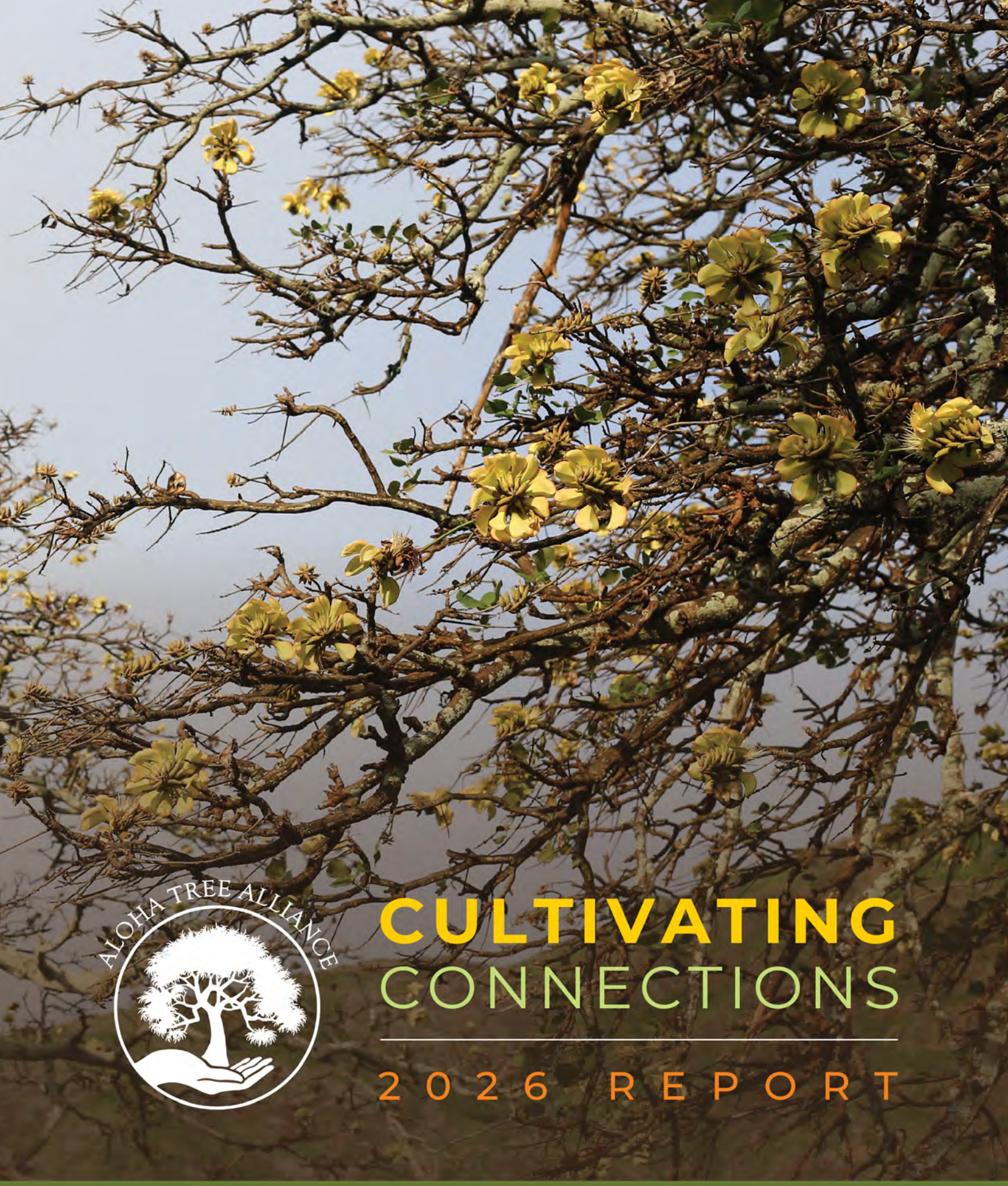


CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS

2026 REPORT

CONNECTING...



