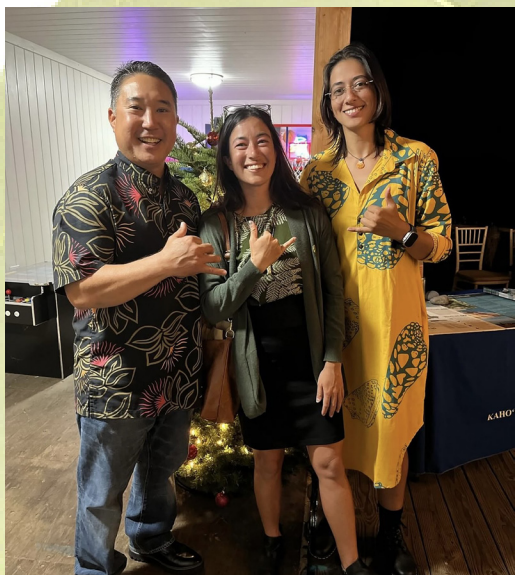
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "M.K. Nāho'opi'i". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.



# I OLA KANALOA FUNDRAISER



Counterclockwise: The KIRC's Public Information Specialist Ashley Razo's presentation. View of Kaho'olawe from Nāulu Farm. KIRC's Dean Tokishi, Christina Wine, Caroline Sabharwal. I Ola Kanaloa presentation.



## KIRC Raises Over \$4,000 in Fundraising

On December 14, 2024, Mākena Golf & Beach Club hosted the first I Ola Kanaloa, a fundraising dinner event honoring the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission and the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (PKO) for our combined work towards supporting Kaho'olawe. The event celebrated the KIRC and PKO in playing a critical roles in remembering, reconnecting and practicing in the spaces of Kanaloa.

I Ola Kanaloa aims to encourage the health and vitality of Kanaloa spaces: the ocean, wind currents, particular marine life, underground fresh water and ancestral knowledge.

The dinner was held at Nāulu Farm, named for the Nāulu wind and cloud bridge that connects Ulupalakua to Kaho'olawe. The Nāulu cloud bridge is a unique meteorological phenomenon in the Honua'ula region of Maui. It forms when trade winds interact with warm air rising from the island causing condensation and forming a bridge-like cloud band that stretches from the top of Honua'ula to the island of Kaho'olawe. This cloud formation typically occurs in the afternoons and is crucial for the area's ecosystem, contributing to the island's rainfall and supporting its diverse flora and fauna. Nāulu Farm is part of Mākena's larger effort to support the connection of the Nāulu cloud bridge from Ulupalakua to Kaho'olawe.

There were two presentations, the first being from PKO's leader, Lopaka Aiwohi and the second presentation given by the KIRC's Public Information Specialist, Ashley Razo. There was over 70 attendees and the KIRC raised over \$4,000 in fundraising donations. All dinner proceeds from the event benefited the KIRC and PKO honorees. Mark your calendars, the second I Ola Kanaloa celebration is slated for November 22, 2025. We hope to see you there to celebrate Kanaloa!





# OCEAN PROGRAM



These past winter and spring months, the KIRC welcomed volunteers from Kihei Charter School, County of Maui Environmental Protection & Sustainability (EP&S), Office of Conservation and Coastal Lands (OCCL), Hawai'i Sea Grant, the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (PKO), Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW), and Kamehameha Schools (KS)-Maui.

Volunteers assisted the Ocean Program in completing work on the Green Grant Wetlands Restoration project funded by the County of Maui Department of Environment Management (DEM) and Environmental Protection & Sustainability Division. This one year grant is providing the KIRC funding to enhance 2.69 acres of wetland habitat in Honokanai'a and 1.5 acres of wetland habitat in Honukanaeae. The Green Grant is allowing the KIRC's Ocean Program to utilize innovative techniques such as a planting method including a metal framing system which will eliminate "cave in's" in vertical sand dune faces, allowing vegetation to take root and stabilize the loss of habitat. The KIRC will also implement the method of hypersaline flooding to an area to remove non-native buffelgrass. The KIRC has found that hypersaline water can be used to inundate and "burn" buffelgrass with no negative effect on the native 'aki'aki grass.

