



In the center of historic Lahaina town, a banyan tree planted 150 years ago has been showing new growth in the wake of the August wildfires that destroyed most of the town around it. The growth has been a source of inspiration for many people who lost loved ones, homes, and livelihoods.

House Working Groups Exploring Wildfire Prevention, Shelter Needs Following Devastating Maui Wildfires

On August 8, multiple wildfires whipped by high winds burned on Hawai'i Island and Maui. The most devastating of the fires were on Maui: 100 people lost their lives in Lahaina. Thousands of homes, businesses, and other structures were destroyed.

“The loss in Upcountry Maui and in Lahaina is heartbreaking, and my thoughts are with all those who lost loved ones, beloved family homes, and cherished community spaces,” said Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa, whose brother Aaron is a Maui fire fighter who was part of the response that day. “We will be hearing stories about the bravery, care, and aloha shown that day for years to come.”

The outpouring of support from Hawai'i Island to Maui came from all corners – donations of money and supplies, volunteers, and professional deployments including citizen soldiers and airmen in the Hawai'i National Guard, first responders, emergency managers, and public information

officers. Retired fire chief and former Hawai'i County Civil Defense administrator Darryl Oliveira took on the leadership role at the Maui Emergency Management Agency after the previous administrator stepped down.

On September 6, the House formed six working groups to evaluate specific topics related to the Maui wildfires and make recommendations for appropriate legislative action in the 2024 Regular Session. The intent of the recommendations is to lay the groundwork for policy action that can help Maui's recovery and better prepare Hawai'i for future wildfires. Rep. Kahaloa is serving on the groups on Wildfire Prevention and Shelter.

Wildfire Prevention

Co-Chairs Reps. Linda Ichiyama & Darius Kila
Purpose: To identify the causes of wildfires and preventative action that may be taken to reduce the risk of wildfires throughout the state.

(continued)



During a Lahaina site visit, Rep. Kahaloa met with Darryl Oliveira, former head of Hawai'i County Civil Defense who took a temporary assignment leading the Maui Emergency Management Agency in the wake of the fires.

HOUSE WORKING GROUPS *(cont'd)*

Shelter

Chair: Rep. Luke Evslin

Purpose: To evaluate the availability and creation of temporary and transitional shelters for displaced individuals and families.

"I'm grateful to be working on Wildfire Prevention as the representative of a leeward community that is extra dry and has experienced wildfires in the past," said Rep. Kahaloa. "I am also grateful to be working on Shelter because we know how close so many working families are to the financial edge, and that natural disasters can impact families in that situation even more significantly. The availability of affordable, attainable housing is a priority."

The other working groups are evaluating Schools, Jobs and Business, Environmental Remediation, and Food, Water, and Other Supplies.



The House Finance Committee visited with the Hawai'i 'Ulu Co-op at their facility in Honolulu to learn about their role in Hawai'i's food security.

Finance Committee Visits Hawai'i Island With Focus On Emergency Preparedness, Health, Food Systems

Members of the House Finance Committee, led by Chair Kyle Yamashita, House Vice Speaker and Puna Rep. Greggor Ilagan, and Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa, toured various sites on Hawai'i Island October 18-20, meeting with stakeholders to learn about community needs and identify key priorities for the upcoming legislative session.

Hawai'i County Civil Defense

In the wake of the devastating August wildfires, emergency preparedness is top of mind for many in Hawai'i. The committee visited Hawai'i County's Emergency Operations Center in Hilo and received a comprehensive briefing from Mayor Mitch Roth, Civil Defense Administrator Talmadge Magno, and other county officials regarding their coordination and response to multiple wildfires burning on Hawai'i Island at the same time as Maui was fighting fires in Lahaina and elsewhere on the island.



Members of the House Finance Committee met with Mayor Mitch Roth and Hawai'i County Civil Defense during their visit to Hawai'i Island. This meeting took place in the County's Emergency Operations Center, the center of Hawai'i County's disaster response coordination.

