



For Immediate Release

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Watershed improvements completed to increase coral reef resilience *Conservation activities expected to reduce erosion and sedimentation to nearshore marine environment in West Hawai‘i*

WAIMEA, Hawai‘i Island, Hawai‘i (February 9, 2023)—A five-year effort to protect and improve the nearshore marine environment and improve coral ecosystem health in the Kawaihae 1 (Honokoa) Watershed was recently completed by The Kohala Center (TKC), an independent nonprofit organization based in Waimea on Hawai‘i Island.

Through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service and with assistance from the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) and community members, The Center completed the following activities to help mitigate erosion and sedimentation on Kawaihae 1’s coral reef:

- Fencing: 14.9 total miles of fence were installed, repaired, or retrofitted within five ecological restoration units, preventing ingress of feral ungulates.
- Removal of feral goats: Over 1,000 feral goats were removed from Kawaihae 1 through trapping by DHHL lessees and TKC.
- Community education and outreach: 1,331 volunteers and staff were engaged through community presentations, volunteer workdays, and field trips to learn about goat trapping, wildfire management, and native plant species and revegetation.
- Riparian corridor restoration: 76.27 total acres of riparian corridors along Kilohana and Keawewai streams were protected, with 25.05 acres being revegetated with native dryland and mesic forest plants.

Kawaihae 1, or Honokoa, is one of South Kohala’s major watersheds. NOAA selected West Hawai‘i Island, where Kawaihae 1 is located, as a NOAA Habitat Focus Area because of its extensive reef systems, tangible threats, ongoing conservation efforts, and strong community involvement. NOAA seeks to reduce the impacts of climate change, erosion, and sedimentation, and non-naturally occurring nutrients on critical habitats for coral, fish, and endangered species such as Hawaiian monk seals, green sea turtles, and humpback whales.

The completed activities are expected to mitigate the impact of feral ungulates, increase total ground cover over eroding areas, and restore native vegetation in strategically important areas within the watershed, thereby reducing sediment deposits into the ocean, improving coral ecosystem health, and enhancing the habitat of Hawaiian monk seals within NOAA’s West Hawai‘i Habitat Blueprint Focus Area. The project also emphasized community involvement and stewardship to ensure ongoing care of the Kawaihae 1 Watershed.

Watershed improvements completed to increase coral resilience, page 2

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“One of the greatest impacts of this project that deeply moves me comes from the relationships formed ma uka to ma kai with our community members, including our environmental kin. Our native flora and fauna are showing signs of regeneration and our community has renewed knowledge, skills, and hope to continue to face the challenges of our changing climate,” said Cheryl Ka‘uhane Lupenui, TKC’s president and CEO. “As The Kohala Center continues to return ancestral knowledge and research into daily practice, we hope to continue to feed those who also want to engage in Kohala-based stewardship practices to see healthier forest and marine ecosystems.”

“NOAA is proud of our continued partnership with The Kohala Center, which has allowed us to support coral reefs through community-focused efforts,” said Carrie Selberg Robinson, director of the NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation.

The five-year project complements ongoing efforts to mitigate soil erosion, protect native forest, and revegetate degraded landscapes in the region, thereby maintaining and increasing long-term ecosystem health across South Kohala.

About The Kohala Center

Founded in the year 2000, The Kohala Center (kohalacenter.org) is an independent, community-based center focused on research, education, and ‘āina stewardship for healthier ecosystems. We return ancestral knowledge and research into daily practice across fields of conservation, education, agriculture, and leadership. We envision a state of pono indicated by regenerating forests, food, and coastal ecosystems of Hawai‘i.

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Watershed improvements completed to increase coral resilience, page 3

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Available for download at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GMbhGefCE-t7P3QDiT3ZAtWh-dFHtk9E?usp=sharing>

[KohalaCenter_Kawaihae_1_Honokoa_kilo.jpg] Community members practice kilo (environmental observation) of Honokoa Gulch, observing the effects of feral goats on the landscape. Goats and other feral ungulates contribute to erosion and sedimentation through overgrazing and trampling on native ground covers. *Photo credit: The Kohala Center*

[KohalaCenter_Kawaihae_1_Honokoa_koaie.jpg] A young koai‘e (*Acacia koaia*) grows along the streambed of Kilohana Stream. Native tree and shrub species were outplanted in riparian zones in order stabilize the streambanks and increase native groundcover. *Photo credit: The Kohala Center*

[KohalaCenter_Kawaihae_1_Honokoa_volunteers.jpg] Community volunteers prepare an ‘a‘ali‘i (*Dodonaea viscosa*), one of Kohala’s pioneer plant species, for out-planting. Community outreach, education, and stewardship were key activities of the project to ensure ongoing care of the Kawaihae 1 watershed. *Photo credit: The Kohala Center*

[KohalaCenter_Kawaihae_1_Honokoa_fencing_install.jpg] Woody Nelson, a Kohala stewardship technician with The Kohala Center, installs fencing in Honokoa. Ungulate-proof fencing prevents feral goats and other ungulates from entering critical zones within the watershed. *Photo credit: The Kohala Center*

[KohalaCenter_Kawaihae_1_Honokoa_fenced_unit.jpg] A fenced unit enclosing the start of Honokoa Gulch. Over 14 miles of fence were installed within the Kawaihae 1 watershed to mitigate erosion and sedimentation to the watershed’s nearshore marine environment. *Photo credit: The Kohala Center*