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Hawai'i Tourism Authority Supports 'Āina-based Training and Stewardship Program on Hawai'i Island

10 Ka'ū Stewards Complete Training to Educate Visitors in Punalu'u

KA'Ū, HAWAII ISLAND – Ten Ka'ū community residents were recently celebrated at a hō'ike in Pāhala for completing “Ka'ū Hoa Pili 'Āina,” a four-month, 'āina-based education training program as part of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority's (HTA) destination management efforts and Hawai'i Island Community-Based Action Stewardship Program.

“The Ka'ū community voiced the need to better manage tourism impacts on the natural resources in Punalu'u through place-based curriculum,” said Mufi Hannemann, HTA Board Chair who spent part of his career working in Pāhala and living in Nā'ālehu. “We thank Ka 'Ohana O Honu'apo for facilitating this community effort and the work of these local stewards to ensure the protection and preservation of this special place.”

Facilitated by the non-profit Ka 'Ohana o Honu'apo, a resource stewardship organization based in Nā'ālehu, the “Ka'ū Hoa Pili 'Āina” program focused on recruiting and training ten local stewards in the practices of mālama 'āina built on the foundation of cultural practices and protocols, conservation and biological sciences, and place-based messaging about the Ka'ū area.

“It's important to HTA that we continue to listen to our residents and support the collaborative initiatives they want to see within their communities,” said Daniel Nāho'opi'i, HTA's interim president and CEO. “Mahalo to these stewards for committing themselves to the rigors of the training and the stewardship of their home moku (district), Ka 'Ohana O Honu'apo for their leadership and collaboration, and the many kumu and organizations for providing their mana'o in this process.”

HTA is funding the Ka'ū Hoa Pili 'Āina program under its destination stewardship and community efforts as guided by its [Hawai'i Island Destination Management Action Plan \(DMAP\)](#).

“This pilot program is a partnership with the community to support place-based, kama'āina and visitor education efforts while mitigating user impacts in Punalu'u and the greater Ka'ū area,” said Rachel Kaiama, Island of Hawai'i Visitors Bureau's (IHVB) destination manager.

As part of the training, Ka 'Ohana o Honu'apo worked with 13 other organizations to share information on a wealth of topics, including the Hawai'i Wildlife Fund, Nā Mamo O Kāwā, Kua'āina Ulu Auamo (KUA)'s Limu Hui, The Nature Conservancy, Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, Kalanihale, Hui Aloha Kīhōlo, Edith Kanaka'ole Foundation, Kamehameha Schools, Volcano Rare Plant Facility, Kaulana Mahina, Island CPR and Mālama Pono Punalu'u.

Trainees delved into land-use changes, watershed protection, heritage management and coastal restoration projects. They completed CPR and First Aid training and learned communication skills for sharing the importance of pono practices with visitors and kama'āina.

In addition to learning species identification and monitoring practices, the trainees took their skills out in the field to conduct 'opihi monitoring and limu surveys. Other immersive activities included forest and loko i'a (Hawaiian fish pond) restoration, marine debris removal, community-based

management, communication skills building, mo'olelo sharing and learning about impacts to watersheds.

Speaking on behalf of Ka 'Ohana o Honu'apo, a representative said the training was not intended to steward one place or one 'āina, but instead, was a landscape-scale, comprehensive training program for the entire district of Ka'ū.

“The trainees learned a great deal about the resources within Ka'ū, plus land-use changes over time, the impacts of climate change, invasive species, etc., and heard from experts in their fields relative to conservation and stewardship,” detailed the Ka 'Ohana O Honu'apo representative. “They also formed collaborations and partnerships with other organizations and community members, which opened up the potential to learn and incorporate stewardship activities not yet happening in Ka'ū.”

A potential stewardship opportunity cited was the success of community-based management in Miloli'i, and how to bring those practices to the Ka'ū coastline. The trainees also studied the impacts of Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death on Hawai'i's forests and ways to mitigate its spread through decontamination strategies and protocols.

Trainees received a monthly stipend for their participation and were required to attend all instructional events and steward-related opportunities, as well as engage with visitors to effectively communicate pono behaviors and safety protocols. In addition, they participated in a number of volunteer opportunities with multiple groups and organizations in Ka'ū and South Kona. Trainees hailed from across the Ka'ū District.

Sharing how the stewardship program has directed her “to a purposeful life,” trainee Chelsae-Lynn Kobzi said the best part of the program was working with organizations and “seeing what's available out there as there is so much to do.” She added participation has “brought me purpose, confidence and a whole new perspective.”

With a deeper connection to their 'āina, the newly launched group of stewards can seek to reconnect with the different organizations and individuals they worked with during the training to remain involved in efforts to help mālama 'āina. This can be done on a volunteer basis or through employment opportunities.

Looking to the future, Kaiama said the idea for the training program is to show how community stewardship training and implementation can be done and then hope for more like it to be self-sustained or partially-supported by state and county agencies.

“It would be ideal for community-based steward programs to foster the economic job diversification we need as these volunteers and others like them can benefit from well-paying jobs that uplift their community while protecting the natural and cultural resources of the island,” added Kaiama. “This is the regenerative tourism model we would like to see more of.”

Funded and supported by HTA and administered by IHVB, the Hawai'i Island Community-Based Action Stewardship Program builds on the success of other community-based programs around the state including at Hanauma Bay State Park, Hā'ena State Park and Lē'ahi (Diamond Head State Monument).

To learn more about how destination management and stewardship is advancing on the island of Hawai'i, visit: <https://holomua.hawaii-tourism-authority.org/hawaii-island/>.

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Link to download the following photos:

<https://finnpartners.box.com/s/iy594t9wgwz6p4vuq3fzwi0ydn30fqm>

Photo credit: Hawai'i Tourism Authority

Photo 1: Trainees and Ka 'Ohana o Honu'apo (KOOH) members at the recent Ka'ū Hoa Pili 'Āina stewardship training program hō'ike were from front left: KOOH board member Jodie Rosam, Alice Birnbaum, Chelsae-Lynn Kobzi, assistant coordinator Alexic Kerver, Christine Inserra, Crystal Leonards and Neil Nevis. Back row: KOOH board members Megan Lamson and Daniel Dierking, Leiahi Ka'awa, KOOH board member Nohea Ka'awa, Mālama 'Āina coordinator John Replogle, Alden Wells, Christine Alley, Jimmy Cocallas and Colby Lund.

Photo 2: From left: Chelsae-Lynn Kobzi, Colby Lund, Crystal Leonards, Alice Birnbaum and Alden Wells, new graduates of the Ka'ū Hoa Pili 'Āina stewardship training program, dance to honor Pele at the recent hō'ike.

Photo 3: Wai'ōhinu native Christine Alley carries her 'a'ali'i to the kuahu, as it represents the resilience of the people of Ka'ū, at the recent stewardship training hō'ike. It is the enactment of 'ōlelo no'eau #507: "He 'a'ali'i ku makani mai au; 'a'ohe makani nana e kula'i. *I am a wind-resisting 'a'ali'i; no gale can push me over. A boast meaning "I can hold my own even in the face of difficulties."*

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 [Twitter](#).

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