

Olowalu ka Hana

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2026

Olowalu ka hana

Expanding our Impact



Aloha mai kākou,

As we move deeper into the season of kauwela, I am reminded of how this time of year invites clarity, purpose and renewed energy. These longer days and abundant light mirror the momentum building as we expand our impact across our Islands and at Palmyra Atoll—a place that has shaped our chapter's identity for a quarter century. Visionary and generous supporters like you have grown our preserve and research station at Palmyra into a living model advancing reef resilience, species recovery and climate adaptation strategies across the Pacific and around the world.

As we enter a potentially record-breaking "Super El Niño" year, our collective commitment is needed more than ever. Higher ocean temperatures could lead to coral bleaching. Drought and increased fire risk could threaten rare native forest enclaves and neighborhoods. And severe storms could damage coastlines and further strain communities. But together, we are building resilience so communities and the natural world are better able to withstand impacts.

With the Hawai'i Emergency Reef Restoration (HERR) Network we are strengthening capacity for rapid response. Across our islands, we are restoring forests, protecting freshwater, strengthening reefs and conserving native species—powered by community knowledge, Indigenous leadership and science working together in concert. This is all possible because you choose to invest in the future of these lands and waters.

This year, your support helped advance one of the most significant conservation policy wins in recent memory. The first year of annual Green Fee funding is moving toward implementation, with more than \$64 million dedicated to the state Department of Land and Natural Resources. This historic investment will strengthen stewardship of forests, wetlands, coral reefs and nearshore environments—areas where TNC and our partners are poised to help deliver lasting impact. Your advocacy and belief in this work helped make this moment possible.

As we reflect on the progress of this past year, I am filled with gratitude. Mahalo for standing with us as we olowalu ka hana—multiply and expand our work—to create a thriving future for Hawai'i and Palmyra.

Mahalo nui loa,
Ulalia Woodside Lee, *Executive Director*

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Duke E. Ah Moo
Kris Billeter
Tana Burkert
Anne S. Carter
Ka'iulani de Silva
Dan J. Dunn
Dave Eadie
Jan Elliott
Matt Emerson
Hon. Judith A. Epstein
Dr. Alan M. Friedlander
Benjy Garfinkle
Sean Hehir
Puni Jackson
Brett MacNaughton
Janet Montag
Alicia Moy
John R. Sabas
Bradley E. Smith
Julie Smolinski
Vern M. Yamanaka

IHUPANI ADVISORY COUNCIL

Christopher J. Benjamin
Kenton T. Eldridge
Eiichiro Kuwana
Duncan MacNaughton
Jean E. Rolles
Crystal Rose
Nathan E. Smith





Weathering the Kona Lows: Lessons from Hawai‘i’s Native Forests

IN MARCH 2026 two Kona Low storms hit Hawai‘i within three weeks. They destroyed homes, damaged roads and upended thousands of residents. Damage was estimated to exceed \$1 billion, and the Hawai‘i Emergency Management Agency said the second storm caused the worst flooding in over 20 years.

These events revealed how vulnerable our infrastructure is to increasing storm intensity. This year, flooding on O‘ahu’s North shore was made worse by invasive species. Non-native California grass and invasive trees prevented water flow in irrigation ditches. Back in 2014, hundreds of downed, invasive Albizia trees closed roads and damaged houses during Hurricane Iselle on Hawai‘i Island.

Although our forest preserves across the state sustained some damage in these (and other) storms, by

comparison these native landscapes fared better. Though they are certainly vulnerable and require our ongoing management, Hawai‘i native forests have been shaped by innumerable storms and other weather disruptions.

Native forests act like a sponge, collecting rain and moisture from passing clouds, slowly delivering fresh water into streams and aquifers and reducing runoff and siltation onto our shorelines and coral reefs. Their layered canopies blunt the force of winds, their spongelike understories absorb punishing rainfall, and their deep, cohesive soils hold fast even under record downpours. They are able to take in huge volumes of water far more effectively than the invasive dominated landscapes that surround many of our communities.

Where native forests have been degraded, the land tells a different

story. Centuries of disrupted nutrient cycles have left soils so degraded they become hydrophobic—literally repelling water. Instead of soaking into the ground, rainfall pounds the surface, triggering treefall, landslides and torrents of sediment that race downhill into homes, roads and reefs. It’s no coincidence that some places on O‘ahu, where less than 15% of native forests remain, saw 10 to 15 feet of mud during the storms. Healthy native forests keep soil and sediment in place; degraded landscapes send them into our communities and the ocean where they smother reefs and are lost forever.

Our native forests provide fresh water, homes for native birds and a connection to Hawaiian culture. And they demonstrate how our islands could be responding if we commit to persevering the native ecosystems we have left and restoring other areas.



