



# East Maui Water Authority Newsletter

COUNTY OF MAUI



Photo: C. Roberts

## Message From The Director

This season the East Maui Water Authority (EMWA) and our community Board the ‘Aha Wai O Maui Hikina have a lot to celebrate, and much work ahead. Since our last newsletter, EMWA has once again presented to the BLNR on O‘ahu, hosted a community meeting in Ke‘anae, and a new Board Chair and Vice-Chair have taken office. Our first Water Resource Program Specialist has also been hired. These accomplishments and more are detailed throughout this newsletter, and we are excited to begin our work to help our watershed become more resilient, healthy, and able to grow water for our future.

On April 24, the EMWA and Board presented an update to the Department of Land and Natural Resources Board of Land and Natural Resources on our capacity to manage the East Maui water system and assist the state with land stewardship. Dr. Johnathan Likeke Scheuer, then Board President, shared a presentation on public trust principles as they relate to water system ownership on

state land and highlighted historical documents detailing ownership rights. In support of our efforts to manage the East Maui water system, Mayor Bissen formally requested that the state transfer management of the East Maui Irrigation System to the County of Maui through an executive order. We will continue to work with the State of Hawai‘i and Mahi Pono to find a plan that benefits all parties and supports central valley agriculture, water to Upcountry, and the watershed communities, and helps to support a healthy, productive ecosystem.

One way we are supporting existing work in the watersheds is through our grant program. Our work is deeply rooted in relationships— to the land, the water, and to one another. These values are shown through our inaugural Community Grant Program supporting five local projects. We have been welcomed into communities from Ke‘anae to Kula,

where we continue to listen and learn.

Two of the grant projects are highlighted in this publication, and I hope you enjoy reading about the excellent work our grantees are planning to facilitate.

As our newly elected Board President Kyle Nakanelua reminds us, this work is not about any single decision or any one season— it is a commitment to community-based resource management to ensure water for everyone and a healthy ecosystem for the next thirty generations.

Mahalo for your continued trust, your mana‘o, and your kōkua as we carry this work forward together.

Me ka ha‘aha‘a,  
*Gina Young*  
Gina Young  
EMWA Director

Department Highlights

## Mayor Bissen's 2026 State of the County Address Highlights Work of the East Maui Water Authority

On March 5, 2026, Mayor Bissen delivered the 2026 State of the County address where he outlined five priorities for Maui County: Kama'āina housing, Lāhainā wildfire recovery, community well-being, natural and cultural resource protection, and economic development. Within the realm of natural and cultural resource protection, he shared the following about the East Maui Water Authority:

“Over the past year and a half, the County of Maui, Mahi Pono, and the newly formed East Maui Water Authority have taken steady, intentional steps toward a long-term solution for East Maui's water. For generations, East Maui communities— particularly Native Hawaiian farmers, kalo growers, and long-time residents— have faced real challenges related to water access and stewardship. These longstanding issues will take time and continued commitment to resolve, but we are in a place of honest dialogue and shared responsibility.

Maui's future depends on a strong agricultural sector, and Mahi Pono plays a critical role in keeping our lands productive, fire resistant, and strengthening island food security. I appreciate their willingness to engage openly. These efforts reflect a shared commitment to agricultural viability, community benefit, and responsible watershed management.”



Mayor Bissen sings and plays 'ukulele to Hawai'i Aloha during the 2026 State of the County Address  
Photo: County of Maui

“*For generations, East Maui communities— particularly Native Hawaiian farmers, kalo growers, and long-time residents— have faced real challenges related to water access and stewardship. These longstanding issues will take time and continued commitment to resolve, but we are in a place of honest dialogue and shared responsibility.*”

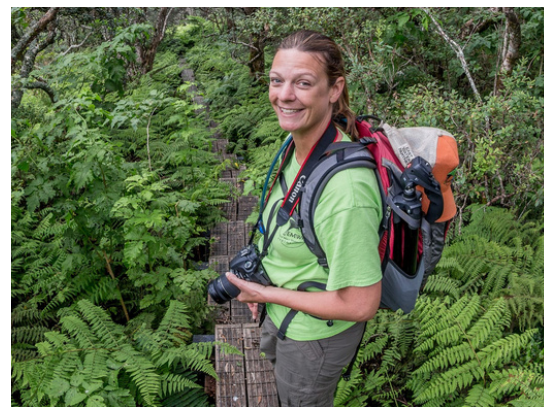
Watch the State of the County address and learn more at: <https://www.mauicounty.gov/2954/2026-State-of-the-County-Address>

## Welcoming Allison Borrell as EMWA's Water Resources Program Specialist

We are excited to welcome Allison Borrell to the EMWA team as our new Water Resources Program Specialist. In this role, Allison will oversee the EMWA Water Resources Program; develop, implement, and evaluate watershed plans and programs, support the 'Aha Wai o Maui Hikina Board through the watershed planning process, and help advance EMWA's mission of responsible water stewardship in East Maui.