The first focus of the Green Grant is planting native 'aki'aki and 'ākulikuli. 'Ākulikuli, also known as seaside purslane, is a drought, heat, wind and salt-tolerant groundcover plant indigenous to Hawaii. The KIRC staff find it highly valuable for Kaho'olawe's coastal ecosystems due to it's ability to filter toxins, and absorb sediment runoff and excess nutrients from water before the water reaches the ocean and suffocates coral reefs. 'Aki'aki has historically been chosen by the KIRC Ocean team because of it's ability to prevent erosion by trapping sand and moisture, creating habitat for species like the threatened Hawaiian green sea turtle, and supports native seabird nesting. Additionally, 'aki'aki helps reduce runoff onto the reef.

*Pictures from top to bottom: Volunteers from Kihei Charter School, Ocean Program staff with Michelle McLinden and Mia Charleston from County of Maui EP&S, Kihei Charter School & OCCL volunteers planting on Honokanai'a Beach.*







In January, sixteen volunteers from the PKO planted 700 ‘aki‘aki and 300 ‘ākulikuli at Honokanai‘a. In February, sixteen high school students and staff from Kīhei Charter School and two representatives from the County of Maui planted 900 ‘aki‘aki and 100 ‘ākulikuli on the beach dune system of Honukanaenae. In March, sixteen teachers from KS-Maui participated in the planting of 1,000 ‘aki‘aki grass on the beach dune of Honukanaenae. In the past six months-with the help of the KIRC’s volunteers, a total of 6,000 native plants were planted! The total number of native plants reintroduced by the KIRC’s Ocean Program since 2022 is now over 34,687!



The second focus of the Green Grant is the removal of the non-native buffelgrass weed. The Ocean team has continuously battled buffelgrass, which is a highly flammable, and fire-adapted grass that can quickly regenerate after fires, leading to a cycle of increased fire frequency and intensity. Buffelgrass also displaces native plant species, reducing biodiversity and disrupting pollination and native seed dispersal.



In the winter and spring months, the KIRC volunteers also repaired Kaho‘olawe’s roads by shoveling approximately 25 tons of gravel rock and laying the gravel bags down on the main roadway. This maintenance is vital in reducing the sediment load that enters the nearshore waters during seasonal heavy rain events. the seasonal wetland in Honokanai‘a. This grant funds enhancement to a 2.69-acres including planting 10,000 native species, invasive species removal, and reduction of sedimentation and increase water flow into the wetland.

What’s next? The Ocean Program will continue to enhance the wetlands at Honokanai‘a and Honukanaenae and to stabilize the sand dunes on the coastline of Kealaikahiki ‘ili by introducing over 7,000 native vegetation, removing invasive species, and constructing waterflow control devices.



*Pictures from top to bottom: Volunteers from Kīhei Charter School and OCCL planting on Honokanai‘a Beach. Kīhei Charter School volunteers gathering and raking gravel on the main road.*



# RESTORATION PROGRAM



Volunteers from the OCCL on the hard pan at Wailuna

During these past winter and spring months, volunteers from Kamehameha Schools (KS) Maui, KS Kapālama Art Department & Alum, the Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana, Terraformation, East Maui Watershed Partnership, the Office of Conservation and Coastal Lands (OCCL), Maui Ocean Center, Haleakalā Biochar, the Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW), Hawaiʻi Sea Grant, Island Conservation, Ka Ipu Kukui Fellows, Four Seasons Resort Maui, and Lanikai Brewing assisted the Restoration Program.

Volunteers planted 4,000 native and canoe plants at Keālihalao and at Keanakeiki while seedballs were distributed at Kanapou and Kamōhio watershed. Invasive species removal continued at Keanakeiki and Keālihalao. Volunteers also assisted in repairing roads and fuel reduction around base camp and the up keep of facilities.