The Promise of Palmyra

25

Years of protection, conservation and research at Palmyra

15,000

Acres of protected coral reefs surrounding the atoll

9

Sihek (Guam kingfisher) rewilded at Palmyra so far

25

Science volunteers who have helped with research and conservation at Palmyra

50+

Islands around the world where Palmyra-generated conservation science is being applied

On a research ship in 2004, Alex Wegmann's first glimpse of Palmyra Atoll was a dark ripple on the horizon that grew larger and larger until it became a "wall of green."

Palmyra's lush rainforest soared overhead, its dense canopy casting the forest floor in shadow. Beneath the boat he saw a bright coral reef teeming with fish. Seabirds filled the sky with a cacophony of calls and cries, the breeze heavy with the tang of guano.

"It blew my mind," says Wegmann, who previously directed the Palmyra program and is currently a lead scientist with TNC working on island resilience across the Pacific.

This year, TNC celebrates 25 years of conservation at Palmyra Atoll. Uninhabited before World War II, Palmyra was damaged by military use, agriculture, unmanaged visitation, and invasive species like rats. After TNC purchased it in 2000, Palmyra began to recover quickly. Selling part of it to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 2001 catalyzed establishment of the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument, one of the world's largest marine protected areas. Today, Palmyra is one of the most intact tropical ecosystems on Earth, thanks to visionary and generous donor support that has enabled 25 years of innovative science and conservation.

Palmyra stands out as a living model

that offers globally relevant conservation insights, says Eric Conklin, who directs marine science for TNC in Hawai'i and Palmyra. Rats were eliminated in 2011, causing native trees and land crab populations to explode and enabling rewilding: nine Sihek—the extinct-in-the-wild Guam kingfisher—are now living in a natural home for the first time in 40 years. Rodent eradication methods developed at Palmyra have been duplicated successfully at Vahanga Atoll in French Polynesia, Wake Atoll in Micronesia, and beyond.

Native forest restoration, seabird attraction using decoys and recorded calls, and programs to detect and remove reef-damaging drifting fish aggregation devices (FADs) are also driving recovery at Palmyra and elsewhere. Successful seabird attraction methods from Palmyra are now in use at Tetiaroa Atoll, while FAD watch programs have expanded to American Samoa, French Polynesia, the Cook Islands, Ecuador and Hawai'i. Meanwhile, a "virtual super reef" built from 25 years of Palmyra data is helping scientists in Belize, Palau, the Marshall Islands and Maui model how reefs respond to environmental change and conservation efforts.

Because its reefs have the astonishing ability to recover from heat-related coral bleaching events



Aerial view of Palmyra © Kydd Pollock/TNC
Male Sihek © John Ewen
Strawberry hermit crab © Gary Andrew
Seabirds in native forest © Gary Andrew



that have devastated other reefs, Palmyra also offers the opportunity to uncover the factors of reef resilience.

These discoveries reflect years of hard work, ingenuity and generous donor support. But they come at a cost. Palmyra's remote location and rugged conditions mean that transporting personnel and supplies is financially and logistically challenging.

significant contribution as well as support the work of some of the world's most accomplished and dedicated scientists who are developing solutions to the planet's most pressing problems.

For Wegmann, the investment is worth it, not only for research and conservation opportunities, but for Palmyra's message of hope to the world.

It's a comeback story. Palmyra provides us with hope and optimism. It's best in class.

”

-Alex Wegmann, Lead Scientist

“While you're there, it's priceless,” says Conklin. “But getting to and from Palmyra, and maintaining TNC's preserve and research station on a remote atoll nearly 1,000 miles from Hawai'i, has a real price tag.”

In 2006, TNC received a \$10 million gift from an anonymous donor to support Palmyra. About 10 years later the same donor gifted another \$10 million to support science at the atoll.

“This gift changed the trajectory of our work at Palmyra, enabling us to create a TNC-led conservation science lab focused on climate adaptation and resilience,” said Wegmann.

To secure Palmyra's future, we have launched a 25 for 25 Matching Fund. It's an opportunity to leverage a

To learn more about how you can support Palmyra Atoll, please contact Lori Admiral, director of philanthropy for TNC Hawai'i and Palmyra, at lori.admiral@tnc.org.



Donor Profile: Betsy and Mark Amparan

Why we love Palmyra is
that it's a TNC success
story that continues
to expand.

—Betsy Amparan



BETSY AND MARK AMPARAN knew they would see a diversity of wildlife on their first visit to Palmyra Atoll in 2023. But they didn't expect the huge population of crabs on Cooper Island.

"The crabs were comical and entertaining," says Betsy. "They're everywhere!"