Allison brings more than 20 years of experience in watershed conservation on Maui. She began her career as a field assistant with the Mauna Kahālāwai Watershed Partnership and has spent the past 16 years serving as the Community Outreach and Education Liaison for the East Maui Watershed Partnership. She also serves as the Hawai'i State Advocate for Leave No Trace and has dedicated her career to protecting Maui's natural resources through education, stewardship and community engagement.

Originally from Minnesota, Allison has called Maui home for the past 24 years. She feels fortunate to continue learning from



EMWA welcomes Allison Borrell as our new Water Resources Program Specialist. Photo: A. Borrell

the community and deepening her understanding of the cultural values and practices that shape the relationship between people and 'āina. These experiences have strengthened both her personal and professional commitment to caring for Maui's natural resources. Please join us in welcoming Allison to the EMWA 'Ohana!

Department News

## County of Maui Formally Requests a State of Hawai'i Executive Order to Manage East Maui Water System, Presents to the Board of Land and Natural Resources

Mayor Bissen has moved forward on his commitment to finding a solution in the management of the East Maui water system. In April, amid continued discussions with the State of Hawai'i and stakeholders, Mayor Bissen formally requested that the state transfer management of the East Maui Irrigation System to the County through a Governor's Executive Order.

On April 24, 2026, in Honolulu, both Director Young and Board Chair Scheuer presented to the BLNR. Director Young and Department of Water Supply Deputy Director James Kimo Landgraf informed the Board of the County's readiness and capacity to manage the system and the benefits of doing so. The Request for the Executive Order and Report on the County's Capacity to manage the system as early as the end of this year is on the next two pages of this newsletter.

In Scheuer's PowerPoint presentation, he highlighted the history related to the ownership of the system. In Mahi Pono's April 22, 2026 written testimony to the BLNR, they wrote that "EMI owns the Ditch System." Scheuer went into detail questioning this claim.

Chair Scheuer raised four important issues that call into question Mahi Pono's claim. He first noted that, based on an environmental impact statement prepared by Alexander and Baldwin, most of the ditch system lies on Crown and Kingdom Lands now controlled by the state, rather than private lands. Secondly, he shared that based on data provided by Mahi Pono, the vast majority of the water comes from state-controlled lands. Third, he shared that the Public Trust Doctrine – which comes from Kingdom law and also the



Director Young, Board Chair Scheuer, and Department of Water Supply Deputy Director James Kimo Landgraf presented to the BLNR on EMWA's readiness and capacity to manage the East Maui water system and the benefits of doing so. Photo: EMWA

State Constitution— Article XI Sec. 1— states that “all public natural resources are held in trust by the state for the benefit of the people.” Because of that, there is legally no such thing as “company-owned water” in Hawai'i, even if it originates from privately owned lands.

Finally, he reviewed the history of how the Crown and Kingdom lands were split into four license areas— Nāhiku, Honomanū, Ke'ānae, and Huelo— and in a 1938 Agreement (commonly referred to as the East Maui Water Agreement) between the Territory and East Maui

Irrigation Company Ltd. He then noted that when the four licenses were previously issued for the system— the last of which expired in 1986— each license required that the ditch infrastructure located on these public lands revert to the lessor, namely the State of Hawai'i, upon expiration. Therefore, the question of who owns the Ditch System is not as simple as Mahi Pono's testimony states, and it is important that the public understand these nuances.

“***The Public Trust Doctrine, which comes from Kingdom law and the State Constitution, Article XI Sec. 1, states, “All public natural resources are held in trust by the state for the benefit of the people.”***  
***Because of that, there is legally no such thing as “company-owned water” in Hawai'i, even if it originates from privately owned lands.***”

Watch the April 24, 2026 Board of Land and Natural Resources Meeting Recording (EMWA segment): [mauicounty.gov/EMWAvideolibrary](https://mauicounty.gov/EMWAvideolibrary)  
Dr. Scheuer's presentation can be viewed at:  
[mauicounty.gov/EMWApresentations](https://mauicounty.gov/EMWApresentations)

**RICHARD T. BISSEN, JR.**  
*Mayor*

**JOSIAH K. NISHITA**  
*Managing Director*



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**April 9, 2026**

**Ryan Kanaka'ole, Acting Chair  
State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, Kalanimoku Building  
1151 Punchbowl Street  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813**

**RE: BLNR APRIL 10, 2026 AGENDA ITEM D-1 AND REQUEST FOR A SET ASIDE VIA GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDER FOR STATE HELD INTERESTS IN THE EAST MAUI IRRIGATION SYSTEM AND SURFACE WATER FROM KO'OLAU FOREST RESERVE, ISLAND OF MAUI, HAWAII FOR THE PUBLIC PURPOSES OF DOMESTIC, MUNICIPAL, AND AGRICULTURAL USE TO BE UNDER THE CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT OF THE COUNTY OF MAUI**

Aloha e Acting Chair Kanaka'ole,

Mahalo for your patience as the County of Maui has prepared to take on the responsibility of managing the East Maui water system. The County is ready to move forward and respectfully requests a set aside pursuant to HRS Sections 171- 11 and 95.

