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Kahoolawe commission raises \$38,000 online

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By MELISSA TANJI - Staff Writer (mtanji@mauinews.com) , The Maui News

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In one month, the cash-strapped Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission raised about \$38,000 to assist with operations through the summer, but the group still is short of its \$100,000 goal and may have to reduce volunteer trips to the one-time practice range for the military.

On the online crowd-funding website "Go Fund Me," the nonprofit KIRC raised about \$38,000 from 377 people in the campaign titled "Aloha Kaho'olawe 2015." The official end date for the campaign was Monday, though the site will continue to accept donations.

With the funds, the nonprofit that cares for and operates volunteer work trips to the uninhabited island can maintain operations at current levels until August, said Executive Director Michael Naho'opi'i. The fund drive did not reach its goal, but a couple of grantors have given notice that they will expand their grants. In addition, the organization has received lots of attention and has added about 340 new members.

"But it is still not enough to do full operations like we had. We are looking at cutting back a lot of the access trips to the island. We are still going to have volunteer trips, (but they are) not going to be very often," Naho'opi'i said Tuesday.

The state Legislature decided to give the commission only \$1 million of the \$3 million requested for the next fiscal year that begins July 1. The commission has been trying to find ways to sustain its operations and staff.

On June 1, commissioners unanimously passed the budget for the next fiscal year, which includes trimming two positions and other adjustments to cut costs. The organization can revise the budget at its next meeting in July, commissioners said.

Naho'opi'i said that he and his staff are working on the details of a plan to deal with the shortfall.

Reducing the volunteer trips could be one of the decisions. Normally, there are two, three or even more monthly volunteer trips to the island. But Naho'opi'i said Tuesday that the commission would be "lucky" to make the trip once a month when funding dips in August. The organization had hoped to raise more funds from the drive to sustain operations at current levels through the entire summer.

As far as his 18-member staff goes, Naho'opi'i said 10 employees will remain on the payroll, though they will take 5 percent pay cuts. Of the other eight staffers, six will probably get their salaries paid through grants, while the other two positions are "up in the air," he said.

The commission is stuck in a difficult position as its \$44 million trust fund, which was set up in 1994, becomes depleted. Administrators estimate the remaining balance currently to be about \$400,000.

Since 1994, the commission has worked to restore, protect and preserve the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve deploying 10,000 volunteers over the years.

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