Seeds to Forests



Kīpuka to Corridors



Culture to Conservation



People to purpose



Partners across O'ahu

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Six Years of Cultivating Connections

Aloha Friends and Supporters,

Guided by the philosophy **"Think Globally, Act Locally,"** we launched Aloha Tree Alliance in 2020 with a bold vision: to help restore Hawai'i's native forests while contributing to global efforts to address climate change and biodiversity loss. We focused our initial restoration efforts on the Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail. From the start, we saw restoration as an opportunity to inspire young people, connect them to the 'āina, build community, and cultivate the next generation of environmental stewards.

We also knew from the beginning that this vision could never be achieved alone. Lasting conservation depends on partnerships, shared purpose, and people willing to invest their time, talents, and resources in something larger than themselves. Over the past six years, we've learned that these relationships are what make restoration possible. Every seed, every forest, every volunteer, and every partnership is part of a larger network of connections that strengthens both people and place.

This year's theme, **Cultivating Connections,** reflects that understanding. It begins by **connecting seeds to forests** through our Native Hawaiian Plant Nursery, where each seed collected holds the promise of a future forest (p.3). It continues by **connecting kīpuka to corridors,** as once-isolated restoration sites along the trail grow into healthier, interconnected landscapes (p. 5). We are **connecting culture to conservation** through the Hawaiian Hardwoods Community Forest (pg. 7), **connecting people to purpose** through education and stewardship (p. 9), and **connecting partners across O'ahu** to expand restoration beyond a single trail (p. 11). At ATA, these connections are strengthening the natural and human relationships that make our restoration work possible.

Today, with more than 10,000 native trees and shrubs planted, ATA's vision is becoming a reality. The impact can be seen along the Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail and is felt in the thousands of volunteers, students, partners, and supporters who have become a part of this journey.

As you explore this report, you'll discover the many ways these connections are taking root—from forests and watersheds to culture, science, education, and community. Together, they demonstrate what is possible when people unite to mālama the places we love.



With Aloha,

Chris Chang

CULTIVATING IMPACT

Everything we do is CONNECTED.

From native seed collection and propagation to watershed restoration, volunteer stewardship, youth education, and community partnerships, each effort strengthens Hawai'i's forests and communities.

Together, these connections create lasting impact.



10,300+ trees planted

We planted native and culturally important trees restoring forests and strengthening watersheds.

15,000 volunteer hours

Mahalo to our community for contributing their time, energy, and stewardship.

500 students engaged

Future environmental leaders connected to mālama 'āina.



3.3 acres restored

Native habitat improved for watershed health and biodiversity.

20 native species propagated

Growing resilience through native and Polynesian-introduced plants.

25 community partnerships

Organizations working together to create island-wide impact.

FROM SEEDS TO FOREST

Powering Restoration



The opening of Aloha Tree Alliance's Native Hawaiian Plant Nursery in June 2025 marked a turning point in the organization's restoration efforts.

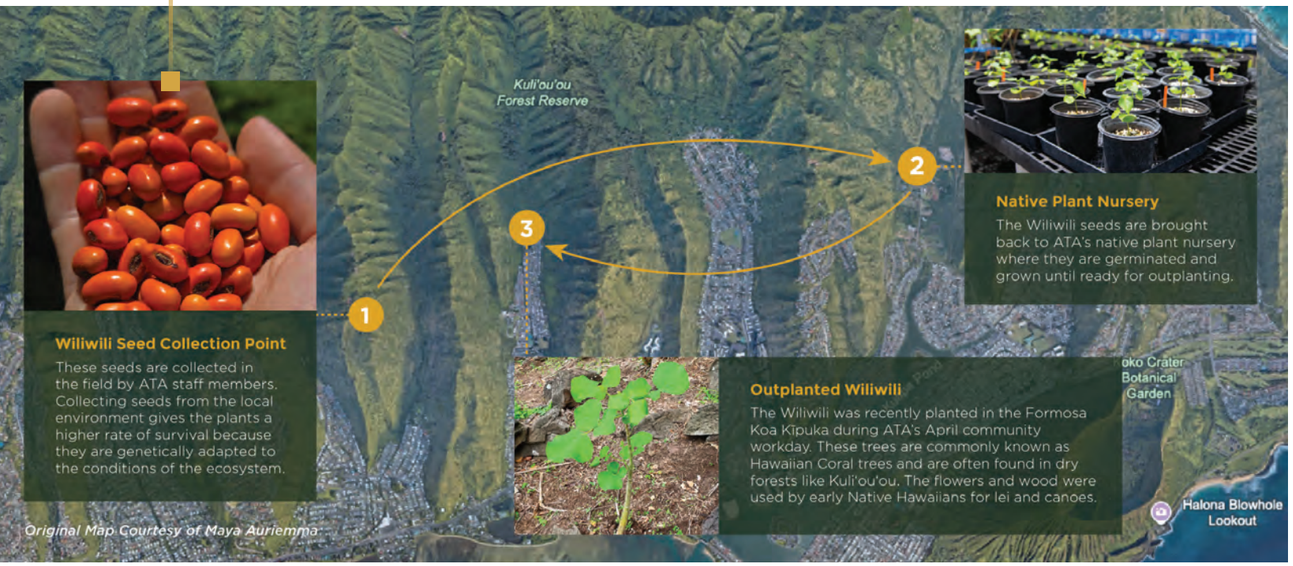
> Seed collection is the foundation of our work. It sets the rhythm for our season and lays the groundwork for quality restoration.
>
> Coming back from a successful collection day, it's wild to think that each seed is alive and there is a whole grove of trees in my pack. That's where restoration really begins.
>
> **Eli Livezey**
> *ATA Conservation Planner*

