



Hawai'i and Palmyra

Kanu ā Ho'oulu
Sowing Hope





‘Ōhi’a trees at Kona Hema Preserve © John De Mello



© Elyse Butler

This newsletter is arriving to you near the time of Ke Alanui Polohiwa a Kāne—the summer solstice. It marks the end of Ho’oilo, our wet season, and the beginning of Kauwela, our warmer, drier months. It is the longest day of the year, when the sun stretches to its northernmost point in the sky. With more daylight, this season offers greater opportunity for vital work, ceremonies and connection. It is a potent time, brimming with energy and light, replete with the promise of abundance and renewal, and perfectly aligned with our theme, Kanu ā Ho’oulu, which I am translating as “planting for growth.”

Kanu ā Ho’oulu is a form of reciprocity, where we nurture growth within our communities, our forests and oceans, and ourselves. As the changing climate continues to reshape our world, we need to internalize and apply this concept, more than ever.

Across Hawai‘i, communities, leaders, cultural practitioners and people like you are rising to meet the challenges of our changing planet with increasing aloha and kuleana. I am continually inspired by the stories we share: community-led partnerships to restore coastal abundance, partnerships repairing coral reefs damaged by intensifying storms, and teams cultivating new forest sanctuaries for native birds. Each effort is a living expression of our collective pilina—our connection to ‘āina.

This time of year is often associated with the Hawaiian deity, Kū. While Kū is sometimes linked with war, he also embodies the energy that sparks life, healing and stewardship of land and sea. Kū represents the courage of kuleana to protect and provide for ‘ohana and communities. The energy of Kū reminds us that bold, decisive action is needed to move forward together in the face of increasing uncertainty and adversity.

At The Nature Conservancy, kuleana is at the heart of our work. We are honored to carry the privilege and commitment of caring for ‘āina, in partnership with communities, and with support from donors who share our passion for caring for the lands and waters we love, as they care for us. Momentum for kuleana and ho’oulu is building across our islands, and it’s encouraging to see it manifesting in bold legislative action.

This year, Hawai‘i’s state legislators passed landmark legislation that gives visitors to Hawai‘i the opportunity to care for the places they love, too. By linking Hawai‘i’s economy to the protection of its natural resources—through a modest hotel tax increase—the bill secures much-needed funding for climate resilience and sustainable tourism. The governor signed the bill into law in May, securing long-term funding that marks a major stride toward closing our \$560 million conservation funding gap.

Thanks to this shared vision and courageous action, Hawai‘i is better equipped to face the challenges ahead. With continued commitment to mālama ‘āina, we can all look forward to a future rooted in growth, resilience and hope.

Ulalia Woodside Lee
Executive Director

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The Nature Conservancy Hawai‘i and Palmyra chapter is the local affiliate of The Nature Conservancy, an international, non-profit organization based in Arlington, VA.

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

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Cover: Kona Hema Preserve protects part of an ancient koa-‘ōhi’a forest that spans more than 100,000 acres on the Island of Hawai‘i.
© John De Mello



Olowalu Road to Resilience meeting © Nolan Clark

KĀKO'O FOR OLOWALU

With chronic flooding caused by sea level rise and storm surge eroding Honoapi'ilani Highway on Maui, the Hawai'i Department of Transportation will move six miles of the highway inland between Ukumehame and Olowalu. Because this stretch of coastline is relatively undeveloped, this provides an unprecedented opportunity to re-establish traditional biocultural practices and other nature-based adaptations—such as wetland restoration and enhancing beach migration—to mitigate these ongoing hazards.

So TNC is partnering with the University of Hawai'i's Community Design Center (UHCDC) to engage the community in developing a vision for this coastal corridor. Through a series of interactive, in-person and virtual events throughout

2025, the community will consider traditional and nature-based solutions that can be implemented before and after the road realignment is complete. Based on this community input, UHCDC will develop conceptual designs for coastal resilience that include three focus sites and cost estimates for the proposed interventions.

Finding opportunities in the short term while designing for long-term adaptation with natural, or green, or hybrid green-grey infrastructure is often cheaper and more effective than man-made infrastructure, such as sea walls. Moreover, these natural interventions also build coastal resilience by allowing for the return of natural ecological processes, such as increasing habitat for native species and the absorption and infiltration of stormwaters and sediments from mauka areas.