Kona Community Hospital

As a full-service acute care facility with 94 beds and 24-hour emergency services, Kona Community Hospital has been dedicated to serving West Hawai'i for over a century.

In the FY23-24 budget, the Legislature appropriated \$21.7 million to support the hospital's needs. Of this, \$16.25 million was earmarked for infrastructure upgrades, construction, and equipment. \$2.5 million was allocated for replacement of the oncology facility, and the remaining \$2.98 million was designated for the hospital's pharmacy expansion plan. Members of the Finance Committee met with hospital officials to receive an in-depth progress report on ongoing projects and gain a deeper understanding of the community's needs.

Hawai'i 'Ulu Co-Op

The Hawai'i 'Ulu Co-op is a farmer-owned business working to revitalize 'ulu (breadfruit) and other Hawai'i-grown staple crops. Formed in 2016 with nine small growers on Hawai'i Island, the co-op has grown to over 140 member-farms across the islands. By working together, the co-op's farmers can offer consistent, high-quality products that are delicious, versatile, local, healthy, accessible, and sustainable.

The committee met with co-op leadership at their Honalo facility to learn about the model, discuss their future plans, and their needs to upgrade their facilities to continue growing and improving Hawai'i's food security.

The visit also showcased a working example of a food manufacturing facility like those that would be part of a statewide food and product innovation network proposed in Rep. Kahaloa's House Bill 1426.

The committee also visited the Kalaoa volunteer fire station, one of eight volunteer companies that complement the operations of the Hawai'i Fire Department; and Pohoiki Bay, the only ocean access for boaters in Puna that which was cut off in the 2018 Kīlauea eruption.

Rep. Kahaloa also joined the Finance Committee for site visits on Maui October 25-27, including to the fire-impacted areas of Lahaina and Upcountry Maui, the future site of the temporary school to replace Kamehameha III Elementary School which was destroyed in the fire, and a cultural center under construction by renowned musician and kumu hula Keali'i Reichel's Hālau Ke'alaokamaile in Pi'iholo.



In June, Reps. Kirstin Kahaloa and Jeanné Kapela, along with Sen. Dru Mamo Kanuha, visited Kealakekua Bay to see the work of Ho‘āla Kealakekua Nui and their active partnerships with the State Parks division of the Department of Land & Natural Resources and other partners.

Ho‘āla Kealakekua, Hawai‘i Tourism Authority Partner to Manage Tourism Impacts at Kealakekua Bay

The Hawai‘i Tourism Authority (HTA), in partnership with the Island of Hawai‘i Visitors Bureau, has engaged Ho‘āla Kealakekua Nui (HKN) to support visitor education efforts and mitigate tourism impacts at Kealakekua Bay.

Kealakekua Bay has become especially popular with visitors in recent years, resulting in congestion, natural and cultural resource degradation, and safety hazards. HTA is funding this community-driven approach to destination management as guided by its 2020-2025 Strategic Plan and Hawai‘i Island Destination Management Action Plan.

HKN is an indigenous-led non-profit organization that has been actively building capacity to co-manage Kealakekua Bay State Historical Park and the surrounding community. Through this project, HKN aims to educate visitors, residents and commercial tour operators about the Kealakekua Bay Community Action Plan Code of Conduct developed by the community on how to respectfully interact within Kealakekua Bay;

provide equipment to community volunteers actively restoring coastal habitat during Hana Lima workdays; and train citizen scientists to monitor the health of the area using a recently developed app called Kilokilo, customized for Kealakekua Bay.

HTA is the state agency responsible for representing The Hawaiian Islands around the world, and for holistically managing tourism in Hawai‘i in a sustainable manner consistent with community desires, economic goals, cultural values, preservation of natural resources, and visitor industry needs.

Through September 2023, visitors spent \$2.2 billion on Hawai‘i Island, supporting our local businesses, farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs, and residents who work in the visitor industry.

To learn more about how destination management and stewardship is advancing on the island of Hawai‘i, visit holomua.hawaii-tourism-authority.org/hawaii-island/.



