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New Keaukaha Programs Aim to Mitigate Visitor Impacts, Protect Natural and Cultural Resources

Collaborative Community-Based Efforts Foster Destination Management

HAWAII ISLAND – The Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA), County of Hawai'i, and Island of Hawai'i Visitors Bureau (IHVB) today announced two new community-based destination management initiatives — the Keaukaha Steward Pilot Program and Community Cultural-Based Education Program — a concerted effort to mitigate visitor impacts and protect natural and cultural resources in the Keaukaha area.

“HTA’s destination management work continues to expand on Hawai'i Island as we support the community’s vision. These new programs uplift the Keaukaha community, provide opportunities for residents, and reduce visitor impacts through place-based education and stewardship,” said Caroline Anderson, HTA’s Director of Planning. “We are proud to be a part of this collaborative undertaking with the County, IHVB and various community partners.”

Residents identified Keaukaha as a highly visited hotspot area in the County of Hawai'i's [2020-2025 Hawai'i Island Tourism Strategic Plan](#) and HTA's [2021-2023 Hawai'i Island Destination Management Action Plan \(DMAP\)](#). The Keaukaha Steward Pilot Program and Community Cultural-Based Education Program aim to address residents' concerns through community-led, government-supported action at Waiuli (also known as Richardson Ocean Park) and Lehia Beach Parks.

“Our administration recognizes the value of community collaboration and the importance of perpetuating authentic Hawaiian culture, particularly in and around our wahi pana,” said Hawai'i County Mayor Mitch Roth. “By implementing place-based education and stewardship programs, we can actively engage residents to preserve our cherished destinations while promoting sustainable tourism. We are extremely honored to collaborate with HTA, IHVB, and our community partners to develop initiatives that promote, perpetuate, and protect our Hawai'i Island.”

Keaukaha Steward Pilot Program

The Keaukaha Steward Pilot Program is a collaborative project with the County, HTA, Kupu, Keaukaha and Leleiwi Community Associations, Hui Ho'oleimaluō, and the Keli'i William Ioane Legacy Foundation as the community lead organization.

With funding provided by HTA and the County, Kupu has hired four local stewards to work part-time — two stationed at Waiuli and two at Lehia — to help educate visitors about the area and history, gather visitation data, and mitigate unwanted behaviors. The pilot program runs from May to December 2023.

"Kupu is honored to support this community-led effort to mālama these areas," said Kāwika Riley, Kupu's Vice President for External Affairs.

The Keaukaha Steward Pilot Program advances Action G of the Hawai'i Island DMAP to "Invest in community-based programs that enhance the quality of life for communities."

Community Cultural-Based Education Program

With funding provided by HTA and in conjunction with the County and IHVB, the Keli'i William Iwane Legacy Foundation has also been selected to develop and operate the Community Cultural-Based Education Program which will help balance the preservation of cultural and natural resources with mindful visitation in the Keaukaha area.

"As an 'ohana, we have seen the dramatic alteration of our wahi pana by the influx of visitors to our community spaces where we as children played and learned at Waiuli and Lehia Parks," said 'Āinaaloha W. Iwane, Keli'i William Iwane Legacy Foundation project manager and cultural specialist for the Keaukaha Steward Pilot Program, and daughter of Native Hawaiian community advocate Keli'i Iwane, better known as Skippy. "We are grateful for these opportunities to activate a collective community abundance and mālama 'āina."

The cultural education program will support the Keaukaha Steward Pilot Program by enhancing the stewards' cultural and historical knowledge of the Keaukaha area to be shared with the community and parkgoers. The program focuses on community collaboration, including with the Edith Kanaka'ole Foundation through its Honuiaiākea (Kapu and Kānāwai Papakū Makawalu) Process workshop. Staff members will synthesize information gathered from the two-day workshop and design learning materials for community and steward use.

"Supporting the work of our Keaukaha residents and non-profit organizations is an integral part of carrying out the Hawai'i Island DMAP," said Rachel Kaiama, IHVB's Destination Manager. "The 'āina-based curriculum will become an invaluable resource for the community and ongoing preservation of these special places."

The Keaukaha Community Cultural-Based Education Program advances the Hawai'i Island DMAP priorities, including "Develop resources and educational programs to perpetuate authentic Hawaiian culture and 'Ōlelo Hawai'i" (Action B) and "Support and promote 'āina-based education and practices to protect and preserve our natural resources so that residents and visitors will aloha 'āina" (Action C).

Keaukaha is the second Hawai'i Island community to implement a steward program for improved destination management and preservation. In north Kohala, Nā Ala Hele Trail and Access Program staff members began working closely with the Pololū and surrounding communities. In 2021, HTA provided funding support for the Pololū Trail Steward Program, a pilot project in collaboration with Nā Ala Hele Trail and Access Program, the lineal descendent community of Pololū, and Kupu. The pilot program was a success for the community and carried forth by the State Department of Land and Natural Resources.

To learn more about how destination management and stewardship is advancing throughout Hawai'i, visit <https://holomua.hawaiiitourismauthority.org/>.

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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 Ku'u Home – care for our beloved home. For more information about HTA, visit www.hawaiitourismauthority.org or follow @HawaiiHTA on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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