

KAHO‘OLAWE

KO HEMA LAMALAMA | Newsletter of the Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve Commission | Summer 2024

THE REBIRTH OF KAHO‘OLAWE

The historic, first documented Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle nest on Kaho‘olawe

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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

The ecological damage to Kaho'olawe began when goats were introduced to the island over 200 years ago. "In 1793, Captain George Vancouver (a British Royal Navy Officer) gave (the Maui Chief) Kahekili a parting gift of goats and, as the story is told, Kahekili sent the goats to Kaho'olawe to grow and multiply. Those goats were the forebears of the thousands of goats that would roam and denude Kaho'olawe of its vegetation for almost two centuries to follow." (Restoring a Cultural Treasure, A Final Report of the Kaho'olawe Island Conveyance Commission to the Congress of the United States).

One of the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission's (KIRC) primary missions is to implement the environmental restoration of the island through native out plantings, erosion control projects and removal of invasive species. In the past few years, KIRC staff has placed a significant focus on mitigating the impacts of climate change by removing invasive buffelgrass along the sandy western shorelines of Kaho'olawe and planting native coastal vegetation including 'aki'aki, seashore rush grass (*Sporobolus virginicus*). In the short time that we have been implementing this project, we have already seen the positive impacts of our efforts. The native grasses have stabilized our coastal sand dunes and have encouraged additional dune formations as the 'aki'aki grass traps windborne sand. Additionally, the close-knit root structure of the native grasses creates a stable foundation for beach and shoreline recovery after large winter swells by capturing sand and holding the coastline intact.

Our most recent result of our efforts was the discovery of green sea turtle nests and clutches of eggs in these restored areas. Scientists have suggested that the turtles do not like the coarse feel of the invasive buffelgrass but are more attracted to the feel of the reestablished native coastal ecosystem. Other officials commented that this could be one of the first local indications that shoreline restoration projects are attracting the return of native marine wildlife. This year, the State of Hawai'i, Office of Conservation and Coastal Lands is a new funder of our coastline restoration projects and in upcoming newsletters we will be featuring some of the results of their support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "M.K. Nāho'opi'i".

▼ The historic August honu nest discovery, rescue and release was covered on MSN, Hawaii News Now, KHON2 and Maui News. Read more on page 3.



PROGRAM UPDATES

A wetland in Honokanai'a, one of the project locations for the 2025 Green Grant



Ocean Program Awarded \$174,470 for Wetlands Restoration work in Honokanai'a and Honukanaeae

August 30, 2024 - The KIRC's Ocean Program became a recipient of a 2025 Wetlands Restoration Green Grant through the County of Maui Department of Environment Management (DEM), Environmental Protection & Sustainability Division. This one year, \$174,470 funded grant, set to start January 2025 will provide the KIRC funding to enhance 2.69 acres of wetland habitat in Honokanai'a and 1.5 acres of wetland habitat in Honukanaeae. This is a big win for the KIRC as it secures one of Ocean Program's positions, the Ocean Resource Specialist II (ORS II) for one year. The ORS II position was set to expire fall 2024, as it is a grant funded position through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program (CWC).

The overall mission of this Wetlands Restoration project is to restore wetlands and stabilize sand dunes on the coastline of Kealaikahiki 'Ili by introducing native vegetation (8,000 native plants), removing invasive alien species, and constructing waterflow control devices and sediment traps across the 1.75 acres of road. The KIRC will incorporate 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 project's overall impact will be on the coastal ecosystems of Honokanai'a and Honukanaeae including the wetlands, sand dunes and near-shore marine environments. These coastal ecosystems will directly benefit from the project's activities since the wetland hydrology will be enhanced by removal of invasive species and planting of native vegetation. The near-shore marine environments will benefit from a decrease of sedimentation due to improvements to the road and increased vegetation planted in the project areas.

The Green Grants program is managed by the County of Maui Department of Environment Management's Environmental Protection & Sustainability Division (EP&S). The expansion of the Green Grants program follows the transfer of approximately \$1.7 million in competitive grant funding to DEM's Environmental Protection & Sustainability Division from the County Office of Economic Development and Office of Innovation.