As you know, the set-aside process through executive order has historically been used for public purposes and offers a more efficient path forward than other mechanisms. Because a set aside does not require a contested case, it provides a much more efficient, less litigious and less divisive opportunity to bring the Maui community together as we move toward County management of water delivery systems. The County's focus remains on ensuring that the system is managed in a way that serves the public interest, and we look forward to continued discussions on the most appropriate path forward.

Consistent with these principles, the County, as a governmental subdivision of the State of Hawai'i, is well positioned to serve as a steward of these resources in a way that upholds the public trust. The County's role allows for a balanced approach that supports watershed protection, long-term ecosystem health, and reliable future water availability.

Part of this balanced approach is the recognition of the critical importance a strong agricultural sector plays in developing Maui's food security, economic resilience, and wildfire risk reduction. Productive agriculture in Central Maui helps sustain our local economy and plays an important role in stewarding lands in ways that reduce fire risk and protect surrounding communities. Ensuring long-term, reliable, and affordable access to water is essential for Mahi Pono and any future operators to continue fulfilling this role.

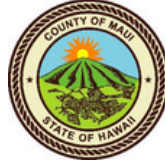
Our shared goal is to support the continued viability of agriculture in the Central Valley for generations to come, while preserving Important Agricultural Lands as a foundation for food production and economic opportunity for our residents.

We look forward to working collaboratively with you and the Board of Land and Natural Resources on the development of an executive order. Once completed, acceptance of the order is subject to approval by the County Council. We have attached a proposed draft executive order for your consideration. Please let us know a convenient time to begin these discussions.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard T. Bissen, Jr.".

Richard T. Bissen, Jr.



## Report on County of Maui Capacity to Manage East Maui Water System

Maui County can operate the East Maui water system through a State Executive Order. The Department of Water Supply (DWS) will operate, maintain and improve the system. The EMWA is entering into an intragovernmental agreement with DWS to specify roles and responsibilities. An operational plan is being developed in anticipation of beginning operations by the end of the year. The EMWA is establishing a watershed planning division to implement watershed programs to increase aquifer recharge. Its work to steward East Maui water resources centers on environmentally sustainable practices, local expertise and Hawaiian cultural and generational knowledge. This integrated system of water resource management provides a long-term approach to asset management and watershed protection to ensure water availability for Maui County residents and our agricultural sector for generations to come.

### Maui County organizational capacity.

DWS currently operates four surface water systems in Maui: Waikamoi, Kahakapao, Pi‘iholo and Lahaina. The Department has 240 positions overall, including 170 personnel assigned to operations for water systems. Those consist of pipefitters, equipment operators, pump mechanics, construction mechanics, construction personnel, laborers, water meter technicians, electricians, electronic technicians, laboratory personnel, welders, distribution system operators, surface water treatment operators, valve control technicians and several other personnel for support of the Departments water systems. In addition, 10 positions are being created in anticipation of County acquisition of additional water systems. The County is also in discussions with Mahi Pono and East Maui irrigation about contracting services as an additional option.

### Budget and funding, including current funding sources, anticipated capital and operational costs, and any identified funding gaps.

For fiscal year 2026, the County of Maui has a \$1.56 billion dollar budget and a AA+ bond rating providing significant access to financial markets for capital program funding. Acquisition of local water systems and the protection of natural resources are top priorities for the County. In this fiscal year, DWS has a capital improvement program to manage over \$68 million dollars in funding. As a government entity, the County is required to manage assets for the long-term and has committed over \$563 million dollars of water improvement projects funding over the next six years. Funding gaps for capital improvements are not anticipated. The County uses a six-year funding program that incorporates public transparency and community input to establish priorities as part of our municipal budget process. Maui County also anticipates additional funding will be available through its strategic water conservation efforts and other grant funding opportunities.

### Integrated Water Resource Management.

The County of Maui is able to operate and upgrade the system, provide watershed management programs in the lower and middle areas, and provide benefits to the communities of Maui Hikina to mitigate community impacts of water removal from the area. This integrated approach seeks to not only ensure long-term water availability for the island of Maui but also improve the health of the watershed areas and communities. Long-term water removal from the area has resulted in negative consequences to these communities.

The County of Maui through the work of the EMWA seeks to restore health and balance to the area through the reintegration of cultural values and practices, the active transfer of knowledge to generations that will shoulder the responsibilities and impacts of climate change, and economic employment opportunities to bring families back home.

### Other operational and legal considerations.

Most of the water collected by the East Maui water system emanates from State land, and most of the East Maui water system is located on State land. An executive order from the State can be granted to Maui County allowing the use of water emanating from State lands and for any and all interests the State holds in the East Maui water system.