For the first time, ATA can sustainably grow thousands of locally sourced native plants each year, dramatically expanding its capacity to restore native forests, beginning with the Kuli'ou'ou watershed.

Long before a native tree takes root on the Kuli'ou'ou Ridge Trail, ATA staff and volunteers venture into the forests of southeastern Ko'olaus to carefully collect seeds from native species. Each seed preserves the unique genetic diversity of local plant populations and holds the promise of a future forest. Those seeds are brought to the nursery, where they are carefully propagated and nurtured into healthy young plants before returning to the Kuli'ou'ou watershed and other restoration sites across O'ahu.

In just over one year, staff and volunteers propagated nearly 5,000 native plants of which have been outplanted in the Kuli'ou'ou watershed and at Kīpuka Partner Program sites across Oahu (see story on page 10).

This full-circle process—from seed collection and propagation to outplanting and, ultimately, the next generation of seeds—is laying the foundation for healthier forests, stronger watersheds and a lasting legacy of stewardship. Mahalo nui loa to Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program, The Garden Club of Honolulu and other committed partners for making this work possible.



ROOTING RIGHT WITH MORA SHEETPOTS

The quality of a seedling determines the longevity of the tree.

Without healthy plants, restoration efforts fall short. It all starts below the surface. Like us, plants have vital organs, and healthy roots are essential for survival in the field. Enter the **Mora SheetPot**, an innovative growing technology designed to promote healthy root development.

Below the surface, root binding, root rot, and J-rooting are three major threats to tree seedlings' healthy root development in the nursery. The Mora SheetPot addresses each challenge through air-pruning, superior drainage, and greater depth, producing stronger root systems and more resilient trees.

Air-Pruning: Eliminating Root Binding

First, and perhaps most notably, the Mora SheetPot features an open bottom and drainage holes running along sides. In a process known as air-pruning, roots stop growing when they reach air, preventing root binding and stimulating new growth to create a robust rootball. Because the roots are exposed to air at multiple points, root binding—where roots coil at the bottom of a plant pot and decreases the plant's ability to absorb water and nutrients—is no longer a concern. Gone are the days of time-sensitive, labor-intensive up-potting to avoid those dreaded coiled roots!

Drainage: Combatting Root Rot

Choosing the right soil media and avoiding overwatering are two of the best ways to prevent root rot. But what if there was a third? While the first two remain essential, the Mora SheetPot's built-in drainage virtually eliminates root rot. Water drains more freely, while improved soil oxygenation supports healthy roots and the living organisms in the soil, including the plant itself which relies on oxygen to absorb the vital nutrients it needs to thrive.