Volunteers from the OCCL constructed fascines—bundles of brushwood made from tamarisk branches, also known as “alien windrows” (shown in picture 1). These fascines are strategically placed across the barren landscape of the Hakioawa watershed hard pan at Wailuna, one of the most severely eroded areas on Kahoʻolawe. Fascines are an erosion control technique used in degraded landscapes to capture sediment from wind and water erosion and to reduce water velocity during rain events.

Volunteers collected pili seeds on the side of K-1 road and bundled them in cloth to place in depressions and natural features (shown in picture 2 and 3). These bundles act as “seed balls” which will eventually sprout into pili grass after rain events. By gathering seeds from local trees or grasses, the effort ensures that the genetic diversity of the region is maintained and that the plants are adapted to the local environment. In picture four, volunteers are seen spreading seeds and duff onto the hard pan and into rivulets and gulches. The material was collected at the KIRC’s Honokanai’a base camp from hao, milo and kou plants also as a form of mitigation to reduce leaf litter, rodent nesting



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3





Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6

and prevent fire danger. In April, Andy Schmelzer and Joe Imhoff from Haleakalā Biochar made quality biochar using kiawe, rainwater and diluted fish emulsion (shown in picture 5). Abe Puz, Danielle Higashi, and Margaret Angel from DOFAW worked with KIRC's Jamie Bruch installed a Remote Automatic Weather Station (RAWS) at the summit of Kaho'olawe by Pu'u Moaulanui (shown in picture 6). Every year, the KIRC services the weather station and changing sensors. The RAWS gives the KIRC crucial information to monitor red flag warnings, fire hazards, precipitation and winds for the KIRC's Operation team. The RAWS will also be heavily utilized for the upcoming Department of Health (DOH) grant funded project for restoration of the Kamōhio Watershed. The KIRC will use RAWS to monitor precipitation events, flash flooding, sedimentation rates, and accessibility of roads to project sites.

What's next? The Restoration team is currently developing a prototype for a series of composting bioreactors. These bioreactors will address the severely degraded soils on Kaho'olawe. Once the prototype is finalized, the team aims to secure funding to scale the design into multiple operational units for field deployment. The Restoration team is awaiting further instructions to proceed with the DOH project. The Restoration team will continue to search for funding for future desired projects in Kanapou, Keanakeiki, Keāliālalo, and Kaukapakapa.

### *New Hire - Kale'a Paiva, Natural Resource Specialist III*



Kale'a was born and raised on the island of Maui and graduated from Ke Kula Kaiapuni 'o Kekaulike in 2018. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Resources and Environmental Management (NREM) from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in 2024 with a specialization in watershed and coastal management and began working with the KIRC in early 2025. Through the Hawaiian Language Immersion Program, Kale'a found her passion for aloha and kia'i 'āina. She has worked in a variety of fields, including food plant propagation, Hawaiian language tutoring, forestry, aquatic monitoring, wildlife ecology lab work, outdoor education, and traditional Hawaiian agriculture.

Her first experience with Kaho'olawe was as a volunteer with the Kamali'i program through the Hawaiian Canoe Club. After her first access, she quickly grew a strong connection with the island and is now sincerely grateful to be using her passion and education to work toward revitalizing Kaho'olawe. Kale'a hopes to serve as an example to young Hawaiians who are dedicated to restoring the place they call home.



# VOLUNTEER REFLECTIONS

Volunteers Sophie & Wade Maeda at Pu'u 'O Moa'ula



## *A Father and Daughter Huaka'i*

Upon arriving on Kaho'olawe, I had little knowledge other than what I learned in primary school and from 4-H's guest speaker Dean Tokishi. At first, I was nervous to meet the people, especially because my dad and I were the only first-timers there. But going there to learn about Kaho'olawe was one of the best experiences of my life. Not only did I meet such amazing dedicated people, but I also learned so much about a culturally preserved tiny island that had so much meaning behind it. Each day was such an honor to learn and help clean up the island. On top of that, going to Kaho'olawe helped me get away from the "city life" and finally helped me connect with strangers and get my hands in the dirt instead of doing nothing and constantly being on my phone daily. After working hard for a few hours, getting in the ocean and eating delicious food was the best way to end the day. I must give a major thanks to Uncle Paul for helping me learn more about such a sacred island and touring me around. To the KIRC and PKO, I can not thank them enough for giving me such a welcoming experience. I am forever grateful and will use all I have learned for great use! - Sophie Maeda, KIRC Volunteer



