



**HAWAI'I COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 21, 2024

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact: Sheila Sarhangi
Hawai'i Community Foundation
media@hcf-hawaii.org

**HAWAI'I COMMUNITY FOUNDATION AWARDS GRANT TO
RESTORE AND STEWARD KULA LANDS BURNED BY WILDFIRE**

The \$481,800 grant from the Maui Strong Fund will support work by the Kula Community Watershed Alliance on 25 acres of priority land in Kula affected by the August 2023 fires.

KULA, MAUI — Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF) has awarded a grant from the Maui Strong Fund to the Kula Community Watershed Alliance (KCWA) to support restoration and stewardship work on Kula lands affected by the August 2023 fires. KCWA is a land restoration initiative led by residents of affected areas of Kula, which is located in the Upcountry region of Maui, with the mission of stewarding the land to be more resilient, hold more water, suffer less erosion, and fend off future fires more effectively.

Established in the wake of wildfires that burned more than 200 acres in Kula, KCWA has convened neighbors, local leaders, and subject matter experts to develop a unified plan to support the land's recovery from the fires, including stabilizing and regenerating the disturbed soil, restoring and protecting native plants and animals, and stewarding the long-term vitality of the land. This \$481,800 grant will support work focusing on 25 acres of priority lands in Kula, including soil stabilization, fencing and reforestation, a greenhouse for growing native seeds, and staffing for project management and implementation.

These priority lands, located along a steep gulch, were previously densely forested with a fire-prone invasive tree known as Australian black wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), which dehydrated the landscape and choked out other plant species. The vision for the burned areas is to shift the hazardous, invasive vegetation to a landscape dominated by native canopy forest, through the creation of what is known as "shaded green breaks." In sub-tropical environments such as Hawai'i, these are preferred over traditional "fuel breaks," because they make it harder for invasive fire fuels to regrow.

This grant was made possible by donations to the Maui Strong Fund, which was activated in August 2023 in response to the devastating fires on Maui to support the immediate and long-term recovery needs for the people and places of Maui.

"The Kula Community Watershed Alliance is deeply grateful to the Maui Strong Fund for its support of our Kula Fire Restoration Project," said Sara Tekula, KCWA executive director. "This funding enables us to embark on essential, priority soil stabilization and restoration work in our burned areas that wouldn't be possible otherwise, at a scale we have not been able to achieve thus far."

To date, Tekula says eight acres have been stabilized through KCWA’s work, and a community-based native seed propagation program has begun for future restoration work. Two weeks after the Kula fire, KCWA began convening neighbors weekly, and has since met with more than 150 community members. It holds Neighborhood Council meetings monthly to prioritize the Alliance’s projects and funding allocations together to ensure inclusivity and fairness. The Alliance now holds public meetings the first and third Thursday of each month, over Zoom, to share updates about the progress of the Alliance’s work, to host subject-matter experts, and to hear from neighbors and fire survivors about their needs and priorities during the response and recovery.

“While Lahaina has of course been a top focus of the fire relief efforts, it’s important to remember and address the very real needs of other areas on Maui that were affected by the August fires, including Kula and South Maui,” says Lauren Nahme, HCF’s senior vice president of Maui recovery effort. “We are proud to support the Kula Community Watershed Association’s work to ensure the long-term health and resilience of Kula’s natural environment and the safety and wellbeing of its communities.”

KCWA has partnered with Nā Koa Manu Conservation Inc. as its nonprofit fiscal sponsor. Na Koa Manu Conservation’s mission is to protect and recover Native Hawaiian bird populations by supporting conservation research and management activities of like-minded organizations, institutions, agencies, and the public, and support forest and watershed restoration efforts in Hawai’i for the benefit of Native Hawaiian birds’ habitats.

As of February 8, 2024, HCF has awarded more than \$88 million from its Maui Strong Fund to more than 150 nonprofits and partners doing critical work on Maui. HCF has a unique role in disaster preparedness and response. The organization collaborates with partners, both inside and outside philanthropy, for a coordinated effort to secure maximum community impact. HCF has demonstrated its ability to raise funds quickly—and deploy grants effectively to partners that are at the heart of emergency response and recovery efforts.

For more information on the Kula Community Watershed Alliance, please visit <https://www.kulacommunitywatershed.org>.

For nonprofit organizations seeking funding from the Maui Strong Fund, please visit this section of HCF website for detailed instructions on how to apply for a MSF grant. <https://www.hawaiicommunityfoundation.org/strengthening/maui-strong-fund/apply-for-a-grant>

For donations to the Maui Strong Fund at HCF, please visit <https://www.hawaiicommunityfoundation.org/maui-strong>.

For questions or additional information on giving, please contact Donor Services at (808) 566-5560 or donorservices@hcf-hawaii.org.

*****VISUALS*****

For images of the Kula Community Watershed Alliance and its work restoring Kula lands, please visit [this Dropbox folder](#). All photos are provided courtesy of KCWA; no photographer credit required.

###

About Hawai'i Community Foundation & Maui Strong Fund

The vision of the Hawai'i Community Foundation is to create an equitable and vibrant Hawai'i in which all our Island communities thrive. With our more-than-105-year history, our trusted expertise, and the generous support of donors, we are working to address the root causes of our state's most difficult challenges, including expanding access to affordable housing, conserving fresh water resources, and ensuring the healthy development of Hawai'i's young children. HCF works in communities across Hawai'i, with offices and staff located statewide. For more information about HCF, please visit hawaiicommunityfoundation.org and follow our social media channels on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#).

The Maui Strong Fund of the Hawai'i Community Foundation is providing financial resources to support the immediate and long-term recovery needs for the people and places affected by the Maui wildfires. HCF works in close collaboration with federal, state and county agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community members to get an understanding of the evolving priorities on the ground and deploys grants to address unmet needs. To ensure transparency, all grantees and award amounts from the Maui Strong Fund are updated regularly and can be found [here](#). The Maui Strong Fund is designed for the long haul, using a four-phase approach that includes recovery, stabilization, risk reduction, and resiliency building. Learn more about our four-phase approach [here](#).

About the Kula Community Watershed Alliance

Kula Community Watershed Alliance is a land restoration initiative led by many of the fire survivors living in the burned areas of the August 2023 wildfire that devastated Kula, Maui. With the guidance of subject matter experts, we have joined together as neighbors in unified support of our land's recovery from the fires and the establishment of a safer landscape and optimum watershed health in our area. We are committed to stabilizing and regenerating the disturbed soil, restoring and protecting site-appropriate native flora and fauna, and stewarding the long-term vitality of the lands we call home. As we recover from the wildfire, we look beyond the bounds of the burn scar to the greater community both beside us and down slope from us in hopes of restoring our entire *moku* (district) of Kula to a more resilient native landscape and healthier watershed. To learn more, visit <https://www.kulacommunitywatershed.org>.