Depth: Preventing J-Rooting

The taproot is a tree's lifeline and the structural support system. Proper taproot development can directly determine a tree's survival in the field. Curved or kinked taproots, a phenomenon commonly known as J-rooting, can limit nutrient uptake and lead to serious instability as the tree grows. When a pot is too shallow, the taproot reaches the bottom and begins growing laterally, creating a bent, unstable root. To prevent this, ATA grows taproot species—like Wiliwili and Lonomea—in 14-inch Mora SheetPots, giving their roots the depth they need to grow straight and develop into strong, stable tree saplings that can thrive for generations to come.

Investing the time, resources and energy to grow plants means giving them the best possible chance at surviving out-planting. At ATA, the Mora SheetPot helps do just that.



STRONGER TOGETHER

Connecting Kipuka to Corridors

Six years ago, Kuliʻouʻou Ridge Trail was a degraded, struggling landscape, dominated by invasive species and scarred by erosion from hikers shortcutting the switchbacks.

Rather than attempting to restore huge landscapes at once, ATA uses a kīpuka restoration strategy, establishing smaller and strategically chosen planting areas where invasive species were removed and native plants could take root.

Today, as these once-separate restoration sites mature, native plants are filling the spaces between them, merging individual kīpuka into one another to create sprawling ecological corridors across the landscape. These corridors grow into forests, rebuilding one of Hawai'i's most valuable forms of living infrastructure. Healthy watershed forests absorb rainfall, stabilize slopes, recharge groundwater, expand habitats for native wildlife, and reduce sediments flowing into the ocean.

The emergence of these connected corridors marks a significant milestone in ATA's restoration journey. The growing continuity of native habitat demonstrates the power of sustained stewardship to transform a fragmented landscape to an increasingly functioning and resilient forest system in the Kuliʻouʻou watershed.

Photo Credit: Howard Wolff Photography
www.howardwolffphotography.com

DATA THAT GUIDES RESTORATION

Effective restoration begins with paying close attention to the forest—observing how plants respond, how conditions change, and what the landscape is telling us over time. This Hawaiian practice of kilo, or careful observation, is deeply rooted in cultural practice. Combined with contemporary science and systematic data collection, kilo gives ATA a more complete picture of what is happening across its nursery and restoration sites.

This year, ATA significantly strengthened its approach to data collection, tracking seed provenance, plant growth and production, inventories, soil health, plant survival, and species performance. Collecting this information consistently allows the team to identify patterns, evaluate results, and adapt planting and restoration practices based on evidence.

> Reliable data helps us understand the environment and how our plants are performing, so we can make better decisions about what, when, where and how we plant.
>
> Over time, that knowledge helps us improve our restoration practices and provide better data visualization to illustrate our impact.
>
> **Chris Chang**
> *ATA Executive Director*



CONNECTING CULTURE & CONSERVATION

The call of the pū echoed through upper Kuliʻouʻou Valley as Anake Keolani Noa and Kamehameha Schools student Phoenix Carter opened a blessing for ATA's Hawaiian Hardwoods Community Forest on February 28, 2026.

More than the dedication of a new restoration site, the ceremony marked a bold reimagining of restoration through a biocultural approach that honors both ecological health and cultural practice, while strengthening connections between people, place, and generations.

Developed in partnership with the Hawaiʻi Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW), the Hawaiian Hardwoods Community Forest is one of just four of its kind in the state. DOFAW Oʻahu Botanist Susan Ching and Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program Artist-in-Residence Nalu Andrade envisioned the project. The forest will grow culturally significant hardwoods such as koa and lama, alongside native species including nāʻū, ʻilima, pili grass, and ʻaʻaliʻi. Together, they will support biodiversity and watershed health, restore native habitat, and provide, over time, sustainable access to valued hardwoods for Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners, wood carvers, artisans, and educators.

The need is urgent. Demand for these culturally significant hardwoods far exceeds Hawaiʻi's available supply. By planting these trees today, ATA and its partners are helping ensure that future generations will have access not only to the wood, but also to the cultural practices and traditions it supports.