When my daughter Sophie informed me that she had a Senior High School project on Kaho'olawe, I inquired with the KIRC on how to access the island. I was greeted warmly by the KIRC, who informed me that there was a wait list of two years to access Kaho'olawe. Fortunately, two spots opened up and Sophie and I were able to secure our trip to the island. Prior to travel, there is a mandatory pre-island orientation done by the KIRC. They went over the rules and regulations of the island, as well as some of the history. This was very informative for Sophie and I, not being very knowledgeable about Kaho'olawe.

The day came to travel to the island. We were greeted warmly by the KIRC crew as well as members from the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (PKO) who would be joining in on our access. We all jumped onto the KIRC's vessel and donned our lifejackets. The boat ride was very refreshing with beautiful views of the islands on the way to Kaho'olawe. As we arrived, KIRC and PKO members began chanting in Hawaiian to allow safe passage onto the island. Once on island and Sophie and I settled into our barracks, we had the privilege of getting a tour of the island by the one and only Paul Higashino. Mr. Higashino is legendary on Kaho'olawe for the great work he has done for over two decades.



Kaho'olawe is beautiful, but rugged in nature. Much of the island is desert like, with fauna here and there. As we drove, there were ominous signs of unexploded ordinance (UXO) on the side of the road, a reminder of the devastating practice bombing range Kaho'olawe was used for by the U.S Navy. For four days, the PKO, Mr. Higashino, Sophie and I went into various areas on Kaho'olawe to plant seedlings in attempts to start new growth on

*Continued on page 8*



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

the island. As we planted, we were shown areas of past planting, and how KIRC's programs are indeed successful in the mission to restore Kaho'olawe to its origins. During these four days, Sophie and I also learned much from the PKO regarding the significance of Kaho'olawe to the Hawaiian people and why they so fiercely defend that island. We were taken to sacred areas that very little people have had the privilege to visit. Seeing ancient hieroglyphics carved by the ancient Hawaiians in stone left us both speechless and in awe. One morning we woke up at 4:00 am to go with the PKO to see the sunrise at the highest peak on Kaho'olawe. This area is also significant to the Hawaiians because it is a sacred gateway from Kaho'olawe to Haleakalā. It was cold, but we all stood in silence until daybreak. The PKO personnel chanted a prayer for each one of us, including Sophie and I. We felt very honored.

It was refreshing to see the KIRC and the PKO work hand in hand with each other. Although one is a government entity and the other "activists," there was common ground and beliefs between them. The KIRC protects the sanctity of the island, while the PKO promotes the culture and sacred beauty of Kaho'olawe. When we finally departed Kaho'olawe, there was a mixed feeling of happiness and sadness. Happy and grateful to have experienced a once in a lifetime event, but sad to leave such a beautiful and unspoiled place. While the memories will last forever, our main focus is on spreading the word that Kaho'olawe is a sacred island and there is a definite need to continue restoring it. The mana on the island is strong, and so are the KIRC and the PKO in their efforts. We are blessed to have experienced the island. - Wade M. Maeda, KIRC Volunteer

## Community Outreach with KIRC's Ocean Program

In February, KIRC's Ocean Program joined 4th graders and high school students from Kamehameha Schools Maui at Keālia to take part in native coastal planting and non-native species removal. Ocean Program Manager, Dean Tokishi demonstrated KIRC's coastal planting techniques and spoke to KS students regarding the erosion problems Kaho'olawe faces and how we are mitigating it. The KS students are currently working on an erosion resilience project with Kaho'olawe being a centerfold piece within the unit. The project will teach the haumāna about planting practices that have been done on Kaho'olawe with the goal of students designing an erosion resilience prototype.



