



January 28, 2021

Public Access, Open Space & Natural Resources Preservation Fund Commission  
c/o County of Kauai Planning Department  
4444 Rice Street, Suite A473  
Lihue, Hawai'i 96766  
Attn: Kaaina Hull, Ellen Ching

Re: Acquisition and Protection of Alakoko Fishpond on Kauai by Mālama Hulē'ia and the Trust for Public Land

Dear commissioners,

Mālama Hulē'ia and The Trust for Public Land would appreciate the opportunity to present to the Commission at your next meeting on the status of a potential conservation acquisition of the historic Alakoko Fishpond at Niupalu.

The Public Access, Open Space & Natural Resources Preservation Fund Commission has had Alakoko Fishpond on its recommended list of priority projects for acquisition to Kaua'i County Council and Mayor since 2015. Prior to that, since at least 2007, the Commission has Alakoko Fishpond on its list of "secondary recommendations for future action should opportunities for success improve." We appreciate the Commission's prioritization of Alakoko Fishpond for acquisition and protection all these years. We are coming to you again to request your continued support.

The Trust for Public Land is a non-profit land conservation organization. TPL's mission is to protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. For over 42 years TPL has worked to protect over 56,000 acres and 43 special places throughout Hawai'i. TPL's Aloha 'Āina Program protects lands that are culturally and historically important to Native Hawaiian communities and returns these lands to Native Hawaiian organizations for community and cultural stewardship. TPL's Sustainable Hawai'i Program conserves lands that support local food production, our forests and their native species, and clean water sources with the goal of improving Hawai'i's self-sufficiency and food security.

Mālama Hulē'ia (MH) is a 501c3 community based nonprofit organization here on Kaua'i. Our mission is to advocate, educate, and lead community efforts to remove red mangrove along the Hulē'ia river, reestablish native wetland ecosystems and create an environmental stewardship program honoring Hawaiian values. MH was initiated by a group of canoe paddlers from Kaiola Canoe Club and eventually evolved into a stand-alone community non-profit. MH's work started with a successful 3.5-acre mangrove removal demonstration project at Niumalu Beach Park (2012-2016), as many of you know through your participation and support.

Our next project area was the historic fishpond, alternately known as Alakoko, Alekoko and Menehune Fishpond. The fishpond is approximately 600-years old and an important cultural and historic site, listed on both the national and state register of historic sites. Mangrove had been overtaking the fishpond for the last 60 years, causing it to close in, fill with sediment and suffer damage to the 2,700-foot *kuapā* (fishpond wall).

We secured a 20-year lease agreement with the current Alakoko fishpond owner, Okada Trucking Company, and a \$1-million dollar grant from US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to remove 26-acres of mangrove and restore 14-acres of important wetlands under their Coastal Wetlands Restoration program. The work began in October, 2018, and last year, in 2020, we completed the removal of all the adult mangrove on the fishpond. Tens of thousands of seeds continue to sprout, so our work continues (and will long into the future), but we are already seeing the recovery of the site with such features as the regular presence of numerous species of Hawaiian native birds, several which are listed as endangered.

We have had considerable success in the two years we have been on site. Much of that success is due to strong community support and dedicated volunteers. More than 3,000 Kaua'i residents, many of them of students and youth, have participated in the restoration. Each step toward revitalization of the watershed and supporting ecosystem is a step toward a productive and sustainable fishpond and food source for Kaua'i.

While doing on-the-ground restoration work we have also been building a community education and stewardship program. During the pandemic we have been able to focus on virtual standards-based education in partnership with Kamehameha School's curriculum team. This curriculum will continue to be used when students can once again be at the fishpond as an outdoor classroom.

The situation changed suddenly in the new year. The landowners listed the property for sale at \$3-million. This created a significant threat to our progress. Our lease could be canceled after a sale to an outside party. But we see this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to purchase the fishpond, ensuring its preservation in perpetuity, providing a site for cultural and environmental education, enhancing Hawaiian cultural practices, providing food for our community, and creating additional habitat for Hawaiian bird and aquatic species.

The landowners have expressed a willingness to sell the property to TPL and MH for conservation, if an acceptable price and terms can be reached. For the first time since this Commission has recommended Alakoko Fishpond as a priority project, we have a willing seller, but we need to move quickly to raise the public funding before the property is sold on the open market.

Mālama Hulē'ia is working in partnership with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to purchase and protect this property. TPL has real estate conservation expertise and a successful track record in partnering with local communities to protect and conserve land in Hawai'i and throughout the nation.

Given the Public Access, Open Space & Natural Resources Preservation Fund Commission's past prioritization of the Alakoko Fishpond acquisition, Mālama Hulē'ia and Trust for Public Land are humbly requesting the Commission's continued recommendation to use Open Space Funds to purchase and protect this special place.

Attached is further narrative about the importance of Alakoko Fishpond and Mālama Hulē'ia as the stewardship organization to own, manage, and restore it in partnership with the Kaua'i community. Within the narrative there is an outline of our 5-year Strategic Plan which will be updated to include more fishpond specific goals and strategies if we are successful in this conservation acquisition. Please also view our website at [malamahuleia.org](http://malamahuleia.org) for more information.

We are available to appear (on video or in person) to brief the Commission and answer questions. Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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Sara Bowen, Executive Director  
Mālama Hulē'ia

*Jan TenBruggencate*

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Jan TenBruggencate, President  
Mālama Hulē'ia

and



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Reyna Ramolete Hayashi  
Aloha 'Āina Project Manager  
The Trust for Public Land