© Sean Marrs

CELEBRATE OUR NEW DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Congratulations to Hawley Iona, who has been promoted to Deputy Director for TNC Hawai'i and Palmyra. Since joining TNC in 2017 as the Director of Finance and Operations, Hawley has shown exceptional leadership. She has played a pivotal role in guiding overall direction, ensuring organizational excellence, and establishing enabling conditions necessary for achieving our strategic conservation priorities. She worked to ensure our financial security and sustainability, with a focus on developing, directing and executing strategies related to financial health, resource management, cross-functional collaboration and leadership empowerment. Highly respected for her strategic thought partnership, Hawley has been instrumental in supporting our teams during crises, managing risks, improving financial management, and enhancing staff experience and retention.

I OLA KA ĀINA | THAT THE LAND BE HEALED

On Moloka'i, the Kawela watershed was a barren moonscape of loose soil and rocks after years of impact from feral hooved animals who ate everything down to bare dirt. During heavy rains, dirt and soil flowed downhill into streams, over roads and onto coral reefs, smothering them. But we are reversing this damage in partnership with local leaders, the hunting community and government agencies. By installing and maintaining fences to keep these invasive animals out of certain

areas and improving animal management, vegetation increased by 75 percent, and sediment flows decreased drastically, stopping the equivalent of almost 100 fully loaded semi-tractor trailers of dirt being dumped into the stream and reaching the reef below. Hear directly from Moloka'i residents and learn more about this remarkable effort by watching our video *I Ola Ka Āina* on nature.org/kamakou.

Area along fence line shows difference between overgrazed and restored areas © Russell Kallstrom/ TNC



Kapukapu 'Ohana works with tourism companies to reduce visitor impacts. © Leah Keller/TNC

Sowing Hope:

Demonstrating Aloha 'Āina

We are facing intensifying challenges from a rapidly changing planet, increasing land use pressures and unprecedented global stressors. Communities across Hawai'i are choosing to respond not with despair, but with aloha. Rooted in science and Indigenous wisdom and guided by pilina—relationship—communities are demonstrating a collective commitment to care for Hawai'i's natural and cultural heritage. Local leaders, organizations and cultural practitioners are sowing seeds of resilience and regeneration across the landscape. Their work is not only restoring ecosystems, but also strengthening community wellbeing, increasing food security and reinforcing our shared practice of kuleana.

These actions remind us that hope is not passive. It is cultivated through action—through mālama, through listening, and through standing together in the face of adversity. Whether it's stewarding coastal waters through community-based partnerships, responding swiftly to reef damage or replanting native forests to shelter endangered birds, each effort is a demonstration of aloha in action. And while the challenges are great, the spirit

driving this work is greater and is carried forward by the many hands and hearts committed to Hawai'i's future.

KAPUKAPU 'OHANA

Recent collaborative efforts at Kealakekua Bay exemplify this commitment as the community continues to mālama the area's natural and cultural bounty as it has for centuries. Here, historic fishing villages surround a vibrant bay that provides refuge for endangered monk seals, dolphins, whales and green sea turtles, as well as an abundance of reef fishes that have long fed the community and are essential to reef health.

But increasing numbers of visitors from near and far are taking a toll on this bounty, degrading the very resources they come to enjoy. Their impacts are compounded by other local and global stressors, including erosion and sedimentation caused by invasive goats and coral bleaching caused by marine heatwaves. Following statewide bleaching events in 2015 and 2019 that resulted in an 88 percent decrease in coral cover in the Bay, local leaders joined forces to reduce stressors and halt further declines.



Network members attached hundreds of coral colonies in Makako Bay. © Liquid Cosmos Divers

Today, 17 community, government, nonprofit, research and ecotourism organizations are working in partnership to improve stewardship of Kealakekua's lands and waters. Guided by a plan they collectively developed, the group, known as Kapukapu 'Ohana, is strengthening reciprocal pilina among people, place and nature to foster community wellbeing, ecological health and the perpetuation of cultural heritage.



Network members transport corals collected from a decommissioned fish farm
© Dan Dennison/DLNR



RESTORING AND REATTACHING REEFS

Another example of aloha in action comes from coral reef managers, government agencies and researchers, who have come together to bolster coral reef health across Hawai'i. Since developing a statewide early warning and rapid response plan to guide first responders in reef repair and restoration, the coalition TNC convened in 2023 has coalesced to form the Hawai'i Emergency Reef Restoration (HERR) Network. Comprised of scientists and reef



Māmane tree planting, Kona Hema Preserve © David Wood/TNC

managers from the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR), universities and local organizations, the network has committed to respond, in coordination with DAR, to restoration opportunities after storms and other damaging events, such as large swells.