OCEAN PROGRAM

Turtle Nest Discovery

August 13th, 2024



Endangered and Threatened Species Recovery Permit:
ES39990 Version Number: 27

Irene Kelly counting the hatched eggs on Honokanai'a beach

The Ocean program is pleased to announce the first confirmed nesting event for the Hawaiian green sea turtle on Kaho'olawe. On May 15, 2024, during the KIRC's routine monthly volunteer access, base camp contractors (Dawson) on Kaho'olawe notified the KIRC Ocean Program staff that they observed a green sea turtle digging a nest on the beach at Honokanai'a. The area was immediately marked and designated to eliminate all foot and vehicle traffic. In the following month, five other nests were identified, all on Honokanai'a Beach within 100 yards of the original nest.

After a thorough assessment by the KIRC's Ocean Program Manager, Dean Tokishi, a plan to excavate the nests was formalized. The purpose of an excavation was (1) to determine whether or not the nest was a "true nest" or a "false crawl" and (2), if it was a "true nest" then the excavation would determine the success/mortality rate of the hatchlings. After informing NOAA and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel, the KIRC Ocean Program staff requested and was granted Commission approval to conduct excavation of known nest(s) once the last day of hatching had passed and under the cultural supervision and direction of Lopaka Aiwohi of the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (PKO). In keeping with the KIRC's mission to integrate ecological conservation with Hawaiian cultural practices, the excavation was carried out in alignment with traditional Hawaiian cultural protocols.



▲ Turtle hatchling tracks imprinted on Honokanai'a Beach

On Monday, August 12, 2024 a group of eight consisting of: Dean Tokishi (KIRC), Caroline Sabharwal (KIRC), Christina Wine (KIRC), Lopaka Aiwohi (PKO), Nicole Davis (NOAA), Jamie Thomton (NOAA), Irene Kelly (NOAA) and Sheldon Plentovich (USFWS) conducted the excavation in Honokanai'a of the first honu nest (#1) laid 83 days prior. 92 total eggs were laid and 87 hatchlings emerged resulting in a 95% success of hatching.

On the morning of Tuesday, August 13, 2024, it was discovered that another honu nest had hatched the night before because of the hatchling track marks that were present. This nest (#5) was located toward the southern end of Honokanai'a Beach. This nest was excavated later in the afternoon when conditions were cooler and less stressful to any hatchlings that may still have been in the nest.

71 total eggs were laid with 69 hatchlings emerged and 2 hatchlings trapped in the nest. Under the supervision of Irene Kelly, the Sea Turtle Recovery Coordinator with NOAA Fisheries, the 2 hatchlings trapped in the nest were released by Ella-Marie Akoni (12-yr old daughter of Dawson Contractor Peter Akoni). This nest (#5) had 100% success rate of hatching. Regarding the discovery of the honu nest, Tokishi stated “It was because of the committed presence and observation of our Dawson contractors that the initial discovery of the honu nest was made. It is also through the well rounded working relationship we have with our contractors that the excavation ran as smooth and successful as it did.”

Over the last 20 years, one of the KIRC’s Ocean Program’s focus has been removing invasive buffelgrass on the Honokanai’a Beach and replanting with native ‘aki’aki grass. When asked about the location of the honu nest found in the ‘aki’aki grass, Dr. Sheldon Plentovich, the Pacific Islands Coastal Program Coordinator with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service stated, “The replacement of invasive buffelgrass with the native ‘aki’aki grass, undoubtedly made the area more suitable for nesting honu. Buffelgrass forms mats that would be difficult for a honu to dig through. The native ‘aki’aki grass grows more sparsely and honu can easily dig their nest chambers which are usually between 50 and 100cm deep.”

This is an extraordinary milestone for the KIRC’s decades-long restoration efforts and witnessing this return of life to the island’s shores. It is a testament to the progress the KIRC has made. The discovery of these nests is not only a win for the Hawaiian green sea turtle population, which is listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) but it is a symbol of hope in the island’s remarkable capacity for healing.

