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## HAWAII NEWS

# Kohala ahupuaa to become living scientific laboratory

By [Timothy Hurley](#) • Today • Updated 10:57 pm

The 'Iole Stewardship Center has been operating quietly for years on 2,400 acres of Kohala with the goal of restoring the land using the ancient wisdom of the Native Hawaiians.

Soon the effort will reach a whole new level as the Hawaii Community Foundation teams up with the University of Hawaii and Arizona State University to create a living scientific laboratory.

The nonprofits that run the 'Iole Stewardship Center, the Kohala Institute and New Moon Foundation, recently announced they are giving the Hawaii island land and its assets to the Hawaii Community Foundation in an effort to bring new capacity to the project.

"They wanted 'Iole to reach its full potential," said Alapaki Nahale-a, a former Hawaii island Kamehameha Schools official who has been tabbed as interim CEO of the effort. "We'll be able to bring more resources, more capacity and more muscle and horsepower to the table."

The foundation will create a new nonprofit called 'Iole, described as a place-based research center that will bring together academic experts, Native Hawaiian practitioners, community members, students and government leaders to develop sustainability solutions rooted in ancestral knowledge and Indigenous practices.

The vision for 'Iole, according to the foundation, is based on the Native Hawaiian sense of shared responsibility to care for, learn from and thrive off of self-sustaining sections of land known as ahupuaa, which run from mountain to sea.

The nonprofit will restore and cultivate the 'Iole ahupuaa while developing "solutions-based models" that can be scaled and replicated in other parts of the world.

The community foundation, UH and ASU have committed to jointly raising \$6.75 million for the operations of 'Iole for the first three years of the project. The intent is to allow 'Iole to focus on starting up programming and creating an impact without being burdened by financial constraint.

Nahale-a said his initial priorities will be to develop the mission, vision and values of the nonprofit, as well as to engage in program development and establish a dialogue with the community.

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Nahale-a said climate change and the pandemic have only reinforced the increasing importance of resilience and adaptation in these areas.

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Micah Kane, CEO and president of the Hawaii Community Foundation, said his nonprofit was presented with the possibility of taking over the 'Iole Stewardship Center and lands about a year ago. It was an intriguing prospect, he said, but then they were able to get UH and ASU on board.

“When that came together, it warranted a deeper dive,” Kane said. UH and ASU, he said, are both strong research institutions with outstanding expertise in sustainability.

But members of the host culture will continue to be strong collaborators in the project. “People around the world are trying to understand the strength of Indigenous people,” he said.

“With our work at 'Iole, Hawaii has the opportunity to continue to lead the fight against climate change and affect social issues impacting communities here and across the globe,” Kane said.

In a statement, UH President David Lassner said, “We are excited at this opportunity to collaboratively envision a 21st century ahupua'a. 'Iole can be a place grounded in Hawaiian values and knowledge where we are jointly committed to the innovation and courage necessary to integrate traditional and modern ways of learning, doing and living.”

The 'Iole physical assets being passed along to the new nonprofit include a set of historic buildings. There are 10 bungalows and a 40-bed dormitory, a dining hall and other facilities ideal for hosting researchers, practitioners and groups.

Nahale-a said the new nonprofit will continue to host groups and community events.


The Hawaii Community Foundation says it has already engaged additional local organizations, including Kamehameha Schools and Hawaiian Electric Industries, which are directly interested and affected by 'Iole's focus areas.

“I'm really excited about it,” Nahale-a said of his new mission. “'Iole is about helping people reconnect with the environment.”

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