Aloha ʻĀina Fellowship Program

The Aloha ʻĀina Fellowship Program is an important community initiative that takes emerging leaders from Molokaʻi and provides training and educational opportunities in natural and cultural resource management, land restoration, traditional food production, and other ʻāina-based skills. Fellows receive hands-on training in traditional resource management throughout Molokaʻi, and are given skills and ʻike to learn more about what it means to be poʻe aloha ʻāina today.

The fellowship meets on a weekly basis. Twice a month, fellows participate in hands-on mālama ʻāina/land restoration activities with the ʻĀina Momona staff and program coordinators. Fellows simultaneously work to restore damaged lands, while learning a variety of conservation skills. Fellows also attended bi-monthly classes taught by experts across several fields, ranging from permaculture specialists, Hawaiian cultural practitioners, political scientists, aquaculture experts, and more. Each lecture is designed to get Fellows to think critically about Molokaʻi’s future, as well as develop their skills in numerous professional areas. Fellows are given a monetary stipend for their dedication and hard work in restoring and protecting their ʻāina and natural and cultural resources. The amount of the stipend varies based on the time commitment given by each Fellow.

In 2018, ʻĀina Momona partnered with the Ceres Trust, Kamehameha Schools, Grassroots International and the BEAI Fund to pilot the first year of the fellowship program for emerging professionals from Molokaʻi with a commitment to culture based education and natural resource management.

During this first year, Fellows focused on the potential sale of Molokaʻi Ranch, an enormous private estate that takes up one third of the island, and whose sale has major implications for Molokaʻi’s future. Due to climate change-induced storms, winds, and rains, as well as decades of mismanagement from private owners, the soil on Molokaʻi Ranch has become heavily eroded, creating dangerous coastal runoff that puts Molokaʻi’s abundant fringing reef at risk. Noting these concerns, Fellows began to conduct civic engagement, employing surveys to the community to reach a consensus on how the Ranch lands should be used and restored. Fellows collected data that revealed an overwhelming agreement that the community wants the Ranch owned by a responsible, community friendly owner who will consider their sustainable vision for the future and work to protect natural and cultural resources. This data went into the updated 2018 Molokai Community Plan, which was accepted by Maui County as an official document regarding all decision making for Molokaʻi. Noting the damaged state of the Ranch lands, Fellows additionally did service projects and natural resource management to help prevent the soil erosion and overall deterioration of the island’s West end, starting a successful community service campaign at Kapukahehu Beach.

Year two of the fellowship began in 2019 and focused on land and resource restoration in the ahupuaʻa Kaʻamola, which includes Keawanui fishpond, our nonprofit’s land base. Much like Molokaʻi Ranch lands, Kaʻamola is heavily eroded after decades of mismanagement. The erosion upland has caused overwhelming runoff into Keawanui fishpond, which has had lasting and damaging effects to this important cultural resource. Since October 2019, fellows have worked with a variety of specialists to learn more about restoration and rehabilitation practices, permitting, land surveying, agricultural planning, governance, and traditional food production, all in connection to restoration efforts in Kaʻamola. Fellows have worked closely with ʻĀina
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Momona staff and partners to help manage the ahupuaʻa in a long-due restoration effort. It is our goal to use this restoration project to create a scalable model for community-driven restoration and conservation that can be transferred to the Molokaʻi Ranch lands in the future. We hope that this rehabilitation project will show the potential the Molokaʻi community has to get degraded lands restored and used sustainably.

Year three of the Aloha ʻĀina Fellowship will continue restoration efforts in Kaʻamola, with a focus on agricultural planning and traditional farming efforts. Applications will be available in October 2020, and the program will begin in January 2021. If you are interested in applying, or would like to learn more about the fellowship, please contact our program director Jane Au at janeau@hawaii.edu. Mahalo.