This green sea turtle excavation was performed under Federal Fish and Wildlife Permit by trained and qualified biologists. Endangered and Threatened Species Recovery Permit: ES39990 Version Number: 27



Clockwise from top:

- ▶ *Two rescued turtle hatchlings that were trapped before being released*
- ▶ *One of the two rescued turtle hatchlings making it’s way to the ocean*
- ▶ *KIRC’s Caroline Sabharwal returning the hatched egg shells back into the nest to be covered, leaving nutrients to sustain the native ‘aki’aki plants rather than being sent to the lab*
- ▶ *Members from NOAA, PKO, KIRC, Dawson, and UH following the release of the two rescued turtles. Marz Hoyt, Calif Peat, Lopaka Aiwohi, Jamie Thomson, Lisa Gollin, Nicole Davis, Bruce Froemsdorf, Irene Kelly, Peter Akoni, Ella-Marie Akoni, Sheldon Plentovich, Dean Tokishi, Christina Wine, Caroline Sabharwal.*



RESTORATION PROGRAM



Volunteers scattering milo seed pods and mulch in an eroded gulch in Wailuna

In the summer months, the KIRC brought out volunteers from the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana, Kamehameha Schools, Hawai'i Broadband Initiative, DLNR's Division of Forestry and Wildlife, NOAA, University of Hawai'i - Hilo and Patagonia.

The Restoration Program's focus during these summer months were on alien plant removal, native seed collection, seedball dispersal and continuing construction of firebreaks around base camp structures in Honokanai'a

In the Keanakeiki worksite, volunteers removed buffelgrass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) and herbaceous weeds. The KIRC staff cut the last kiawe tree (*Prosopis pallida*) and herbicide was applied to the trunk. In Wailuna, ten pounds of ma'o (*Gossypium tomentosum*) seeds were picked. These seeds will be used to re-establish the once thriving mao shrubland that dominated the Kaukukapapa and Kealaikahiki areas.

Pictured below from left: Kaleinani Higashino and Tyrone Montayre shoveling gravel for firebreak construction. Right: KIRC's Paul Higashino and Tyrone volunteer processing 'ohai pods for seed storage.





Photos from left to right: a'ali'i seeds before volunteers harvested. 'Ohai pods being collected. Volunteer sifting a'ali'i seeds for storage. All pictured in Wailuna.

KIRC's Natural Resource Specialist, Jaime Bruch, worked with volunteers to make seed balls made of ma'ō, a'ali'i, and pili grass seeds along with a mixture of native microbes from Kaho'olawe, biochar, and native soil. These dried seed balls provide the seeds with a protective shield that eventually will bio-decompose and germinate after periods of significant rain events. Upon germination, the seed balls offer a multinutrient rich environment to enhance growth and survival rates. In September, these seed balls were dispersed in the Kamōhio watershed on Kaho'olawe. Mahalo to our partners: Island Conservation, Limua Maui, and the University of Hawai'i. This seed ball project was funded in part from a \$25,000 donation from Island Conservation.



Top: Biochar from Haleakalā Biochar
Bottom: Seed Balls



Ka Palupalu O Kanaloa

The Ka Palupalu O Kanaloa Partnership hui is pleased to announce funding secured from the University of Hawai'i that will support Ka Palupalu O Kanaloa plants. The hui hopes to upgrade the propagation facility on Maui that houses the growing collection of plants. This structure will provide more space to house the plants and allow for better conditions for controlled breeding to produce seeds. The structure will also be storm-resistant to protect the plants during high wind and rain events. The hui is also investing funds to upgrade the irrigation and electric systems at the nursery. The hui also completed a plant monitoring app which is live and available for the growers to use. This will be one more way to update the group about plant health and other details about their care. Currently, there are 16 plants are in propagation in three different locations on Maui. The hui is currently seeking funding to move the oldest plant (15 yr) into a larger planter box and shelter.



COMMUNITY & CULTURE

**Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana
Huaka'i to Kanaloa**

August 22-25 2024



PKO kua and volunteers chanting the oli E ALA E at sunrise at Mua Ha'i Kūpuna. Photo: Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana

In August, the KIRC's Public Information Specialist, Ashley Razo, joined the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (PKO) on a two day huaka'i to Hakioawa on the north shore of Kanaloa. Joining on this huaka'i were volunteers from Hālau 'Ōhi'a, Hālau Unulau, and Omidyar Fellow cohort 'elima. Volunteers participated in cultural practices led by the PKO kua including the practice of kilo (observe) the elemental forms, sharing of 'awa and visiting archeological and culturally significant sites, hales, and muas. Volunteers also practiced mālama 'āina and took part in restoration efforts such as invasive species removal, native planting, and marine debris removal on Kanaloa. Hālau Unulau, under the direction of Kumu Hula Pele Kaio of Hilo and Hālau 'Ōhi'a by Kekuhi sang mele and performed hula throughout the two day huaka'i. Kekuhi Keali'ikanaka'ole is an educator who has trained in the tradition of Hula 'Aiha'a and Hula Pele, chant and ritual for 39 years under Hālau O Kekuhi, named for her grandmother, Edith Kekuhi Kanaka'ole.