In addition, Maui County has clear statutory authority to own and control property within its boundaries. HRS § 46-1.5(16) authorizes the County to acquire and hold real and personal property. The County also has explicit authority over water infrastructure. Under HRS § 46- 1.5(19)(A)(B), Maui County may acquire, operate, manage, and maintain waterworks systems, including reservoirs, wells, pipelines, and related facilities used to distribute, regulate, and control water for public use. In addition, HRS § 46-1.5(23)(F) authorizes the County to assume control from the State of existing waterworks systems, including water rights, pipelines, and related appurtenances, to enlarge, develop, and improve those systems.

County use of State lands to collect water and for operation of the system will also provide for the continued provision of revenues to the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA). This ensures that income generated from Crown lands transferred to the state to be held as a public trust continue to be used for the betterment of Native Hawaiians. Under the 2026 revocable permit fee, 30% is transferred to DHHL and 20% to OHA. In addition, revocable permit fees or in-kind services are also used for watershed management by the DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife. Memorandums of understanding will be used to ensure continued funding and support to DHHL, OHA and DoFAW.

To support Central Valley agriculture, a revised water delivery agreement between the County of Maui and Mahi Pono will be made to ensure water for crops. In addition, Maui County will coordinate with Mahi Pono for access and/or ownership rights to the portion of the Wailoa ditch between Honopou Gulch and the Kamole treatment plant. This portion of the ditch is utilized by both the Department of Water Supply and Mahi Pono to bring water to Kamole Treatment plant and Central Valley agricultural fields. No adjustments to the gravity fed system are required for the continued flow of water for domestic water to Upcountry residents.

Mahalo,

*Gina Young*

Gina Young

Board Member Highlights

## ‘Aha Wai O Maui Hikina Board elects Kyle Nakanelua as New Board President

At the May 15<sup>th</sup> ‘Aha Wai O Maui Hikina Board meeting, Kyle Nakanelua, previously the Board Vice President, was voted in as the 2026-2027 Board President. Previous Board President Jonathan Scheuer stepped down from his title and was voted in as the 2026-2027 Board Vice President. Both Nakanelua and Scheuer received unanimous votes for their new roles and expressed their gratitude and commitment to service of East Maui. In their new roles they will continue their work with the Board to guide the Department on issues affecting East Maui water rights and the establishment of the watershed program. Below, Nakanelua provides his perspective on his time on the Board and what this work means to him:

### *Where is your wai (water)? What water source do you feel connected to, and why?*

My connection to water begins in Kulanihāko‘i—the natural water cycle of East Maui. I am from the Ko‘olau region of East Maui, specifically Wailua. For generations, my family has lived in this area and depended on its streams, springs, and rainfall. My relationship to this water is personal, ancestral, and lifelong. It is not just a resource—it is part of who we are.

### *How long have you served on the Board?*

I have served on the Board since it was created a little over two years ago. I was appointed by Mayor Richard Bissen to represent Maui Hikina because of my family’s history and kuleana to care for the land.

### *How does your background shape your perspective?*

I have farmed kalo (taro) on my family’s land in Ko‘olau for over 30 years. My family has lived in this region since before Western contact in the late 1700s. In 1836, my ancestors were granted land rights by Kamehameha III. Because of this deep generational connection, I bring ancestral knowledge and firsthand experience of the land and water into our Board discussions and decisions.

“  
***Sustainable management requires reinvesting in the natural systems that provide water—protecting forests, watersheds, and streams—rather than focusing only on financial return. True sustainability means caring for the source of life itself.***  
”

### *What change do you hope to help bring about?*

Our main goal is to support the East Maui Water Authority in acquiring and improving the old East Maui Irrigation (EMI) ditch system, as directed by the Maui County Charter. This system controls how water is collected and delivered through East Maui, up to Upcountry Maui and downward into the central plains. We want to ensure it is managed in a way that benefits the public and protects the environment.



Kyle Nakanelua will be the Board President for the ‘Aha Wai O Maui Hikina East Maui Community Regional Board for the 2026-2027 term.  
Photo: K. Nakanelua

### *What does this work mean to you?*

This work is a responsibility. I see it as an obligation to honor my ancestors and protect the future for the next generations. I carry forward their voices, values, and hopes. Stewardship of water is a sacred trust.

### *What are you most proud of so far?*

We are working to shift the conversation about water. Water should not be managed primarily for corporate profit. It is a public trust resource that supports our environment, culture, and way of life. Sustainable management requires reinvesting in the natural systems that provide water—protecting forests, watersheds, and streams—rather than focusing only on financial return. True sustainability means caring for the source of life itself.

### *What are your hopes for the East Maui Water Authority in the next 5–10 years?*

We hope to secure long-term stewardship of watershed lands in Ko‘olau—the areas that collect rainfall and recharge our aquifers. We also hope to take responsibility for the EMI ditch system and modernize it in a way that protects the environment and follows State water laws. Our goal is to ensure water is managed responsibly, fairly, and in the public interest for generations to come.

