BEYOND THE CANOPY:
ADAPTING FOR TOMORROW

ALOHA TREE ALLIANCE

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2025 REPORT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

As ATA's new Interim Executive Director, I step into this role with deep respect for our shared mission and the leaders who have shaped ATA's path. My connection to ATA is long-standing. I've served as a team leader, a board member, and above all, a committed advocate for the essential restorative work that we do. It's an honor to help guide ATA into its next chapter.

At ATA, we are focused on adapting for tomorrow. Having planted over 7,000 trees, we are not only celebrating a milestone, we're also reflecting on where we're finding success and how we can improve to deepen our impact.

Water remains our most valuable resource in restoration work, and we're finding innovative ways to collect and distribute this increasingly limited resource along the trail.

Our new Native Hawaiian Plant Nursery in Kamilo Nui Valley allows us to collect native seeds from within our region of the Koʻolau Mountains and grow them in-house, an achievement that strengthens our self-sufficiency and long-term vision.

Our education programs now reach students of all ages, from elementary trail stewards to high school and college-level interns. We remain committed to nurturing the next generation of environmental leaders.

We are navigating a critical inflection point. With ongoing uncertainty in public funding, we are challenged to reimagine how we pursue our mission for the long term. This is not a time to pause, it's a time to build. To sustain and extend our reach, we must continue to be creative: diversifying our community engagement strategies, investing in our people, and strengthening the programs that define ATA. These are central themes throughout this report. I believe the nonprofits that emerge from this period will be those that grow more resilient and deeply connected to the communities they serve.

Our work is a shared endeavor, fueled by the dedication of volunteers, the trust of donors, the insight and support of partners, and the passion of community members like you. As we broaden our canopy of influence and deepen our roots in the community, our mission remains steadfast: **to nurture, protect, and restore the ʻāina that sustains us all.**

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

With Aloha,

Chris Chang

ROOTED IN IMPACT

2021-2025

The numbers tell a powerful story—one of persistence, partnership, and a growing forest.

They offer a clear look at what it takes to restore a watershed: vision, steady work, strong collaboration, and community trust built over time. Behind each number is a community volunteer, a donor, ATA staff, a mentor, DLNR employees delivering water, a student asking questions, and earth stewards getting their hands in the soil.

Together, these data points reflect more than progress; they mark momentum and a shared commitment by ATA staff and a community shaping the future of our ʻāina.

7,722 NATIVE TREES PLANTED

2.69 ACRES OF RESTORATION KIPUKA

50 PARTNER ALLIANCES

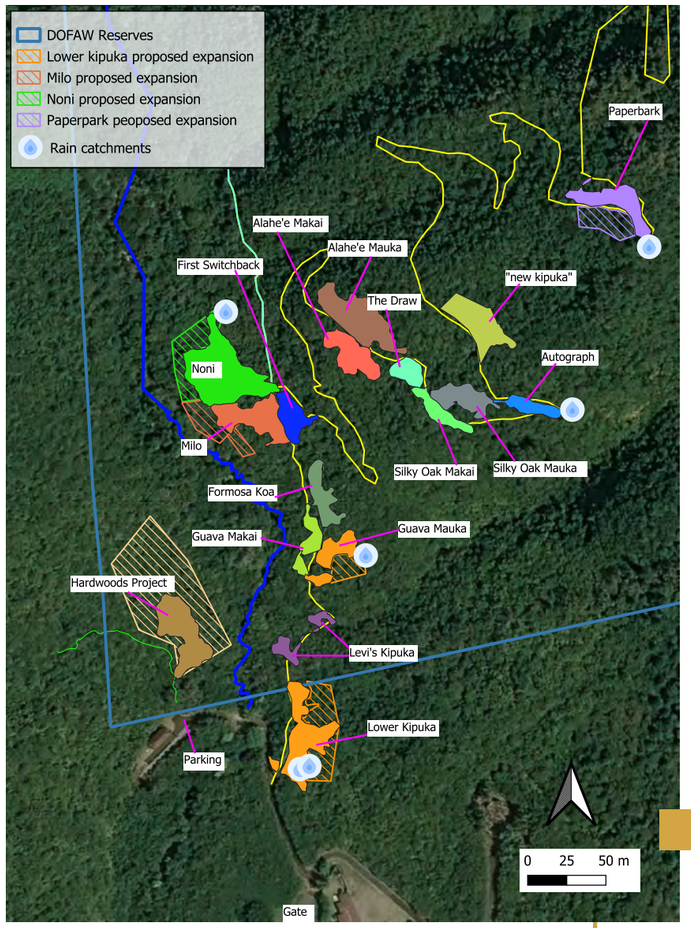
3,346 VOLUNTEERS

10,234 VOLUNTEER HOURS

1,580 STUDENTS REACHED

CELEBRATING THE FORESTS WE CALL HOME

Honoring the 2025 Year of Our Community Forests with Action and Aloha



Seventeen thriving restoration zones form a growing network of native forest recovery along the Kuli‘ou‘ou Ridge Trail.

