

Aloha ‘Āina Fellowship Program

The **Aloha ‘Āina Fellowship Program** is an important community initiative that takes emerging leaders from Moloka‘i and provides training and educational opportunities in natural and cultural resource management, land restoration, traditional food production, and other ‘āina-based skills. Fellows receive hands-on training in traditional resource management throughout Moloka‘i, and are given skills and ‘ike to learn more about what it means to be po‘e aloha ‘āina today.

The fellowship meets on a weekly basis. Twice a month, fellows participate in hands-on mālama ‘āina/land restoration activities with the ‘Āina 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 Moloka‘i’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 ‘āina and natural and cultural resources. The amount of the stipend varies based on the time commitment given by each Fellow.

In 2018, ‘Āina 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 Moloka‘i with a commitment to culture based education and natural resource management.

During this first year, Fellows focused on the potential sale of Moloka‘i Ranch, an enormous private estate that takes up one third of the island, and whose sale has major implications for Moloka‘i’s future. Due to climate change-induced storms, winds, and rains, as well as decades of mismanagement from private owners, the soil on Moloka‘i Ranch has become heavily eroded, creating dangerous coastal runoff that puts Moloka‘i’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 they would like to see the Ranch lands 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 Moloka‘i. 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 ahupua‘a Ka‘amola, which includes Keawanui fishpond, our nonprofit’s land base. Much like Moloka‘i Ranch lands, Ka‘amola 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 Ka‘amola. Fellows have worked closely with ‘Āina

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Momona staff and partners to help manage the ahupua‘a 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 Moloka‘i Ranch lands in the future. We hope that this rehabilitation project will show the potential the Moloka‘i community has to get degraded lands restored and used sustainably.

Year three of the Aloha ‘Āina Fellowship will continue restoration efforts in Ka‘amola, 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.