(Continued from page 6)

**What advice would you give to someone who wants to support this work?**

Get involved. Attend meetings. Stay informed. Support organizations that work to protect Maui's watersheds, such as Sierra Club or Nā Moku 'Aupuni O Ko'olau Hui. Contact your elected officials and let them know you support responsible water management in East Maui. Consider working for the East Maui Water Authority or the Department of Water Supply. Most importantly, think long-term. Invest not just in short-term gains, but in the health and future of your children and grandchildren. Not just 30 years, 30 generations.

**Can you explain the Board and Department's motto and how it reflects a deeper meaning of water stewardship?**

In Hawaiian thought, we are not "owners" of water—we are guardians. Water is part of a larger natural cycle. Rain forms in the atmosphere, carried by winds into the mountains of Ko'olau and Hāmākua. It falls as rain, filters into the forest and soil, replenishes underground aquifers, and emerges again as springs and streams. Those streams feed the land, allowing crops to grow and communities to thrive. This cycle — sometimes referred to as Kulanihāko'i—reminds us that the true "resource" is not just the pipes or ditches that carry water. The real source is the sky, the forests, the

mountains, and the aquifers that gather and protect it. If we care for the watershed, the water will continue to give life. When we protect the source, we protect ourselves.

Ola i ka wai— water is life.



| Grants Program

## East Maui Water Authority Grantee Spotlights

In January, the East Maui Water Authority selected five recipients for its inaugural Community Grant Program, which supports local projects focused on water stewardship, cultural practices, environmental restoration, and community collaboration in East Maui. The program supports and encourages community-based collective action and long-term stewardship of East Maui water resources and cultural practices.

### Nā Moku 'Aupuni o Ko'olau Hui

Members of Nā Moku 'Aupuni o Ko'olau Hui are lineal descendants and current residents of Ke'anae and Wailuanui, Maui. For decades, this non-profit has worked to protect traditional water rights and Native Hawaiian customary practices while stewarding the Ko'olau watershed. Its efforts focus on revitalizing traditional water infrastructure to support food sovereignty, cultural continuity, and ecological health. The organization also manages Ke'anae Uka, a 9-acre community space serving as a campground and gathering site.

Nā Moku 'Aupuni o Ko'olau Hui was awarded \$20,000 to implement its Lo'i and 'Auwai Restoration Project in Ke'anae and Wailuanui. The project aims to restore

water systems in a historically significant wetland taro-growing region. Activities include employing a part-time technician to conduct restoration work, supported by administrative coordination and supplies.

"This project addresses urgent needs in East Maui to repair degraded 'auwai systems, declining lo'i productivity, and the loss of cultural practices tied to water stewardship," said Jessie Kekiwi-Aweau, the organization's Board Secretary. "By restoring these systems, we improve water flow, soil health, and native biodiversity, while strengthening community connections to ancestral knowledge." The project builds on their prior work to protect stream



Nā Moku 'Aupuni o Ko'olau Hui received funds from EMWA for their lo'i and 'auwai restoration projects in Ke'anae and Wailuanui. Photo: EMWA

flows and educate the community about water rights and kuleana. County funding will support continued restoration efforts that incorporate local expertise and benefit the public through environmental and cultural resilience.

Invasive species, particularly miconia in upper Wailuanui and Ke'anae, continue to obstruct waterways and disrupt natural flow patterns. Kekiwi-Aweau noted that funding will also support efforts to reopen and (Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

maintain the higher elevation headwaters of key streams, helping restore consistent stream flow from mauka to makai, benefiting lo'i kalo systems and nearshore reef ecosystems.

While rewarding, this work comes with challenges. Environmental conditions—such as recent Kona low storms—have made accessing and restoring upper stream areas difficult.

“When stream diversions occurred, many families lost their livelihoods and moved away,” Kekiwi-Aweau explained.



“This created generational gaps in traditional practices, and many cultural traditions were not passed down.” To address this, the project engages kūpuna, kia'i wai (water protectors), and youth from Ke'ānae and Wailuanui in hands-on restoration work, helping to rebuild community participation efforts, especially among younger generations. Nā Moku 'Aupuni o Ko'olau Hui also hosts public workdays and invites community members to kōkua and learn. Those interested can visit [www.namoku.net](http://www.namoku.net) to sign up and explore ways to support this important work in East Maui.

## Twin Falls Kupu Wai o Ho'olawa Project



*A grant from EMWA will help to support the inaugural Kupu Wai o Ho'olawa Project at Twin Falls, bringing together youth and adult community members to study the Ho'olawa watershed. Photo: Friends of Twin Falls*

The Kupu Wai o Ho'olawa project—meaning “the growing waters of Ho'olawa”—is a yearlong project bringing together youth (ages 14 and over) and adult community members to study the Ho'olawa watershed through place-based learning, water testing and mapping.