The atoll is home to at least 12 species of land crabs, from coconut crabs to strawberry hermit crabs to horn-eyed ghost crabs. The Amparans marveled at the throngs of them gathering under the elevated floors of the island's galley, where they do the important job of breaking down organic matter, recycling nutrients and helping fertilize the forest. Betsy says it was one of the highlights of her visit.

"Crab Town was really special," Mark adds.

Purchased by TNC in 2000, Palmyra is a TNC preserve within a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge and further protected—out to 50 nautical miles—by the national monument, the largest collection of ocean and islands protected under a single jurisdiction in the world. This protection and its remoteness make it an ideal testing ground for nature-based solutions designed to restore and protect the health of island ecosystems here and elsewhere in the world.

The Amparans, who reside in California, have visited Palmyra twice—once in 2023 and a second time in 2026—confirming their commitment to supporting the research and conservation work being done on the tiny atoll. They were able to talk with scientists about their projects, learning about the rewilding of Siheks and snorkeling one of the healthiest reefs in the Pacific. And they have seen how the work done here, with the support of donors, has greater impacts around the world.

"What the scientists are learning at Palmyra can be expanded to other islands and have other applications beyond the atoll," Mark says.

The couple, now retired, became donors in 2014, impressed by the ease of giving and the impactful work TNC was doing around the world. They joined the Legacy Club, where they met like-minded people who have included TNC in their estate plans and traveled around the country with TNC's Legacy Journeys program. They visited conservation sites in Louisiana, Minnesota, Alaska, even Baja—but nowhere compared to Palmyra.

Celebrating the Legacy Club

IN APRIL, we hosted Legacy Club members at our annual luncheon honoring those who have included TNC in their estate plans. Nearly 100 guests gathered together to celebrate Earth Month and reconnect with our mission to conserve the lands and waters upon which all life depends. Ulaia Woodside Lee and Dr. Eric Conklin shared a presentation celebrating Palmyra's 25th anniversary and showcasing its influence across the Pacific and around the world. Legacy Club members said they left feeling more connected to TNC, optimistic about the future and inspired by the impact of their generosity.

Welcome to Our New Trustees



WE ARE PLEASED TO WELCOME Katherine Richardson and David Lassner to the Hawai'i and Palmyra Board of Trustees.

Katherine Richardson, a lifelong Kaua'i resident, brings extensive experience in nonprofit governance, philanthropy and community service. She serves on multiple boards including Wilcox Health and Island School, and has spent more than 20 years with the National Tropical Botanical Garden.

David Lassner, president emeritus of the University of Hawai'i, has

decades of leadership experience in education, technology and research. Reflecting on his early involvement with TNC at Kamakou Preserve, he is honored to further contribute to environment stewardship through his board service.

Our board's diverse expertise, as well as their excitement about conservation, is invaluable to our work. Their contributions have a lasting impact, and we are grateful for their efforts.

-Ulalia Woodside Lee, Executive Director

”

Growing the Hawai'i Emergency Reef Restoration Network



CORAL REEFS UNDERPIN HAWAII'S CULTURE, environment and economy, contributing over \$2 billion annually in flood protection and reef-related tourism alone, while supporting food systems, traditions and coastal protection. Although reefs are in crisis due to pollution, climate change and physical damage, there is hope.

In Hawai'i, storms and powerful swell events can physically break and dislodge corals. Rapidly stabilizing and reattaching damaged corals helps prevent further degradation, increase survival and accelerate recovery.

When corals are damaged, the Hawai'i Emergency Reef Restoration (HERR) Network is ready to act, demonstrating a key outcome of our pioneering reef insurance policy for the state: preparedness. The HERR Network can mobilize within days to assess and reattach dislodged coral, and it has already restored hundreds of coral colonies across Hawai'i.

To ensure the Network continues to thrive, we are working with partners and donors to identify sources of dedicated funding so that reef restoration can continue

regardless of the cause of damage. Sustainable funding will allow the Network to be continuously prepared to respond quickly to reef damage during hurricane season and beyond, helping our reefs to recover and thrive for the long term. This is even more important with this year's anticipated super El Niño impacts.





Protecting Palmyra's Resilient Reefs

LOCATED 1,000 MILES SOUTH OF HAWAII, Palmyra Atoll is surrounded by 480,000 acres of lagoons, submerged lands and one of the healthiest coral reef ecosystems in the world. For the past 25 years, TNC and our partners have been investigating the critical driving factors of coral reef health and generating research outcomes that benefit reefs—and humankind—within and far beyond the Pacific.



facebook.com/NatureHiPal
[@nature_Hi_Pal](https://twitter.com/nature_Hi_Pal)
linkedin.com/showcase/NatureHiPal
youtube.com/@thenatureconservancyhi_pal

Vibrant coral reef at Palmyra © Franklin Viola
Palmyra reef © Ian Shive