



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

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Three Mountain Alliance Receives *Partners in Conservation Award*

Today in Washington DC, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar presented the Partners in Conservation Award to the Three Mountain Alliance (TMA) on the island of Hawai'i.

The award is one of the highest in the Department of the Interior established to recognize conservation achievements. It enables the Secretary to acknowledge in one award the contributions of both Interior and non-Interior personnel, recognizing outstanding conservation results produced primarily because of the engagement of many partners.

TMA partners include Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, US Fish and Wildlife Service, USGS Pacific Island Ecosystems Research Center, State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources and Department of Public Safety, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Forest Service, Kamehameha Schools, and The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i. Others contributors include the Hawaiian Silversword Foundation and the University of Hawai'i Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit.

"Their achievements exemplify excellence in conservation through partnerships and cooperation with others," said Salazar. "They are an inspiration to us all, and we are grateful for their efforts. They share a deep commitment to conservation and community."

Attending today's ceremony were representatives from Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, USGS Biological Resources Division, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Nature Conservancy.

"At Hawai'i Volcanoes, we can't do it alone," said Park Superintendent Cindy Orlando. "It takes each and every one of us to join together and care for the land, a philosophy epitomized by the Three Mountain Alliance."

Partnerships are the most effective way to address threats to the landscape such as invasive weed species that occur across land ownership boundaries. Partnerships leverage joint funding from state, federal and private sources and share scarce staff and resources to accomplish joint objectives.


The National Parks Conservation Association cited TMA as a critical component in the successful management of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park.



*TMA Partnership Coordinator Tanya Rubenstein with critically endangered *cyanea stictophylla*, one of a hundred native haha propagated and outplanted in native rain forest*

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The Three Mountain Alliance watershed partnership (TMA) formed in 2008 when members of the 'Ola'a Kilauea Partnership, based on their 14 year success of partnering, expanded watershed protection and management to over one million acres across the volcanoes of Mauna Loa, Kilauea, and Hualalai; thus making it the largest cooperative land management effort in the state of Hawai'i. The partnership fights invasive species and works to protect native species across land ownership boundaries.

For more than a decade, TMA partners have pooled staff expertise and funding to conserve native ecosystems and significantly reduce the threats of invasive animals and weeds on Federal, State and private lands. The success of this collaborative initiative to address threats to multiple ecosystems, work across boundaries, leverage limited resources more effectively, and provide capacity building for landowners, prompted the expansion to over one million acres.

Major successes over the last ten years include reducing the abundance of the most threatening invasive plants and animal species over large sections of the partnership area to assist with the recovery of native Hawaiian forest and rare and endangered birds and plants.

The partnership has also worked on reforestation of former ranch land at Keauhou and has provided vocational training for Kulani inmates as well as on-the-ground educational opportunities for island students and teachers.

The formation and effectiveness of TMA is due to the long-term relationships and trust built between partnership members over the long history of working together on joint projects. This trust led KS, the largest private landowner in the state, to play a leadership role in partnership expansion by adding additional lands to the partnership linking other state, federal and private lands.

Kamehameha Schools, an institution whose central mission is to benefit native Hawaiians, is the largest private landowner currently involved in the partnership. KS lands provide an important link between native Hawaiian ecosystems on adjoining federal and state lands. KS has played a leadership role in the development and expansion of the partnership as well as being innovative and responsible stewards of their lands.

A unique aspect to the TMA is the involvement of the State's Kulani Correctional Facility and its inmates in conservation work such as fencing and native forest restoration. By participating in the partnership, inmates receive education and work training opportunities. Inmates also give back to the community through community service programs helping TMA partners protect and restore important watershed lands.