Maile Davis, project advisor, explains that “this is for people that want to explore, learn more, and be connected to a deeper sense of understanding of their environment.” Motivated by her love of bringing community together and volunteering in her children's schools over the years, Davis had the idea for creating a comprehensive experience that both engages and empowers residents through meaningful watershed work at Wailele Farm. That spark turned into a creative

discussion with residents, watershed users, and residents in the area to form the Kupu Wai o Ho'olawa project as it is today.

Wailele Farm—where Twin Falls sits—is proud to allow open access to their area of the East Maui watershed. “We fully realize that we are on the outer edge of the East Maui watershed, yet we are honored to be a part of East Maui as we feel deeply connected to it,” Davis said.

Wailele Farm draws foot traffic from visitors and locals alike, and Davis hopes to bring more local curiosity and enjoyment to the area through this project. “Creating opportunities like this for connections to be made is really meaningful for me in all different kinds of ways,” she said.

The youth cohort, for ages 14-18, and the

adult volunteer group will be selected via a short online application. Once admitted, the adult cohort will focus primarily on collecting and processing water samples, identifying and cataloging native and invasive species, and taking time to kilo.

Students will meet once a month to hear from water experts and kūpuna, test water samples from the area, and occasionally join the adult cohort in collecting samples upstream. Davis said the goal of the project is to engage community members through meaningful experiences, create a working model to share with other communities, and empower students and adults alike to learn more about the watershed. Funding from the EMWA grant will go towards water testing supplies, field work software, soil testers, data and mapping software, participant gear, and operational costs. Updates on the project start date, volunteer applications and general information will be posted on Instagram at [@friendsoftwinfalls](https://www.instagram.com/friendsoftwinfalls). The program is expected to begin this summer. More information will also be available at [twinfallsmaui.net](http://twinfallsmaui.net) closer to that time.

| Community Engagement

# EMWA In The Community

## Ke'anae Community Meeting

EMWA staff held a community meeting at Ke'anae Uka on April 1, 2026. The meeting focused on providing information regarding the upcoming Board of Land and Natural Resources meeting, reviewing the department's draft operational plan, and discussing recent historical projects. It also provided an opportunity to hear attendee input on matters related to East Maui water and to respond to questions.

### Department Projects on Historical Context of East Maui Water

Information and Education Specialist Mary-Eliza Beaumont presented on the historical context of East Maui water related to water leases system infrastructure and local community petitions to the King from 1859 to 1928. Native Hawaiian watershed communities on Maui have formally protested the auction of water and land leases to private plantation owners for 160 years.

To address concerns, early leases granted for water and land access rights stipulated:

- Stream diversions and ditch construction would not interfere, injure, or deprive the existing tenants of their water access
- Government retains the right to grant and withdraw water-rights to lessees
- Government may purchase the ditch systems at any time during the lease period (at actual cost) and/or ditch infrastructure returns to Government at end of lease period



*EMWA Director, Gina Young, presents to the Ke'anae community on April 1. The meeting focused on updates regarding the April 2026 Board of Land and Natural Resources meeting, reviewing the department's draft operational plan, and discussing recent historical projects. The department also welcomed the opportunity for community members to ask questions and provide input. Photo: EMWA*

collection of archival lease agreements made between plantation owners and the Kingdom, Territory, and State of Hawai'i. These historical agreements outlined the terms of land and water leases made during the period of ditch infrastructure construction from between 1876 and 1934.

The three main ideas highlighted in the presentation were:

- 1) The existence of several clauses across historical agreements protecting the rights, access, and environment of Native Hawaiian communities
- 2) Multiple stipulations in lease documents agreeing that any infrastructure constructed on public land would revert to Government's control at the end of a lease
- 3) That the County has historically recognized the importance of public control of water as a public resource in documents like the 1961 County Council Resolution.

### EMWA Draft Operational Plan Update and Opportunity for Input

The Department's draft plan is based upon the series of community conversations meetings held in October 2025 where three community workshops were convened in Ke'anae, Wailuku, and Ha'ikū to gather community input and help shape our strategic and operational planning. These meetings provided the Department with guidance on community-driven priorities— such as establishing an operational base yard in East Maui— and developing an action plan that EMWA can incorporate into its operations plan to guide the Department and seek funding to implement. The workshops were held in collaboration with Public Finance Initiative, Ha'ikū Community Association, Kula Community Association, and Nā Moku 'Aupuni O Ko'olau Hui. This effort is supported through Public Finance Initiative's Rural and Small Cities Program, with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. *(Continued on page 10)*

Planner Summer Wong presented a

**Community Engagement**

*(Continued from page 9)* The graphics below summarize key takeaways from these community-centered meetings and form the basis of the Department’s draft plan.