Over the last year, network members have embraced opportunities to learn, apply and refine coral collection and reattachment procedures, including by putting theory into practice after a strong storm that dislodged corals last fall. They also preserved more than 10 years of coral growth by removing and planting hundreds of corals from a decommissioned offshore fish farm that would otherwise have been discarded.

These efforts are enhanced by our pilina with the global community. Having helped with response after Hurricanes Iniki and Iwa, HERR Network member Captain Tara Leota, marine biologist and founder of [@kauaiioceanawareness](https://www.kauaiioceanawareness.org/), expressed deep appreciation for the network and opportunity to learn from the Meso American Reef Brigades, who have already done coral reef repair and restoration following hurricanes. "It's just so great that we are all working together across the Hawaiian islands and across the world to care for coral reefs."

Just as communities are rallying to protect our coral reefs, they are also rising to meet the urgent challenges facing Hawai'i's native forests and the birds that depend on them.

A NEW GROVE FOR KONA HEMA PRESERVE

Native Hawaiian forests are changing, with wet forests becoming drier and warmer, thus reducing the amount of quality habitat available to native forest birds. Making matters worse, non-native mosquitoes take advantage of these warmer temperatures and move upward in elevation into prime native forest habitats, like those at our Kona Hema Preserve, putting the birds at risk of contracting avian malaria.

To support these native forest birds, TNC is planting 3,000 māmane seedlings to re-establish historical groves at upper elevations within our preserve. 'Īiwi and other threatened or endangered native forest birds depend on the 'ōhi'a lehua bloom—which starts at the upper elevations—for food. As the blooms fade, the birds move downslope looking for nectar. But downslope is where mosquitoes are. Māmane trees tend to bloom longer and later than 'ōhi'a lehua, so planting a new grove of them will hopefully entice 'īiwi and other native forest birds to stay at higher elevations, keeping them safe from the mosquitoes. Planting these māmane is part of a larger restoration effort to plant nearly 16,000 native trees and shrubs across the preserve to increase the number and diversity of habitats and food sources for Hawai'i's native forest birds. Across the pāe 'āina, we are inspired by these examples of hope taking root and flourishing. Mahalo for being part of aloha in action.

A Focus on Solutions

Thriving koa forest in Kona Hema Preserve on Hawai'i Island © TNC

Launched in the fall of 2021, the Climate Solutions Fund (CSF) has received tremendous support from donors who want to prioritize climate-focused projects.

There is no question that people everywhere are experiencing impacts from a changing climate, including more severe storms, fires and flooding that affect lives, neighborhoods and the natural systems we rely on for clean water and air.

TNC's teams are leveraging solutions already found in nature, ensuring the most effective impacts for every conservation project. Nature-based solutions build resilience in the systems that protect us from a rapidly changing planet. Coral reefs, wetlands and dune systems protect our coasts from flooding and storm surges, while keeping our native forests healthy increases carbon storage through restoration and habitat management.

Here are some of the recent projects that have been supported by Climate Solutions funding.

Innovation in the Forests

As storms intensify, so does the need to ensure forest health and the capture of fresh water. Across the state, one key player is in peril: the native honeycreepers, unique pollinators and seed dispersers, who are being decimated. Despite decades of successful forest management, a warming climate is allowing mosquitoes to move into preserves that were once too cold for them, carrying avian malaria with them. Fortunately, a tool has been developed and is being used to safeguard these special birds. To give them a chance of survival, TNC is working with partners to reduce mosquito populations in the upper elevation forests on Maui and Kaua'i.

Reef Protection at the Ready

The reefs that surround the Hawaiian Islands are vital to protecting coastlines, communities and culture. But more intense storms have the potential to severely impact them. TNC has purchased a reef insurance policy to fund response and repair if damage occurs after a qualifying storm. The payout will deploy a coalition of trained divers and reef managers to assess damage, remove debris and reattach dislodged coral colonies to the reef. The Climate Solutions Fund helps ensure this coalition receives the training and tools needed to safeguard themselves and the reefs after a damaging event.

Remote Research Made Possible

Lying roughly 1,000 miles south of Hawai'i, Palmyra Atoll hosts scientists pursuing research to help coral reef, island and ocean ecosystems adapt to climate impacts. There are many benefits to the atoll's remoteness and lack of

human stressors, but these same factors also present challenges, where even everyday conveniences like electricity are complicated. A reliable solar electrical system is a must for water systems, refrigeration, compressors, lights and communications. TNC's research station runs on batteries fed from a photovoltaic/solar panel and generator system. In 2024, the batteries were replaced, and this year, 88 old solar panels were also replaced. This exciting development reduces our dependency on fossil fuels while simultaneously making the atoll's electrical grid more reliable, helping to ensure the health and safety of everyone at the research station.