> The connection between people, forests, and culture has deep roots. In traditional Hawaiian culture, healthy forests provided food, building materials, fibers, medicine, and fresh water while people understood their responsibility to care for these resources in return.
>
> Through language, stories, food, crafts, and art, knowledge of stewardship was passed down across generations. While some of this knowledge has been eroded, others traditions are being remembered and adapted. We hope this project will engage traditional carvers and cultural practitioners in caring for and sustainably using these trees, reviving the connection between people, forests and ʻāina.
>
> **Shimona Quazi**
> *DOFAW Community Forester*



Heather McMillen, DOFAW Urban and Community Forester with the Kaulunani Program, plants one of the first native Uhiuhi in the new Hawaiian Hardwoods Community Forest in Kuliʻouʻou Valley.

The Hardwoods Community Forest will also serve as a living classroom, giving students and community members opportunities to experience conservation firsthand and learn from the cultural traditions rooted in ʻāina. As the trees mature, they will become a lasting resource for learning, cultural practice, and community stewardship, connecting generations to the forest and its many gifts.

ATA is grateful to the Donald and Astrid Monson Education Fund for their generous support of this important work.



CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PURPOSE



Lasting conservation begins with people.

Aloha Tree Alliance's work is powered by hundreds of volunteers, students, interns, and community partners who share their time, talents, and passion to care for the ʻāina.

Through classroom visits and hands-on service, ATA creates opportunities for people of all ages to connect with the land, build skills, and discover their role in caring for Hawaiʻi's forests. From keiki discovering native plants to college students exploring conservation careers and volunteers restoring the ʻāina alongside one another, these experiences cultivate not only healthier forests, but a deeper sense of connection, responsibility, and purpose.

From Allies to Earth Stewards

This past spring, 12 students from six Oʻahu high schools revitalized the Kuliʻouʻou watershed through ATA's ʻĀina Allies program. These young leaders planted native trees, removed invasive species, analyzed soil samples, and investigated the conditions necessary for native forests to thrive.

In partnership with **Makaliʻi Metrics,** the students turned their attention beneath the forest floor, collecting soil samples from five restoration sites along the Kuliʻouʻou Ridge Trail. They analyzed nutrient availability, salinity, organic matter, and soil structure to understand how conditions differ among sites—and which native species may be best suited to each.

The results revealed striking differences. The Hawaiian Hardwoods Community Forest recorded the highest salinity, while the Noni site contained nearly twice the available potassium measured elsewhere. These findings demonstrate why restoration cannot follow a one-size-fits-all approach. By pairing field observations with data, the students helped ATA better understand each site and make more informed decisions about planting and long-term restoration.

The semester culminated at ATA's Native Hawaiian Plant Nursery, where the ʻĀina Allies presented their findings and recommendations to ATA staff. Their months of fieldwork and analysis had produced something tangible: new information that ATA can put to work in restoring the Kuliʻouʻou watershed.



ʻĀina Allies interns worked with Makaliʻi Metrics staff to investigate soils across five restoration sites along the Kuliʻouʻou Ridge Trail. By analyzing nutrient availability, salinity, organic matter and soil structure, they gathered data that help ATA make smarter, site-specific restoration decisions.



University of Hawaiʻi students Samantha Yonan and Maya Auriemma combined GIS mapping, ecological research, and watershed data to support ATA's restoration

New Ways of Knowing the ʻĀina

What happens when learning moves beyond the classroom and into the field?

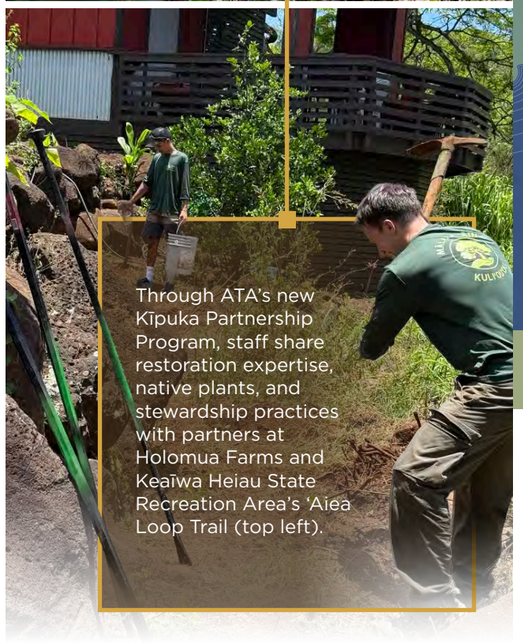
For University of Hawaiʻi students Samantha Yonan and Maya Auriemma, it meant putting their academic interests to work in conservation while bringing fresh perspectives and expertise to Aloha Tree Alliance.