**EAST MAUI WATER AUTHORITY & ‘AHA WAI O MAUI HIKINA**

**WATERSHED & WATER RESOURCE PLANNING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS  
 COUNTY ACQUISITION OF WATER SYSTEM**

**Ke’anae**

**Kahului/Online**

**Ha’ikū - Huelo**

- True partnership between East Maui residents and state agencies
- No private or corporate control
- Support traditional Konohiki system
- Customary practices need community water control
- State needs to support County management

- Support Maui County management of the system
- Develop integrated watershed management
- Ensure strong public accountability
- Secure funding and pursue eminent domain

- Build partnerships between residents, nonprofits, agencies, experts
- Recognize the value of community ownership over corporate ownership
- Corporate control cuts costs, harms ‘āina and people
- Community stewardship prioritizes ecosystem data, invasive removal, and multi-generational training

**EAST MAUI WATER AUTHORITY & ‘AHA WAI O MAUI HIKINA**

**WATERSHED & WATER RESOURCE PLANNING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS**

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Ensure local control by acquiring the East Maui water collection and delivery system
- Maintain and upgrade physical infrastructure of the water system
- Establish a local operations hub for on-the-ground coordination
- Support data collection, monitoring, and stewardship of the streams, including expanded community programs (e.g. “Adopt-a-stream” programs)

**ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES**

- Support community outreach, awareness, and education programs
- Support transparent documentation of the condition of the water system and watershed (including maps and reports)
- Establish a scientific, historical, and cultural knowledge infrastructure
- Establish assessments and accountability practices

## EAST MAUI WATER AUTHORITY & ‘AHA WAI O MAUI HIKINA

### WATERSHED & WATER RESOURCE PLANNING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

## CREATING AN OPERATIONS HUB

### Partnerships & Collaborations

- Partner with Nā Moku and other local leaders
- Coordinate with DLNR, Fish & Wildlife, UHMC, youth programs, Mālama Hāmākua
- Honor lineal descendants and recognize kuleana lands

### Staffing & Operations

- Hire operators, maintenance crews, support staff, and scientific experts
- Create a managed tool- and equipment-lending program
- Cover insurance, logistics, reservations, accountability, and regular servicing

### Infrastructure & Equipment

- Invest in tools for monitoring, maintenance, restoration, and rapid response, such as excavators, trucks, brush cutters, drones, cameras, UTVs, chainsaws, radios
- Secure workshop space plus trucks, trailers, and dump trucks for transport

## EAST MAUI WATER AUTHORITY & ‘AHA WAI O MAUI HIKINA

### WATERSHED & WATER RESOURCE PLANNING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### PARTNERSHIPS

Partner with watershed experts, farmers, scientists, cultural practitioners, and agencies for monitoring training

### EDUCATION

Host community workshops on hydrology, scientific terms, and legal tools like Interim Instream Flow Standards (IIFS)

### JOBS

Hire local EMWA watershed field workers to strengthen local stewardship and increase eco-system health

### RESEARCH & PLANNING

Recruit University of Hawai'i students for research on East Maui stream and eco-system health

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| Community Engagement

## EMWA Staff Huaka‘i to Wailuanui

In May, the EMWA team had the meaningful opportunity to visit and work alongside Nā Moku ‘Aupuni o Ko‘olau Hui in beautiful Wailuanui.

Led by Jerome Kekiwi, the group joined Board Member Bush Martin and kalo farmer Radford Ka‘auamo to harvest kalo, weed, pick lū‘au, and prepare huli for the next planting. The experience offered a firsthand opportunity to huli ka lima i lalo—to turn their hands downward into the rich lepo—embracing the value of hard work and learning through direct practice.

The team also listened deeply to the mana‘o and lived perspectives of East Maui kalo farmers, gaining meaningful insight into their daily dedication and way of life. We extend a heartfelt mahalo to our hosts for welcoming us into this special wahi pana. The experience opened our na‘au and will continue to inform and ground our work back in the office. Mahalo nui!



*EMWA staff had the opportunity to visit, work, and learn alongside Nā Moku ‘Aupuni O Ko‘olau Hui at their lo‘i kalo in Wailuanui. Photo: EMWA*

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## EMWA Featured in Maui Documentary Series

The East Maui Water Authority was honored to be featured in the documentary series “Mālama Maui—The Land We Hold”, created by journalism students from the University of North Carolina. Released this past April, the series examines Maui communities in the aftermath of the 2023 Lahaina fires and explores how a place continues forward after profound loss.

Rooted in the understanding that people, ‘āina, water, and culture are deeply interconnected, the series highlights stories of resilience, stewardship, and rebuilding. The feature captures how communities across Maui continue to care for the land and one another through conservation, education, cultural preservation, and a shared commitment to the future.

Read the article and watch the mini-documentaries, including “Mauka to Makai,” which features the East Maui Water Authority, at [malamamaui.unc.edu/food](http://malamamaui.unc.edu/food).



*EMWA and partners were recently featured in a documentary series made by UNC journalism students. Their feature titled “Mauka to Makai” showcases the complex history of East Maui water use, both past and present. Photos: UNC*

Community Engagement

## Department of ‘Ōiwi Resources Closing Celebration of the Makahiki Season and Mahina ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i

On February 27, the Department of ‘Ōiwi Resources hosted a celebration for the closing of the Makahiki season and Mahina ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian Language Month). One of EMWA’s Information and Education Specialists, Serena Fukushima, entered into the Kalo and ‘Ulu Poke contest and shared her recipe. Please let us know if you try it!



## EMWA Participates in East Maui Taro Festival

The 2026 East Maui Taro Festival was held on Saturday, April 18, 2026, at Hāna Ball Park, marking the 30th annual celebration of kalo, Hawaiian culture, agriculture, and the East Maui community. The festival brought together farmers, cultural practitioners, non-profit and education organizations, families, musicians, and visitors to honor kalo as a foundational Hawaiian food source and a symbol of connection between ‘āina, ‘ohana, and ‘ike kūpuna.



EMWA staff engaged with over 100 participants at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual East Maui Taro Festival held in Hāna this past April. Photo: EMWA

EMWA was honored to have a booth in the education tent, and staff talked story with over 100 festival participants! Mahalo nui to the East Maui Taro Festival Board and Maui Hikina community for letting us be a part of this fantastic event.



**Join Our Next ‘Aha Wai O Maui Hikina (East Maui Regional Community Board) Meeting! Friday, July 17, 2026, 9:00 a.m.**

In-Person Location:  
Kalana Pakui Bldg., Dept. of Planning Conference #140  
250 So. High St., Wailuku, Maui, HI 96793

Remote Location:  
Interactive conference technology via Microsoft Teams  
To view and/or provide testimony, log on at:  
<https://aka.ms/join-a-meeting>  
Meeting ID: 257 467 454 965 97  
Meeting Password: Fu6Lx73N

Join by Phone: 1-808-800-0254 (toll-free)  
Phone conference ID: 468 717 973#  
Please follow the prompts: Press star 5 (\*5) to raise and lower your hand and press star 6 (\*6) to mute/unmute.

## Stay In Touch With Us!

**Upcoming Career Opportunities with the East Maui Water Authority**

Stay tuned or inquire with our department as to when these positions will be posted

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**Administrative Officer**

**Planner**

**Cultural and Aina Advocate (Program Specialist)**

**East Maui Field Technicians**



### Visit our updated website!

The County of Maui recently completed an update of it's website, including our own department page! Visit [mauicounty.gov/EMWA](http://mauicounty.gov/EMWA) to access department news, resources such as maps, meeting information, an events calendar, and more! Check back often, as we will be continually adding content as our department expands.

### TAKE OUR GRANTS SURVEY!

Your input helps us to set priorities and expand our East Maui Water Authority Grants Program and Community Benefit work. Anyone can take this survey. Your responses will only be used for planning and community engagement purposes and will not affect your eligibility or chances of receiving a grant should you apply in the future. Scan the QR code to take this short survey today!



*Make sure to subscribe to our e-newsletter for future announcements and Department updates!*

*To request newsletter hard copies for yourself or your business, please email [emwater.authority@co.maui.hi.us](mailto:emwater.authority@co.maui.hi.us)*

FREE  
ADMISSION



CASH  
PREFERRED

# KE'ANAE KO'OLAULE'A

BENEFITTING HANA 'IMI NA'AUAO SCHOLARSHIP

SATURDAY, AUGUST 8<sup>TH</sup>

9:00AM - 4:00PM

📍 KE'ANAE PENINSULA

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT LOCAL VENDORS  
CULTURAL DEMONSTRATIONS  
'ONO FOOD

*Mahalo for your support*



COUNTY OF MAUI  
OFFICE OF  
ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT

MA KA HANA KA 'IKE

The Ke'anae Ko'olaule'a is an annual community and cultural festival held on the Ke'anae Peninsula. The event celebrates the traditions, music, and spirit of East Maui through live Hawaiian music, hula performances, traditional arts and crafts, cultural demonstrations, and 'ono local food. This year's event is hosted by the nonprofit organization and East Maui Water Authority partner, Nā Moku Aupuni o Ko'olau Hui. Proceeds from the event will support the Hana 'Imi Na'auao Scholarship, which assists Ko'olau lineal descendants and current residents pursuing higher education.

EMWA will have a booth at this event with educational materials and fun activities. We look forward to seeing you there!

For more information, visit [namoku.net](http://namoku.net)

# East Maui Water Authority

COUNTY OF MAUI

*Summer Newsletter 2026*

200 South High Street Wailuku, HI 96793

Office Phone (808) 270-8225

Website: [mauicounty.org/EMWA](http://mauicounty.org/EMWA)

COUNTY OF MAUI  
DEPARTMENT OF THE EAST  
MAUI WATER AUTHORITY  
200 South High Street  
Kalana O Maui Building  
Wailuku, HI 96793



**Eia nō 'o  
Kūlanihāko'i,  
no kākou e  
mālama ai!**

*Here indeed is  
Heaven reflected  
on Earth, it is for  
all of us to  
Protect, Preserve  
and Sustain*