On January 10, Governor Josh Green declared 2025 the Year of Our Community Forests, kicking off a statewide campaign to celebrate the trees that brighten our backyards, line our streets, and bring life to our parks and schools. Led by the Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources, the effort united a coalition of forest champions, including Aloha Tree Alliance (ATA).

For ATA, it was more than a celebration—it was a call to action. All year long, ATA hosted monthly restoration work days, weekly watering activities, student visits on the Kuli`ou`ou Ridge Trail, and community outreach events at fairs and libraries. Every effort planted deeper roots—both in the forest and in the community.

In the 2025–26 planting season, ATA staff and hundreds of passionate volunteers brought new life to the Kuli‘ou‘ou watershed, planting nearly **3,000 native trees and shrubs** and raising our total to more than **7,700 since 2021**. Crews cleared invasives, restored eroded trails to reduce sediment runoff, and expanded restoration sites stretching a mile up the ridge trail.

PLANTING WITH PURPOSE

Five Years of Learning from the Land

Volunteers John Sanders and John Cheever pass an ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua restoration site, where black tarp helps retain moisture by shielding the soil from sun and wind, an essential tactic in dry, water-scarce conditions.

Restoration isn’t about returning to the past—it’s about preparing for what lies ahead. Since 2021, Aloha Tree Alliance has worked to revive the dry mesic forest along the Kuli‘ou‘ou Ridge Trail. But as the climate shifted, so did our approach. Rainfall has decreased, droughts has lengthened, and hardy seedlings have struggled to survive. We realized we weren’t just restoring a forest—we were rebuilding it for a hotter, drier future.

Water scarcity became our greatest challenge. Traditional methods fell short, so we adapted using moisture-retaining techniques such as planting more densely, using a black tarp on selected sites and favoring drought-tolerant native species like ‘Ā‘ali‘i, Lonomea, Pili Grass, and Carex.

> **We’re not just planting trees anymore. We’re planting with the ‘āina as our guide.**
>
> **Eli Livezey,**
> ATA Field & Nursery Manager

Science sharpened our strategy. Soil sampling revealed wide variations along the trail, each site unique in pH, absorption, and nutrients. Today, we map microhabitats and match species to their conditions, boosting survival and biodiversity.

After five years, one lesson stands out: adaptation is essential. With every planting, we listen to the land, honor its patterns, and grow a forest built for the future—with resilience, with purpose, and with aloha.

FROM SEED TO SANCTUARY:

ATA's Native Nursery Opens!

What began as a hopeful vision has blossomed into a beacon of restoration: in June 2025, Aloha Tree Alliance completed its 1,440-square-foot Native Hawaiian Plant Nursery in Kamilo Nui Valley—a major milestone for ecological renewal in East Honolulu.

The nursery's true impact is already growing. This spring, ATA staff and volunteers launched a seed collection effort, harvesting over 16,000 ʻĀʻalii seeds, alongside Wiliwili, Lonomea, Maile, ʻUkiʻuki, ʻUhaloa and ʻIlima. Each batch holds the promise of renewal for Hawaii's threatened dry mesic forests.

Starting this summer, the nursery will support seasonal outplantings, and by late 2026, it will produce 1,000–1,500 native plants annually. These plants will restore the Kuliʻouʻou Ridge Trail and surrounding areas, and be shared with schools and the community through giveaways and education programs. More than just a building, the nursery is a symbol of regenerative stewardship.

> **The collection, germination, and out-planting of these locally collected seeds is now the backbone of our restoration efforts. Every seed we plant is an investment in East Honolulu's ecological and cultural legacy – a chance to replenish and heal our ʻāina, and inspire those who will next care for it.**
>
> **Eli Livezey,** ATA Field & Nursery Manager

By using locally sourced seeds, adapted to the unique conditions of the Kuliʻouʻou region, ATA is cultivating climate resilience from the ground up.