TMA members recognize the compelling need to collaborate on a wide variety of land management issues in forested watersheds across this landscape. Coordinated on-the-ground management is critical to sustain adequate quality and quantity of water and to provide important habitat for a wide diversity of native plants and animals, including endangered species. In addition, the health of these lands is strongly connected with the quality of life for people and local communities.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed in December 2007 outlines the principles that serve as the foundation of TMA:

- *The three mountains of Kilauea, Mauna Loa and Hualalai are ancient, sacred to Hawaiians, and critically important to the life, health and well being of the native ecosystems and human communities that inhabit them.*
- *TMA members have a responsibility (kuleana) to care for these mountains, including native ecosystems and human communities that share this landscape.*
- *Management is needed to maintain healthy forested watersheds on the slopes of Kilauea, Mauna Loa and Hualalai to sustain the future quality and quantity of fresh water.*

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- *Other lands (e.g. younger lava flows, grasslands, crop land and coastal lands) within the TMA area also contribute to water quality and quantity.*
- *The health of the near shore ocean resources are intimately connected to the health of the uplands in the traditional ahupua'a.*
- *Management of these lands would benefit Hawai'i's native flora and fauna.*
- *Many of the threats to the watershed, such as ungulates, fire, insects, diseases, and invasive non-native plants, occur across common land ownership boundaries.*
- *Effective management is best achieved through the coordinated actions of all major landowners in the TMA area irrespective of property lines.*

Three Mountain Alliance achievements include:

Habitat Protection:

- TMA cooperatively manages over 230,000 acres of state, federal and private lands through protective fencing and feral ungulate control. Construction and maintenance of fences to exclude feral ungulates (wild cows, sheep, goats and pigs) is a critical step in the protection and recovery of native Hawaiian species and ecosystems. This area includes some of the best quality forest remaining in Hawaii and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considers the area essential habitat for the small, remaining populations of three endangered forest bird species ('akepa, 'akiapola'au, and Hawai'i Creeper). Habitat protection provides corridors to link small, remaining populations of these bird species as well as habitat for 25 endangered plant species.
- Beginning in 2003, KS ceased cattle operations on the 30,000 acre Keauhou Ranch and changed their long-term management strategy to focus on conservation, education, cultural uses, and ecologically compatible economic uses. By 2008, all domestic cattle and feral ungulates had been removed and the area fenced to promote recovery of the remaining forest. They similarly designated 14,000 acres of rare dry forests in Kona for joint conservation projects. Included among these projects were cooperative forest restoration projects and educational programs.

Forest Restoration:

- In 2008, TMA initiated a cooperative education and forest restoration project "Healing Habitats through Community Cooperation" for over 50 acres in adjacent Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park and KS Keauhou lands. This project, partially funded by the National Park Service conducted educational field seminars and service projects to over 250 local students, teachers and community volunteers who assisted in critical management such as weed control, seed collection, and planting of rare native plants grown by Kulani inmates.
- Kulani inmates propagated over 2,000 seedlings of common native plants in their native plant nursery for reforestation in the TMA. They also assisted Hawaii Volcanoes National Park with forest restoration by planting over 1,000 native plants in the park, landscaped the visitor center of the correctional facility with native plants and provided over 500 plants to sell for the Volcano Art Center Forest Fair.

Weed Control

- In 2008, TMA staff continued to work with partners to control and map priority invasive weeds in the TMA. They expanded cooperative weed control projects on over 500 acres of state, federal and private lands including Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Keauhou and Kilauea Forest (KS lands), Manuka and Pu'u Maka'ala Natural Area Reserves and Ka'u Forest Reserve (state lands) and Kaiholena Preserve (Nature Conservancy).

Endangered Species Restoration:

- In 2008, TMA members continued efforts to save federally endangered and rare species. KS worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State to develop Safe Harbor Agreements for Keauhou and the adjacent Kilauea Forest as well as for their Kona lands which will allow increased on-the-ground management and reintroduction of critically endangered animals and plants to areas cooperatively managed with the TMA. In the same year, over 6,000 endangered plants were planted across TMA lands.

Education and Outreach:

- Over the past ten years and continuing into the present, TMA educational programs provide annual spring and summer student programs (250 students), teacher workshops on native habitat and watershed protection (274 teachers) and public service radio announcements played daily on environmental topics (300 announcements recorded).
- The TMA Educational Program Imi Pono no ka 'Aina, seeking excellence for the land, has a broad range of educational programs for teachers, students and the general public to increase understanding of threats to the native watershed, as well as increase support for TMA projects to protect the watershed.