Direct Japan Flights Return To Kona On Hawaiian Air

The Ellison Onizuka Kona International Airport is international once more with the return of direct service between Kona and Haneda International Airport in Tokyo on Hawaiian Airlines. Weekly flights started in November, and service will increase to three times a week in March 2024.

When Rep. Kahaloa led the Kona-Kohala Chamber of Commerce, she advocated for the return of international air service to Kona and the construction of the permanent Federal Inspection Station.

Hawaiian first launched its Haneda-Kona service in 2016 and suspended flights in March 2020 due to the pandemic. The inspection facility was completed during the pandemic, and these flights will be among the first to use the facility.

Rep. Kahaloa was part of a Hawai'i Island delegation, including Mayor Mitch Roth, Sen. Dru Mamo Kanuha, and others, that traveled to Japan on the new flight in to meet with government and visitor industry officials, and to visit with Hawai'i Island's sister cities.



Kona Resident Elected Vice Chair of HTA Board

In July, the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) Board of Directors selected airline industry veteran Blaine Miyasato (right) as chair. Serving alongside him is educator, social entrepreneur, and Kona resident Mahina Paishon (left). HTA's board is a policy-making entity comprised of 12 members who guide the agency's work on behalf of the people of Hawai'i.

Vice Chair Paishon co-founded Waiwai Collective in 2016, a social enterprise that blends culture, community and commerce to achieve well-being and abundance outcomes for Hawai'i and beyond. Previously, she served as Kanu o ka 'Āina's head of school for the secondary level and Hālau Kū Māna. Co-author of the 'Āina Aloha Economic Futures declaration, Paishon has worked with various cultural and community organizations throughout Hawai'i. She has earned a number of degrees from local universities to cultivate her unique skill set to serve Hawai'i through ancestral knowledge and lifeways. Paishon joined the HTA board in July 2022.



Kahakai Elementary School Inducts 2023-2024 Student Council

On October 16, the Student Council of Kahakai Elementary School was inducted in a ceremony in front of their parents and school leaders. Rep. Kahaloa – who once served as President of her own elementary school student government and continued her involvement in high school and college – was invited to share some words of inspiration with the student leaders.



Ironman World Championship Brings Out Community Spirit

As thousands of the world's most elite triathletes competed on the sport's most hallowed course, thousands of kama'āina came out to volunteer. Rep. Kahaloa joined her fellow members of the Kona Lions Club and members of the Konawaena High School Leo Club at an aid station in the Hawai'i Ocean Science & Technology Park, cheering on the athletes.

Queen Lili'uokalani Canoe Races Celebrate 50 Years

In September, Kona hosted the largest outrigger canoe paddling race in the world - the 50th anniversary Queen Lili'uokalani Canoe Races with over 3,000 paddlers from around the world paddling the length of District 6: from Kailua to Hōnaunau.

198 canoes in the water is an impressive sight! Mahalo to all of the community that came together to host the races, especially Kai 'Ōpua Canoe Club and the King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Resort.

The state provided funding to the races through the Hawai'i Tourism Authority's Community Enrichment Program.



Lili'uokalani's Royal Standard Returns To Her Home

In July, Queen Lili'uokalani's royal standard – her personal flag that flew above her home at Washington Place – was returned after over 100 years following its removal after the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom in 1893. The emotional homecoming followed a long journey from a military officer's private collection back to the Hawai'i State Archives. Lili'uokalani's genealogy traces back to Kona through her mother Keohokālole, and her legacy Lili'uokalani Trust is a major steward of land in Kona.



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Aloha Kona!

Our last newsletter highlighted the work that we did on behalf of Kona during the Legislative session. While all eyes turned to Maui and assisting in their recovery following the devastating wildfires in August, we also continued to work for the good of our West Hawai'i community.

Please enjoy the stories in this edition of Working For Kona, and as always, feel free to let me know how I can be of service to you and your 'ohana. Aloha!



Representative Kirstin Kahaloa

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