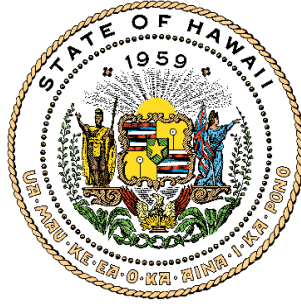




STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU 'ĀINA O HAWAII

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**KAHU 'ĀINA PROJECTS BRIDGE CULTURE AND CONSERVATION
ACROSS THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS**

*Hawaii Tourism Authority Invests in 11 Locally Driven Initiatives that Heal, Restore and
Reconnect People with Place*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 22, 2026

HONOLULU — The Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) announced 11 community-based programs selected to receive approximately \$489,000 in support through its Kahu 'Āina program, part of the agency's destination stewardship portfolio. These initiatives reflect the strength of Hawaii's communities and their dedication to caring for the land, waters and ecosystems that sustain both residents and visitors.

“The Kahu ‘Āina program celebrates the deep relationship between our people and our environment,” said Caroline Anderson, interim president and CEO of HTA. “These projects are led by the communities who know their lands best, ensuring that Hawai‘i’s natural and cultural resources are cared for with wisdom, integrity and aloha.”

The Hawaiian Islands are among the most ecologically diverse places on Earth, home to 27 of 38 global life zones. Their beauty is unmatched — and their fragility equally so. HTA’s Kahu ‘Āina program supports community-based organizations dedicated to the stewardship, conservation and revitalization of Hawai‘i’s natural resources.

The program is administered in partnership with Kilohana, a division of the Hawaiian Council and emphasizes ‘āina-kānaka (land-human) relationships and knowledge.

The following 11 programs are supported through the Kahu ‘Āina program, collectively receiving approximately \$489,000 from Hawai‘i Tourism Authority.

HAWAI‘I ISLAND

Hina‘aiulunui — Pōhāhā I Ka Lani

In Waipi‘o Valley, this project revives ancient ‘ulu agroforestry systems once central to the valley’s food abundance. Participants learn how restoring these groves also restores relationships between people, land and sustenance.

Kipa Waikōloa — Waikōloa Dry Forest Initiative

On the leeward slopes of Hawai‘i Island, volunteers join guided hikes and service days in the rare dry forest, home to wiliwili, ‘iliahi and uhiuhi. The project invites all to experience the quiet resilience of this endangered ecosystem.

KAUA‘I

Kaua‘i Invasive Species Committee — Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit

Community workdays along Waimea Canyon and Kōke‘e trails invite residents and visitors to remove invasive plants and learn the stories of native plants that define Kaua‘i’s uplands. These efforts protect fragile bog ecosystems and maintain the beauty of the island’s most beloved hiking paths.

Mālama Kukui Heiau — Pihana Ka ‘Ikena

Located near Wailua, Kukui Heiau is a heiau ho‘ōla — a temple dedicated to healing and well-being. Guided by cultural practitioners, the project restores the heiau’s eastern wall using traditional dry-stack masonry and installs interpretive signage to teach proper protocol and share the mo‘olelo of the area.

MAUI

Honolua Hands-On Conservation — Aloha Pū‘u Kukui

Community volunteers work in the upper slopes of Honolua Valley, learning to identify native and invasive plants, plant seedlings and understand the watershed’s role in feeding the reefs of Lāhainā and Kā‘anapali.

O‘AHU

Forest to Frets: Stringed Instruments of Hawai‘i Workshops — Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings

Honoring musical innovators Joseph Kekuku and Princess Ka‘iulani, this program teaches participants to craft guitars and ‘ukulele from invasive woods, blending environmental restoration with the cultural legacy of Hawaiian music.

Komo i ka ‘Āina — Kauluakalana

At Ulupō Nui in Kailua, Kauluakalana restores lo‘i kalo, fishponds and cultural sites once central to Kawainui’s life-giving wetlands. Families, students and volunteers return to these storied lands to reconnect with food, tradition and community.

Kūkulu ‘Āina & Community at Maunawila Heiau — Hawaiian Islands Land Trust

At the nine-acre Maunawila Heiau Complex in Hau‘ula, community members and visitors help clear invasive species and care for this heiau ho‘ōla. Maunawila is a place of restoration and balance, where cultural education and service come together to heal both land and people.

Mālama Palehua — Palehua Conservation Initiative

High above the Wai‘anae Coast, Palehua’s native forests and cultural sites are tended by kama‘āina and volunteers. The program offers cultural tours and mo‘olelo sharing, linking restoration work to the history of the mountains that watch over the coast below.

Mālama Pūpūkea

On O‘ahu’s North Shore, Mālama Pūpūkea-Waimea engages residents and visitors in caring for the Pūpūkea Marine Life Conservation District through education, cleanups, native plant restoration and cultural outreach. The project fosters low-impact behavior, community connection and long-term coastal health through its ambassador programs and hands-on stewardship efforts.

Stewardship and Conservation of Hawai'i's Protected Marine Animals — Hawai'i Marine Animal Response (HMAR)

From the shores of Mā'ili to Kailua, HMAR responds to calls about Hawaiian monk seals, sea turtles and seabirds, educating beachgoers on respectful coexistence. Volunteers bridge visitors and wildlife through hands-on conservation and daily outreach.

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About the Hawai'i Tourism Authority

The Hawai'i Tourism Authority is the state agency responsible for representing the Hawaiian Islands around the world — and for holistically managing tourism in a sustainable manner consistent with community desires, economic goals, cultural values, preservation of natural resources and visitor industry needs. HTA works with the community and industry to mālama Hawai'i — care for our beloved home. For more information about HTA, visit hawaiitourismauthority.org or follow @HawaiiHTA on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#) and [X](#).

High-resolution images are available [here](#).

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