This year, Sam and Maya joined ATA through a shared course in the Natural Resources and Environmental Management program. Their projects brought together historical research, citizen science, traditional ecological knowledge, watershed data, and GIS mapping to deepen ATA's understanding of place and transform complex information into compelling visual stories (see map on page 3).

As ATA expands partnerships with colleges and universities, it is creating more opportunities for mentorship, applied learning, and real-world experience, helping prepare Hawaii's next generation of conservation professionals.







CONNECTING PARTNERS ACROSS O‘AHU

New Kīpuka Partnerships Expand Restoration Across O‘ahu

Restoration goes farther when knowledge, resources, and experience are shared.

This spring, Aloha Tree Alliance launched its new Kīpuka Partnership Program, extending the restoration expertise developed in Kuli‘ou‘ou to help community organizations strengthen native forests in other parts of O‘ahu.

Inspired by the Hawaiian concept of kīpuka—a pocket of native forest within a larger landscape—the program recognizes that even small areas of healthy native forest can become starting points for broader ecological renewal. Supported by the Cooke Foundation, the 18-month initiative is ATA’s first strategic effort to serve as a restoration advisor to community partners, sharing expertise, native plants, and stewardship practices while building their capacity for long-term restoration.

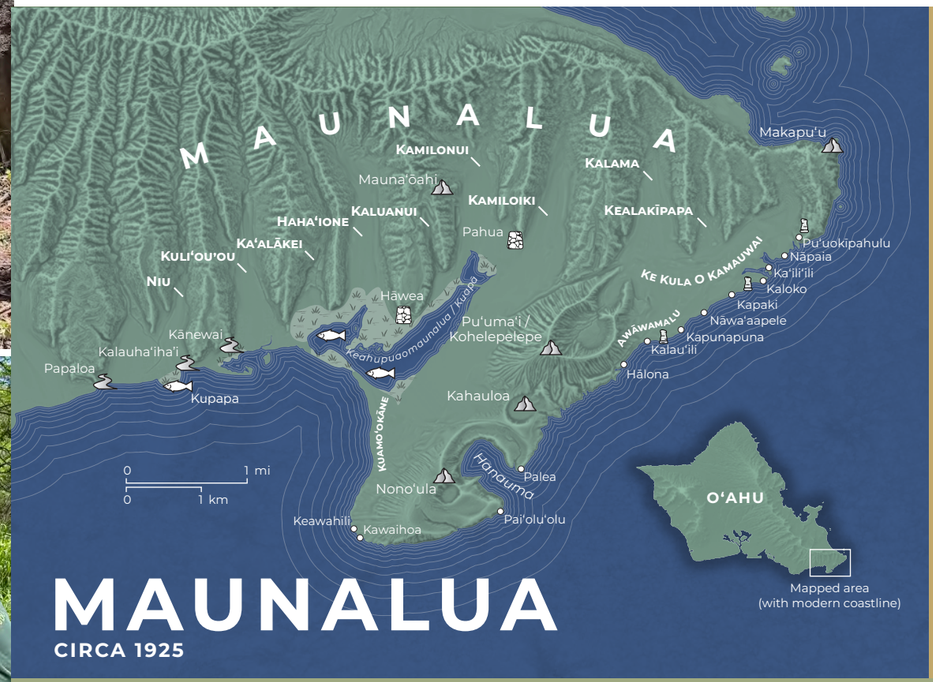
ATA is currently working with Holomua Farms on the North Shore, Keaīwa Heiau State Recreation Area, and the Hawaiian Hardwoods Community Forest in Kuli‘ou‘ou Valley, with another partnership in development. Rather than taking on these projects itself, ATA equips partners with the knowledge, native plants, and practical tools to lead restoration in their own communities.

Through ATA’s new Kīpuka Partnership Program, staff share restoration expertise, native plants, and stewardship practices with partners at Holomua Farms and Keaīwa Heiau State Recreation Area’s ‘Aiea Loop Trail (top left).

> “Holomua is honored to partner with Aloha Tree Alliance on the Kīpuka Partnership Project. For us, this partnership is about more than planting native plants; it is about restoring pilina—relationships between people, ‘āina, and community. Together, we mālama ‘āina, strengthen those connections, and create spaces where culture, community and future generations can holomua [move forward].”
>
> **Ann Yoshida,** Owner, Holomua Farms

EVERY PLACE HAS A STORY

To mālama ‘āina is not just to care for the land—it is to know it, to learn about it through action.



Map of Exonyms of Hawai‘i Kai and Historic Landscape (c.1925 CE). Cartography by Geoffrey Wallace (Landscape Archive Cartography). Modified from original with permission from N. Ha‘alilio Solomon. Map data from the USGS and the Honolulu Land Information System.

When we want to know someone, we ask their name.

As we continue to cultivate aloha ‘āina, we are reminded to extend that same courtesy to place. Hawaiian place names carry stories, history, and ecological knowledge, inviting us to see the landscape through the eyes of those who knew it first.

An endonym is a place’s native or local name, while an exonym is a name given or used by outsiders. With evidence of inhabitants dating back nearly 1,000 years, Kuli‘ou‘ou—the valley at the heart of our work—has retained its endonym into modern times. According to hula master Keoki Kalama, Kuli‘ou‘ou means “sounding knee” and is in reference to the small pūniu (knee drum) which is often played with the large pahu drum made from the niu trunk. Thus, the names of the two lands that are side by side are Kuli’ou’ou and Niu. (*Keoki Kalama, recorded 10/29/26 by Theodore Kelsey. Courtesy of Maunalua Fishpond Heritage Center.*)

Moving east toward our nursery in Kamilonui, however, tells a different story.

Over time, as Hawai‘i’s landscape, languages, and communities changed, many traditional place names faded from everyday use. Across Maunalua, exonyms such as “Hawai‘i Kai,” “Koko Crater,” and “Mariner’s Ridge” have largely replaced the traditional names Maunalua, Kohelepelepe, and Kamilonui. Makai of ATA’s nursery in Kamilonui Valley lies Loko i‘a o Maunalua (Keahupua o Maunalua, or Kūapā as shown on map), once O‘ahu’s largest and most abundant fishpond. Today, both its name and essence have changed; the thriving fishpond has become the dredged and urbanized harbor known as “Koko Marina.”

As places change in both form and name, what stories are lost—and what can we rediscover? What narratives and values are upheld in a name?

Let a name be a door into history, where you may find some predecessors, or simply a deeper connection to a place you love.