ATA extends deep gratitude to David Arai of Mizu Enterprises for generously subleasing the land to develop the nursery, the Kaulunani Urban & Community Forestry Program and The Garden Club of Honolulu, whose vital support made this dream a reality. With the nursery now operating, ATA celebrates this sanctuary where every seed carries the promise of restoration, regeneration and hope.

Native tree seedlings grow at the Carbon Neutrality Challenge project's greenhouse where each tree begins its transformation from seedling to forest.

PLANTING HOPE, STORING CARBON

A Collaborative Path to Carbon Neutrality in the Kuliʻouʻou Watershed

In the face of a warming planet, one of the simplest and most powerful climate solutions is still growing all around us: trees.

Every native tree planted is not only an act of restoration but a quiet force for climate action, drawing carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the air and storing it deep within its branches, trunks, and roots. Strip away the water, and nearly half a tree's weight is carbon—a testament to its role in fighting climate change through carbon sequestration. Trees also support the rain cycle; without them, our Islands' aquifers run dry.

Since 2021, ATA and its dedicated volunteers have planted more than 7,722 native trees and shrubs in the Kuliʻouʻou watershed that will, over time, contribute to carbon storage and the long-term health of forest and coastal ecosystems.

Amplifying this impact, the Carbon Neutrality Challenge (CNC) donated over 800 native plants and trees to ATA during their 2024-2025 planting season. Rooted in the understanding that forests are among Earth's most powerful carbon sinks, CNC focuses on growing trees that will not just survive, but thrive.

With more than a decade of experience, CNC has pioneered strategies that improve each plant's resilience, viability and survival in the world.

> **Without resilience and survivability, our trees cannot become forests, and forests cannot become the carbon sinks we need them to be. CNC understands that a forest starts in a greenhouse, so they prepare each plant to withstand the challenges it will face after planting.**
>
> **Olivia Taub,** ATA Field and Nursery Technician

By producing trees with unbound roots, sturdy trunks, and trained drought-tolerance, CNC's plants have strengthened ATA's reforestation efforts and helped expand climate-smart landscapes across the region, demonstrating how local action can support global change.

A healthy forest is never idle. It filters air, replenishes aquifers, cools communities, and shelters native species. In Hawaiʻi, where native ecosystems are rare and deeply vulnerable, restoring dryland and mesic forests is vital to ecological, cultural, and climate resilience. ATA and the CNC are helping Hawaiʻi's forests do what they do best: store carbon, protect biodiversity, and grow hope for a more resilient future.

Congratulations to ATA's first ʻĀina Allies cohort! These dedicated interns proudly earned their certificates after six months of hands-on restoration, leadership training, and deepening their connection to the ʻāina. Their commitment is a bright sign for Hawaiʻi's environmental future! *From left to right: Harley Didriksen (ATA), Jayven Okuda, Kailee Chan, Josie Camacho, Irene Chen, Sophia Chan, Sophia Park, Eros Say Yutig, Eloise Harrison-Jones.*

The Science Behind the Sprinkle: *Do Hydrogels Really Help?*

One Intern's Research Provides Clarity

If you've joined an Aloha Tree Alliance workday, you might have seen volunteers sprinkling Water-Storing Crystals (WSCs), or hydrogels, to the soil. But do they work?

Josie Camacho, a rising senior at Mililani High and member of ATA's first ʻĀina Allies cohort, turned that question into a field experiment for her AP Capstone project—and became ATA's first research intern. She tested Kou seedlings in two kīpuka: half with WSCs, half without. After four months of monitoring growth, health, and moisture, her results showed that WSCs improved both survival and growth, especially in flat, exposed areas.

Reflecting on her experience, Josie said, "It's been such an amazing experience to collaborate with the Aloha Tree Alliance to complete my AP Research project. I've met so many amazing people, and I'm glad to see that my research on hydrogels has contributed to how the ATA cares for their native plants here in Kuli'ou'ou."

WHERE STEWARDSHIP STARTS...

Education is at the core of Aloha Tree Alliance's mission—cultivating Hawaiʻi's next generation of ʻāina stewards.

In 2025, ATA launched its first ʻĀina Allies Internship Program, giving youth hands-on restoration skills and deep cultural knowledge grounded in mālama ʻāina. Beyond the nursery and trails, ATA staff reached thousands of students across Central to East Honolulu through dynamic classroom presentations and immersive trail visits. These experiences spark lasting connections to Hawaiʻi's native forests and watersheds, empowering a community that understands how vital trees are to life, culture, and our island's future.

