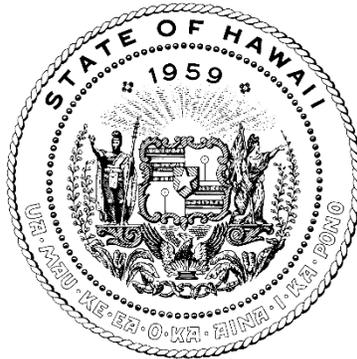


**REPORT TO THE THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE  
STATE OF HAWAI‘I  
2023 REGULAR SESSION**

**HAWAI‘I STATEWIDE TRAIL AND ACCESS SYSTEM  
“NĀ ALA HELE”**



Prepared by:

THE STATE OF HAWAI‘I  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
DIVISION OF FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE  
Nā Ala Hele Trail and Access Program

In response to Section 198D-9, Hawai‘i Revised Statutes

Honolulu, Hawai‘i  
October, 2022

**HAWAI‘I STATEWIDE TRAIL AND ACCESS SYSTEM**

## “NĀ ALA HELE”

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Hawai‘i Statewide Trail and Access Program, also known as Nā Ala Hele (NAH), was established in 1988. Section 198D-2, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), directs the Department of Land and Natural Resources ( DLNR) to plan, develop, and acquire land or rights for public use of land, construct, restore, and engage in coordination activities to implement a trail and access system in Hawaii. The program operates within the DLNR’s Division of Forestry and Wildlife. This report has three sections:

- Program Functions
  - Staffing
  - Funding
  
- Program Highlights
  - Abstractor Report
  - Branch Reports
  - American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding
  - Administrative Rules Revision
  - Nā Ala Hele Program Plan Update
  - Completion of the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority CON20210 Contract
  
- Program Needs

It is important to note this report addresses the requirements of the Nā Ala Hele Program enabling legislation, and that NAH administratively is a part of the Outdoor Recreation Section of the Division of Forestry and Wildlife, which has a broader array of responsibilities, including trails and roads not formally designated as NAH program features.

### **PROGRAM FUNCTIONS**

#### **Staffing**

Current NAH program staffing includes:

- Administration
  - Program Manager (Forester VI, SR26)
  - Abstractor (Abstractor VII, SR17)
- Branches – Professional and Technical
  - Each Branch has one (1) Trail and Access Specialist V, SR24 that serves as the Branch NAH Program Manager;
  - Hawai‘i Branch has an additional Trail and Access Specialist IV, SR22;
  - Hawai‘i, