

2021 Report

# Aloha Tree Alliance

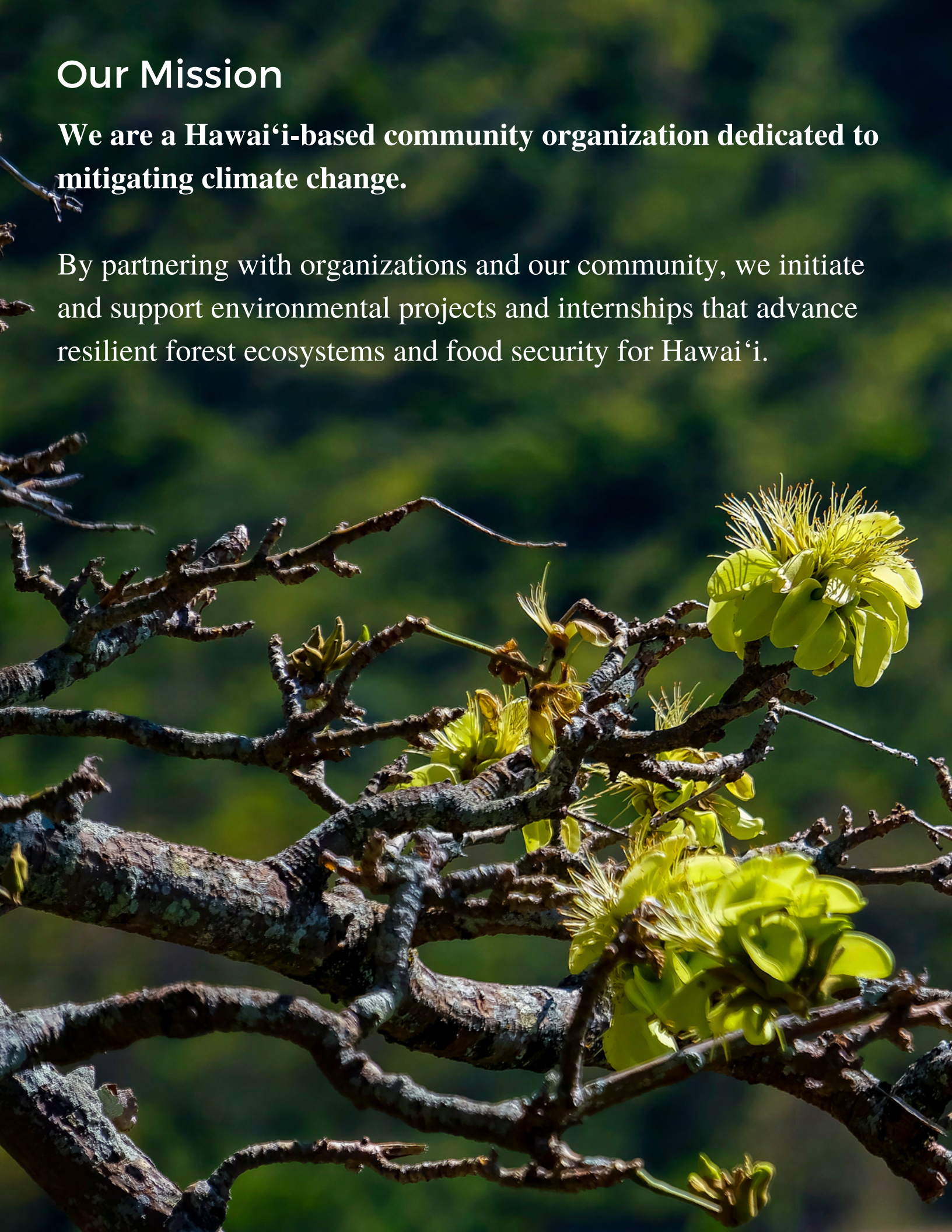
Working to restore the natural world  
for future generations



# Our Mission

**We are a Hawai‘i-based community organization dedicated to mitigating climate change.**

By partnering with organizations and our community, we initiate and support environmental projects and internships that advance resilient forest ecosystems and food security for Hawai‘i.



# Message from the Executive Director

Facing forward begins with courage—with a willingness to act and to take promising steps to make a difference in the world and influence others toward positive change.

Aloha Tree Alliance (ATA) was founded in 2020 in response to a worldwide call to action regarding climate change. As we witness impacts of the climate crisis—supercharged hurricanes, devastating wildfires, melting glaciers and polar ice sheets, deadly floods, and millions of plant and animal species at risk of extinction—the need for action has grown more urgent. Island communities may experience the most damaging effects due to rising sea levels and unprecedented storms.

ATA's first project to mitigate climate change and strengthen Hawai'i's resilience has been the restoration of the Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail that is part of the Ko'olau watershed in East Honolulu. The project is supported by a Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program grant from the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Forestry and Wildlife. This popular and once pristine hiking trail has been damaged by overuse, especially by hikers who cut through the forest switchbacks, killing plants and trees and causing erosion and damage to the native watershed and beautiful Maunalua Bay. ATA is grateful for its generous donors and selfless volunteers who have acted with courage to take steps to help create positive change toward restoring Hawai'i's natural world.

The pages that follow capture ATA's first year of accomplishments and share an empowering story from a promising young leader. We hope you enjoy this report and invite you to join us as we face forward, with feet on the ground and hands in the earth to restore, preserve, and protect our island home and create a more resilient future for all.

*-Laurie Chang*



# Aloha Tree Alliance's Growth



**December 2020:** Cailyn and Arlynn start research on restoration and reforestation for Hawaii's ecosystem.



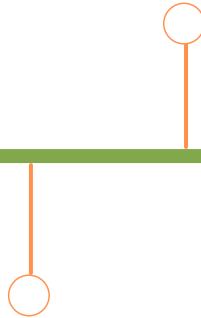
**March 2021:** Laurie Chang becomes ATA's Executive Director.



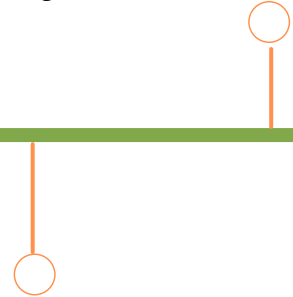
**April 2021:** Attorney Caitlin Moon files paperwork to incorporate ATA as a 501(c)3 organization.



**December 2020:** Cailyn becomes ATA's first stewardship grantee.



**February 2021:** Will Weaver is named as ATA's Restoration Specialist.



**April 2021:** Roarke Clinton joins ATA as its website developer.





**June 2021:** ATA receives its 501(c)3 status from the IRS.



**August 2021:** ATA is a grant recipient of a \$7,500 award from the Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program for the Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail restoration project.



**December 2021:** Architects Hawai'i partners with ATA to plant trees for their holiday community service project.



**May 2021:** ATA develops alliances with Mālama Maunalua, Protect and Preserve Hawai'i, Maunalua Fishpond Heritage Center, Liveable Hawaii Kai Hui, and the Department of Forestry and Wildlife.

**October 2021:** ATA begins restoration at the Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail.

**November 2021:** ATA selects Kanoa Nakamura as a mentee under Will Weaver for stewardship training.



# Sowing Seeds for a Brighter Future

*An Introduction to ATA's Stewardship Program  
by Cailyn Schmidt*



It was the summer of 2020. I had just graduated from UC Berkeley with a double degree in Conservation and Resource Studies and Music. I had plans to travel abroad in Paris for two months before COVID-19 drastically changed the world and so many people's lives. It was supposed to be the summer with the world in front of me, but instead I found myself quarantining in my childhood bedroom, watching leaves fall and squirrels tussling in the old oak trees in my backyard.

Self-isolation in quarantine was one of the most reflective times of my life. I found old journal entries from when I was 12, which read, "When I grow up I want to help the environment and bring peace and love into the world." How exactly I was going to do that from my childhood bedroom, I had no idea. That summer—as we can all recall—the world, the environment, and our nation were very far from being OK.

As a biracial Taiwanese American, I cried in solidarity as protestors took to the street, chanting George Floyd's name and calling for racial justice. The political turmoil and the generational inequality that left people of color behind in the political process was numbing, shocking and heartbreaking. The lack of care in our society was apparent, and far from being a culture of love and understanding one another. I couldn't breathe from the inequality, I couldn't breathe from the destruction of our environment, I couldn't breathe from the anxiety and hopelessness I felt about the future.

On top of the political unrest, summer in California was quite literally suffocating. The disease was ravaging, attacking people's lungs, destroying lives. Simultaneously, the lungs of California—our redwood, pine and oak trees—were burning to the ground due to an intense, statewide dry lightning storm. Eleven thousand dry lightning bolts ignited hundreds of fires across the state. Three fires blazed nearby my hometown, casting the sky into a



*Fire plumes in Northern California, August 2020.*

thick, dark cloud of smoke for over a month. Stark images of local migrant farmworkers working against the backdrop of a black sky and an invisible disease blazed across social media. The environmental injustice that disproportionately affected people of color was happening right in my hometown. I felt so helpless, in despair, and unable to utilize the skills I learned from my conservation degree as the world collapsed around me.

I picked up a freelance garden gig here, and did an online fellowship there. I lacked agency, community, and the ability to propel my life forward. All I wanted was to do my part in mitigating the climate crisis, however I could, to honor my younger self and the future generations of the world.

Even though I graduated from the best public university in the country with good grades, research skills, and a plethora of community volunteering work, I was unable to find a job that supported myself and also supported efforts to help the environment. It wasn't until December of 2020 in which I received an email from Arlynn Livingston, an old family friend, that opened a door of hope for my life, my future, and my outlook on the world:



*Cailyn, Laurie, and Arlynn at Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail.*

*"I am so grateful for this beautiful earth, the source of our very being. We are elemental, made up of the same stardust as mother earth and the cosmos. I look at photos of how we humans have deforested the very lungs of our home and feel panic for the future of all living species. I am deeply concerned that we don't have a vision, unifying message or educational pathways that call young people to action to be stewards of our future. We need to pass on the skills and wisdom to help protect, preserve and restore our forests, native ecosystems and knowledge to create food security in our communities.*

*I dream of our country creating a green job youth corps that engages young people across our nation to become the stewards of tomorrow.*

*I would like to have you join me in brainstorming and developing a vision for how we might create pathways for future environmental leaders like you to shepherd us through the challenges of climate change."*

I joined forces with Arlynn soon after this email and began researching all the different tree planting organizations in the country. In just a short month after that, it manifested in us creating our non-profit organization, Aloha Tree Alliance, to address the alarming disappearance of Hawaiian forests and the lack of state funding to remedy the issue.

My internship with Arlynn enabled me to transplant myself to O'ahu, where I could be closer to the effort. Since being here, I have expanded my professional roots and have had a once-in-a-lifetime experience. At 23 years old, I was given the incredible opportunity to co-found a nonprofit, develop my creativity, professional skills and network, and most importantly, contribute to a meaningful environmental cause that gives back to the world and to myself.

As Operations Manager, I learned to wear many different hats and gained experience with grant writing, business development, marketing, communications, outreach, website development, social media and volunteer coordination.

I gained valuable experience collaborating on grassroots projects with NGOs, government agencies, and private businesses. Each mentor I've had at Aloha Tree Alliance has taught me foundational, developmental and professional skills that are integral to becoming my own agent of change in the world.

### **What I Have Learned**

Working with Arlynn, I learned the power of prose and words. She taught me how to focus and control a thought, vision or idea, and shave it down until it is simple, yet powerful. This control of prose strengthened my grant writing skills, leadership skills, and increased my confidence and ability to steer the direction of important meetings. She often provides me resources to keep me up to date on the latest news, books and scientific research in our work. She is an amazing teacher and influences me deeply with her kindness, generous spirit, and utterly fierce yet loving tenacity to change the world for the better. She teaches me to breathe strength and softness in the same breath, guide with grace, and lead with love.

Laurie Chang, our executive director, is an excellent communicator. Through working with



her, I learned how to pay close attention to detail, prepare meetings, deliver materials for review and outline actionable next steps. Her expertise in networking has shown me how to concisely and clearly communicate with other professionals in the field.

As a previous editor for the Punahou Bulletin and former teacher of English and journalism at 'Iolani School, Laurie is a highly skilled editor, and provides valuable experience for young adults interested in working closely with an editor to deliver final materials. She taught me to execute items for review efficiently from emails to grants, and guided me in her expertise of communication, planning, and preparing. Her abundance of kindness, energy, and drive to make a difference in her community while being in her retirement years inspires me everyday to strive for excellence and professionalism with a positive and caring attitude.

Will Weaver, our Restoration Specialist, opened up a whole new world of Hawaiian flora and fauna. From his fountain of knowledge I learned about the sacred connection of mauka to makai, and the ancient Hawaiian land use system of ahupua'a. Together we conducted species biosurveys, ordered restoration plants from the state nursery, and carefully and thoughtfully chose key kīpuka sites for restoration. His professional research experience working at the Ko'olau Mountain Watershed Partnership demonstrated for me what future careers are like for conservationists. His methodical steps in preparing the land for restoration, both scientifically and spiritually, gave me the confidence and tools to conduct a restoration project on my own. Will is an invaluable mentor for anyone pursuing a career in conservation.

Lastly, our website developer, Roarke Clinton, taught me the importance of well designed and thought out technology to both market and effectively operate our small business. Working closely with him every week, I learned how to edit

and design a website, set up productivity and management tools, applications, and streamline our workflow and inter-team communication to be more efficient. His expertise as a web designer for 1% For the Planet and as a design director/manager for startups reaching over 200 million people have provided me with valuable tools and insights into marketing strategies for top emerging environmental organizations.

My mentors have gone exceedingly out of their way to make sure that I am established, taken care of, and feel at home in a new place. Their, generosity and devotion to helping me succeed professionally and personally is an extremely rare thing to find in a professional setting. As a young person trying to find my way in the world, I feel incredibly fortunate to have found this group of compassionate, kind and caring people who have helped to cultivate my interests, talents, skills, and abilities to an entirely new level. My outlook on the world just a short year ago has drastically changed from one of hopelessness, fear, despair, and anxiety to one of hopefulness, love, tenacity, and courage.

Our dream is to nurture an island community in which current and future generations can benefit from strong climate leadership, healthy connections with nature, food security, and green jobs that provide young people with opportunities to restore the natural world while creating sustainable livelihoods for themselves. It all starts by planting a seed.



*Cailyn planting mai'a.*

# KULI'OU'OU RIDGE TRAIL RESTORATION

Since restoration began in October 2021, ATA has:

Installed

## 3 RESTORATION SITES

Kīpuka in Hawaiian means opening. ATA designed and maintained key kīpuka sites along the trail that are ripe for restoration.

Engaged

## 84 VOLUNTEERS

Keiki, kūpuna and young adults joined efforts to remove invasive grasses and trees. They laid weed mats and prepared the soil for out-plantings of native trees and ground cover.

Planted

## 36 NATIVE TREES

The Division of Forestry and Wildlife's state nursery provides trees to ATA. Every plant is thoroughly inspected for pests before it is put in the ground.



@alohatreealliance

*Stay rooted! Follow our journey on social media.*




# Mahalo Volunteers!



## About the Project

Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail is a popular hike on O'ahu, Hawai'i used by thousands of residents and visitors each year. The trail has been severely degraded as a result of invasive weeds, overuse, and misuse from hikers creating shortcuts and causing erosion that harms the forest, the watershed as well as the Maunalua Bay marine ecosystem.

Aloha Tree Alliance began the Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail restoration project in October 2021. The project will extend through the end of 2022.



*If you plan for a year, plant kalo.  
If you plan for ten years, plant koa.  
If you plan for one hundred years,  
teach the children.*

*Hawaiian Proverb*

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