ALOHA TREE ALLIANCE RECOGNIZED FOR PROTECTING HAWAIʻI'S NATURAL HERITAGE

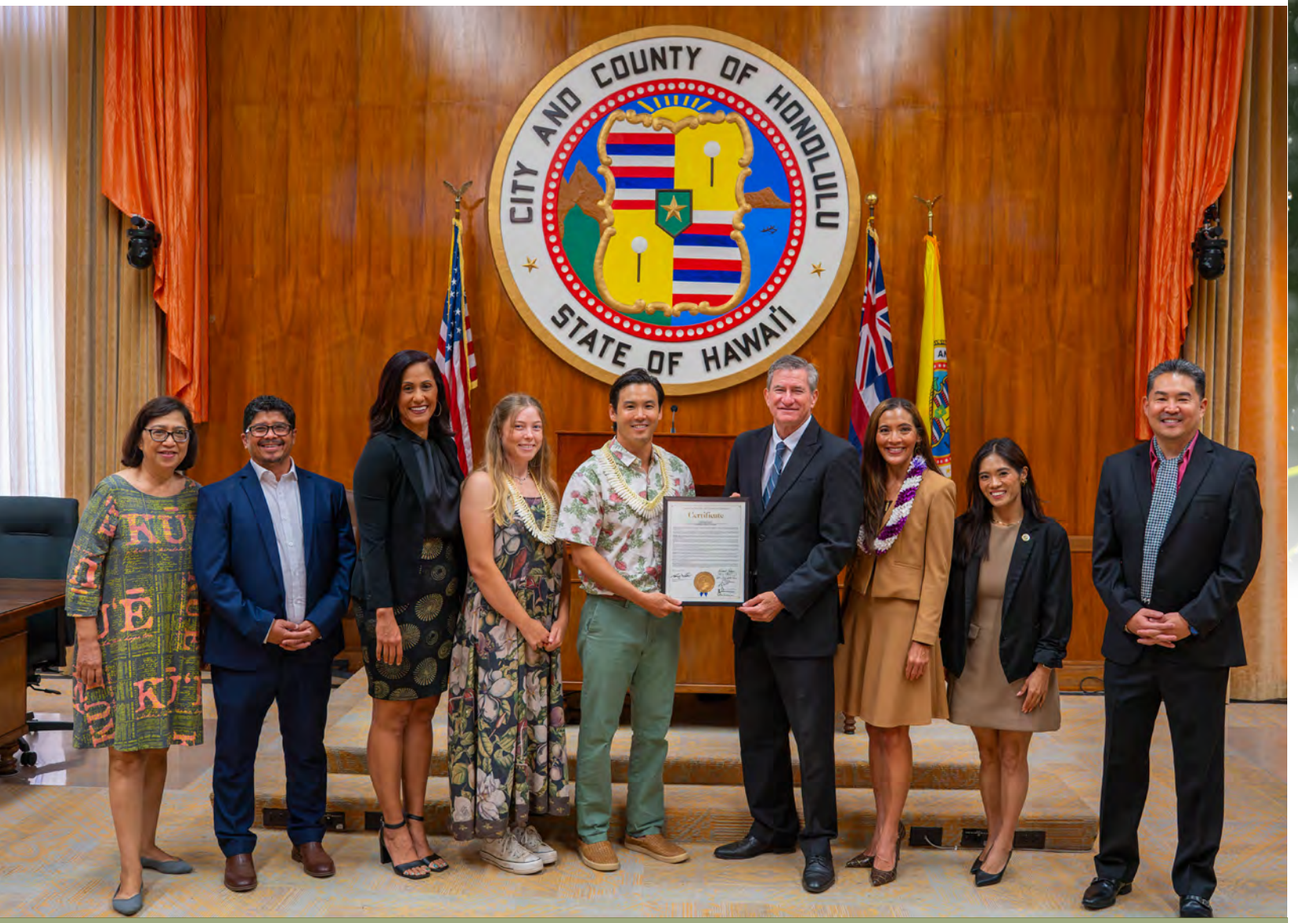


Photo Credit: Office of Council Chair Tommy Waters

In summer 2026, the Honolulu City Council and Council Chair Tommy Waters recognized Aloha Tree Alliance for its vital work in protecting Hawaiʻi's native watersheds and ecosystems, and inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards. Executive Director Chris Chang and Nursery Manager Olivia Taub accepted the recognition.

TOGETHER WE GROW

Aloha Tree Alliance's work is strengthened by the generosity and vision of our funding partners.

Mahalo nui loa to the foundations, grantors, businesses, and individual donors whose investments are helping restore the Kuliʻouʻou watershed, inspire the next generation of environmental stewards, and build a healthier future for Hawaiʻi. We are deeply grateful for your trust, partnership, and belief in our mission.

Photo Credit: Rylan Cooney
IG: @rylancamera

COOKE FOUNDATION, LIMITED

KAULUNANI urban & community FORESTRY PROGRAM.

mālama maunalua

Donald and Astrid Monson Education Fund

THE COCONUT Traveler

CARBON NEUTRALITY CHALLENGE One million trees

NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION NFWF

OCEAN MUSIC ACTION

ARLYNNA AND MICHAEL LIVINGSTON AND FAMILY

THE GARDEN CLUB OF HONOLULU



25
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



15,000
VOLUNTEER HOURS



500 STUDENTS ENGAGED



20 NATIVE SPECIES PROPOGATED



10,300+
TREES PLANTED

ONE SEED. MANY HANDS. A THRIVING FUTURE.

CONNECTING TODAY'S WORK TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

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. The forests we plant today are only part of the story. Equally important are the connections we are creating—connections that will continue to grow, adapt, and thrive for generations to come.

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