Picture above: visitors of Kanaloa greet each sunrise with the E ALA E chant. This oli is chanted early in the morning to aid the sun to rise. This chant begins a short time before the sun rises in the morning and must be continued until the sun's disc is fully above the horizon. The oli welcomes the new day and honors those who have come before us. The group formed a half circle and faced the sun as it slowly rose over the peak of Haleakalā on Maui. The other half of the circle represents all those kūpuna (ancestors) who have passed on and 'aumākua (ancestral deities) that complete the circle. In essence, they are there to protect and guide the group as they begin a new day.

Pictures below, left: volunteers maintaining the trails leading from Hakioawa to Pu'u 'O Moa'ula Nui. Volunteers cutting back invasive plants in Hakioawa. Right: volunteers picking up marine debris on the beach in Hakioawa. Photo credit: Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana





Picture above, left: a group photo of the kua and volunteers at the Kihei boat ramp after disembarking from Kanaloa. Right: Kumu Kekuhi leading volunteers in a hula. Photo credit: Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana

Volunteer Reflections

“A highlight for me was taking cuttings of native ‘ākulikuli that were introduced to the sand dunes near the beach in recent years, and transplanting them near the pā hula to replace invasive grass with an indigenous ground cover that will help build soil. My kumu Kekuhi taught us a simple ‘oli to chant while doing the work. It helped me to focus my attention on the plants, imparting mana to help them grow, asking the dieties of the ‘āina to grant them life. I have since used this ‘oli back on Hawaii island; it personalizes the relationship I have with the mea kanu (plants) I put into the ground. It was moving to hear from our Hakioawa hosts, the kua, the backbone of PKO, especially the young men and women who are stepping up to be the next generation of leaders and stewards. Their love of the island was palpable and the sacrifice and amount of time they put into their training and work is inspiring. It was equally moving to hear about the kūpuna who came before them and are no longer with us. While Uncle Calvin was sharing, an iwa bird unbeknownst to him began circling around the men’s hale, one of several hō‘ailona (auspicious signs) I saw over the weekend.”
- Lahilahi Verschuur.

“I went to Kaho‘olawe for the first time two years ago in 2022 with Hālau ‘Ōhi‘a and we planted a school of ‘āweoweo around the fishing ko‘a and near Hale Nāmakapili to embody the birthing relationships in the Kumulipo between the ‘āweoweo fish of the sea and the ‘āweoweo plants of the land. This year, in 2024, we went back and we have seen how those little ‘āweoweo plants have grown so large and flourished, as have much of the island. In these ways, Kaho‘olawe represents for us the hope of healing through aloha. The Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana has taught us so much about the island and I am so grateful that they have helped so many of us to be a part of that restoration.” - Candace Fujikane, Professor of English, University of Hawai‘i

“There were many beautiful and deeply moving experiences I had on Kanaloa such as looking from the mountain trail toward the ocean, watching the sun rise over Haleakalā, hearing the chants and seeing the shadows of the dancers cast on the wall behind them, sleeping on a tarp on the beach and looking straight up into the night sky. But the most powerful experience I had while on Kanaloa was to become a part of a group that was focusing on mālama. Mālama of the ‘āina and mālama of one another. The American rugged individualism was not appropriate on Kanaloa. We weren’t there to do “our thing”, we were there as an ‘ohana who looked out for each other and who chose to pay attention to what was happening in that moment. We could practice listening deeply and in giving freely. I laughed so hard and had so many joyful moments when we gathered together in the evenings. I felt that being on Kanaloa was an opportunity to practice and experience being part of a community who were present with one another and who combined our intentions to use the power within each of us to imagine life flourishing, rains showering the forest and creating a community where wounds can heal and aloha can thrive.” - Patricia Hanson Hubner

Pictures below, left: Students from Hālau Unulau based out of Hilo and Waimea perform a traditional hula under the direction of Kumu Hula Pele Kaio on the pā hula ‘o Ka‘ie‘ie (hula platform) in Hakioawa. Right: students from Hālau ‘Ōhi‘a perform hula under the direction of Kumu Kekuhi.



Mahalo to our current Members and Donors!

Individual donations are critical to the KIRC's efforts to protect, restore and preserve Kaho'olawe. Consider becoming a member today!

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Kaho'olawe serves as a pu'uhonua (refuge) for all forms of life. During a May access to Kaho'olawe, an untagged female monk seal was observed on the beach of Honokanai'a.

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.

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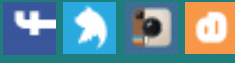
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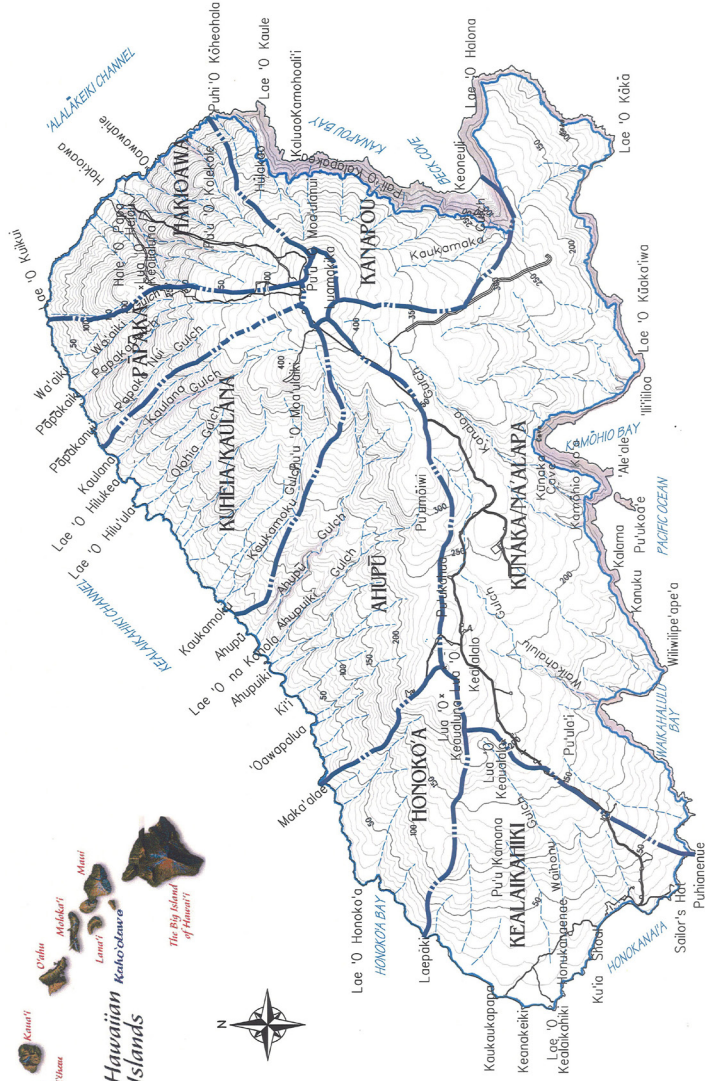
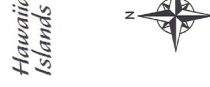
Cover photo: One of the two rescued green sea turtles making it's way to the sea on Hanokanai'a Beach

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 'Ohana: Michelle Miki'ala Pescaia* (Interpretive Park Ranger, Kalaupapa National Historic Park)
 - Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana: Faith Kahale Saito* (Native Hawaiian Counselor, Hulili Ke Kukui Hawaiian Center, University College, Honolulu Community College)
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 - Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA): Justin Keoni Souza* (Trustee, OHA)
- Michael K. Nāho'opi'i, KIRC Executive Director



KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE

▲ 'Ō Boundary
 ▲ Contours
 ▲ Coast Line

0 1000 M
 0 2000 M
 Graphic Scale