Counterclockwise. KS Maui 4th grade students seen observing mudflats at Keālia pond. KS Maui Senior Elena Beauchamp with the KIRC's Dean Tokishi. KS Student outplanting 'Ākulikuli using KIRC's innovative metal framing system. Students holding KIRC's metal frames used to help plant natives. Students holding non-native pickleweed.



# KŌKUA KAHO‘OLawe

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Safety, transport  
and on-island  
operations



Research,  
monitoring and  
ocean programs



Planting, erosion  
control and  
restoration efforts



Preservation and  
protection of  
cultural resources



Access, education  
and community  
involvement



## ALOHA KAHO'OLAWE

Aloha Kaho'olawe is a campaign to support restoration and access. We invite participation via membership, partnerships and legislative support. By building consensus that there is value in the historical, cultural, ecological and community building resources shared through Kaho'olawe, we aim to share this special place now and for generations to come.

### Benefits Include:

Annual Family Membership to Maui Ocean Center (valued at \$290)

Annual Individual Membership to Maui Ocean Center (valued at \$129)

KIRC Logo T-Shirt or Card Set  
(while supplies last)

Subscription to Ko Hema Lamalama

KIRC Logo Sticker

KIRC Virtual Tour QR Sticker

### Patron Benefactor Sustainer

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Front of T-Shirt (in Blue)



Back of T-Shirt (In Orange)



The Kaho'olawe Exhibit at Maui Ocean Center



A set of 5 greeting cards



Ko Hema Lamalama Newsletters



Stickers

## MEMBER FORM

Send this completed form with your donation to:

Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission

811 Kolu Street, Suite 201 | Wailuku, HI 96793.

Checks may be made payable to Kaho'olawe Rehabilitation Trust Fund. You can also give online at [kahoolawe.hawaii.gov/donations.shtml](http://kahoolawe.hawaii.gov/donations.shtml).

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Comments:

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This Ko Hema Lamalama publication has been funded by a HTA Kūkulu Ola Program grant.

Cover photo: The KIRC staff and KIRC volunteers from Kihei Charter School repairing roads on Kaho'olawe

## ABOUT THE KIRC

The Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC) was established by the Hawai'i State Legislature in 1994 to manage the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve while held in trust for a future Native Hawaiian sovereign entity. The KIRC has pledged to provide for the meaningful and safe use of Kaho'olawe for the purpose of the traditional and cultural practices of the native Hawaiian people and to undertake the restoration of the island and its waters. Its mission is to implement the vision for Kaho'olawe Island in which the *kino* (body) of Kaho'olawe is restored and *nā po'e o Hawai'i* (the people of Hawai'i) care for the land. The organization is managed by a seven-member Commission and a committed staff specializing in five core programs: Ocean, Restoration, Culture, Operations and Administration.

## COMMISSIONERS

*Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ōhana:* **Michelle Miki'ala Pescaia** (Interpretive Park Ranger, Kalaupapa National Historic Park)

*Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ōhana:* **Faith Kahale Saito** (Native Hawaiian Counselor, Hulihi Ke Kukui Hawaiian Center, University College, Honolulu Community College)

*Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ōhana:* **Jensen Kalamala'ike'eki'eokalani Chock** (Kumu 'Ōlelo Hawai'i KS Kapālama)

*County of Maui:* **Saumalu Mataaafa** (Deputy Director, Department of Housing and Human Concerns, County of Maui)

*Department of Land & Natural Resources:* **Dawn N.S. Chang** (Chairperson, Department of Land & Natural Resources)

*Native Hawaiian Organization:* **Benton Keali'i Pang** (President, O'ahu Council, Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs)

*Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA):* **Justin Keoni Souza** (Trustee, OHA)

Michael K. Nāho'opi'i, KIRC Executive Director