Eagle Scout Leo Tokumi (back right) founded Roosevelt High School's Green Horizons club, inspiring classmates to venture beyond the classroom and experience the power of mālama ʻāina on the Kuliʻouʻou Ridge Trail.

"Josie's data is already shaping how we use hydrogels. It's helping us grow stronger forests."

Eli Livezey, ATA Field & Nursery Manager

Kapālama Elementary School students celebrate the Year of Our Community Forests by harvesting and planting native Aʻaliʻi seeds, doing their part in hands-on restoration while leaving a lasting imprint on the land they call home.

Megan Levin, ATA's partner with Ocean Music Action, and her son Osian plant a native tree on the Kuliʻouʻou Ridge Trail to help the forest safeguard our island's fresh water.

Foliage damage from Chinese Rose Beetles spotted on a native `Ilima plant on the Kuliʻouʻou Ridge Trail. These nighttime feeders can weaken or kill young native plants critical to forest restoration.

ECHOES IN THE FOREST:

COQUI FROGS, ROSE BEETLES, AND THE RACE TO PROTECT KULIʻOUʻOU

Across Hawaiʻi, native and cultural landscapes are under siege as climate change and increasingly dry conditions take their toll on the ʻāina.

Compounding these threats, invasive species are rapidly spreading through forests, farms, coastlines, and even backyards—disrupting ecosystems, degrading watersheds, and endangering plants and animals found nowhere else on Earth.

The Kuliʻouʻou Ridge Trail has joined the growing list of affected areas. Coqui frogs (Eleutherodactylis coqui), a fast-breeding, non-native species that can reach noise levels of 90 decibels, have been discovered near the summit. With no natural predators in Hawai`i, they can rapidly overrun ecosystems, reducing insect diversity and displacing native species.

The Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) team has moved quickly to prevent further spread. But Coqui are just one part of a broader pattern. Little Fire Ants and Coconut Rhinoceros Beetles have already impacted communities across Oʻahu and could soon reach this valley, threatening native plants and culturally significant species.

Aloha Tree Alliance staff also has observed fresh Chinese Rose Beetle damage on newly planted ʻŌhiʻa and other native species. These beetles spend most of their life cycle underground, emerging at night to feed, often leaving young plants skeletonized and vulnerable.

Hawaiʻi's community forests are at risk. Yet, there is hope. Volunteers remain a powerful force in early detection and response–reporting sightings, removing invasives, and helping ecosystems recover.

With continued vigilance and collaboration, we can protect Kuliʻouʻou's forest and ensure its resilience for generations to come.

> **Mitigating the impact of pests is tough, but with physical barriers and low-impact treatments, we're helping native species survive the odds.**
>
> **Eli Livezey,**
> ATA Field & Nursery Manager

THE POWER OF ALLIANCE

At Aloha Tree Alliance, the word alliance is more than just part of our name—it's the foundation of our work.

Every step toward restoring native forests and protecting Hawaiʻi's watersheds is made possible by the collective strength of our partners, donors and volunteers.

This past year, we worked hand-in-hand with a remarkable coalition—from federal agencies like NOAA to state partners such as the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Forestry and Wildlife, Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program, and the City and County of Honolulu. We've joined forces with nonprofits such as Malama Maunalua, Koʻolau Mountains Watershed Partnership, Maunalua Fishpond Heritage Center, Protect & Preserve Hawaiʻi, The Coconut Traveler and The Garden Club of Honolulu. Allies also include organizations such as Xylem Watermark Inc, ULOHA, Oboz Footwear, numerous school groups and individuals who have made our work more impactful and resilient.

Mahalo for standing with us!

In the drought-stricken Kuliʻouʻou watershed, every drop of water matters. This spring, Coffman Engineers helped ATA install a 275-gallon catchment tank a mile up the ridge, boosting our ability to hydrate young native plants. ATA is also deeply grateful to the Hawaii State Department of Forestry and Wildlife, whose monthly water deliveries keep our lower tanks filled. Together, these acts of alliance help sustain life in a thirsty forest.

THE FOREST NEEDS YOU

ATA's mighty crew of staff and volunteers stand tall under our banner, proving the power of alliance is the heartbeat of forest restoration.

VOLUNTEER TODAY.

More info at: *alohatreealliance.org*

VOLUNTEER WITH US!

Join our volunteer ʻohana to restore and protect one of Hawaiʻi's most precious watersheds. Whether you're clearing, planting, watering, or weeding—your hands can help heal the land.

Step up. Dig in. Make a difference. Sign up at alohatreealliance.org.

Mahalo!