Because of donors like you, these vital projects have benefitted from the Climate Solutions Fund. If you would like to learn more about this work or donate to this fund, please contact Lori Admiral at lori.admiral@tnc.org or 808-587-6249.

Palmyra Coral Gardens © Kydd Pollock



CARE ABOUT WASTEWATER IN THE OCEAN? WE DO, TOO!

Hawai'i is a land of natural wonders, from mist-shrouded mountains to turquoise waters and vibrant coral reefs. However, these environments face many threats.

TNC's Coastal and Estuarine Scientist Dr. Kim Falinski is leading efforts to address land-based pollution affecting the ocean environment. In a January webinar, Kim shared how TNC is working to address an unseen danger: untreated wastewater in groundwater and nearshore ocean areas.

Hawai'i is one of the last states to regulate cesspool installation and has more than 83,000 cesspools and 650 coastal injection wells, which discharge 53 million gallons of untreated

wastewater into nearshore ocean waters every day (that's the equivalent of 80 Olympic-sized swimming pools).

These outdated waste treatment systems make coral reefs more vulnerable to invasive algae, disease and death, and they place ocean users and other marine life at risk.

Watch Kim's [recorded webinar](#) to learn how TNC is partnering with communities, leveraging technology, and advocating for government policies and funding to support Hawai'i's wastewater treatment transition.

Together, we can work toward clean water and vibrant reefs for Hawai'i.



Courtesy of
Kim Falinski



TRUSTEES VISIT MOLOKINI

TNC's February board meeting offered trustees and staff an opportunity to experience an effectively managed, protected marine area and to foster deeper connections with one another. The group visited the Molokini Shoal Marine Life Conservation District near Maui, where they marveled at whale songs, snorkeled with beautiful corals and fish, and learned about TNC's contributions to the original Conservation Action Plan for the area. We shared about the similar challenges and conservation strategies TNC addresses across Hawai'i and at Palmyra Atoll and discussed sustainable tourism and the need for dedicated environmental funding. Additionally, the group discussed how marine protection is evolving in Hawai'i and how our research at Palmyra Atoll demonstrates best practices for island and coral reef health across the Pacific.



Trustees learn about the significance of Molokini and Palmyra. © Kydd Pollock/TNC



Legacy Club members learn about the long-term impact of legacy gifts on TNC's mission. © Chelsea Toyama/TNC

CELEBRATING THE LEGACY CLUB

Mahalo to our Legacy Club members for creating a lasting legacy for nature by including TNC in their estate plans! In April, we gathered to celebrate Earth Month together at a luncheon honoring their vision and generosity.

Suzanne Case, former TNC Hawai'i and Palmyra executive director and Legacy Club member, shared an inspiring story about a woman whose legacy gift catalyzed an extraordinary innovation. With her unrestricted funding, we purchased a bulldozer and used it to turn the soil in former pastures

in Kona Hema Preserve. We discovered that this process (called "scarification") allowed koa seedlings to sprout on their own as soon as they were exposed to light. Today, the area boasts a thriving koa forest.

All legacy gifts are meaningful and impactful for our natural world. If you would like to join the Legacy Club, we invite you to name TNC in your will, trust, retirement plan or other financial account. We also offer gifts that pay income.

To learn more, please contact: Lara Siu, lsiu@tnc.org, (808) 587-6235.



Remarkable Recovery at Palmyra

Palmyra Atoll is home to many land crabs, including these colorful strawberry hermit crabs. Without invasive predators like rats, crabs thrive and are important players in ecosystem health. © TNC

Palmyra Atoll was once overrun by invasive rats that decimated bird populations and disrupted the interconnected balance of the ecosystem. After a heroic effort with partners to remove the rats nearly 15 years ago, and an ongoing effort to remove non-native palms, native rainforest trees are now expanding their footprint, providing more nesting and roosting habitat for seabirds. More seabirds benefit both rainforest and reef, as their guano provides healthy nutrients for the soil and sea.

With no rats to prey on them, Palmyra's land crabs have also flourished, and several species of ground-nesting seabirds are now returning.

Palmyra is a powerful example of what's possible when nature is given the chance to recover. Our efforts at Palmyra have immediate relevance far beyond its shores in a time of rapid global change. That progress is only possible because of people like you who support our work. Together, we make a difference.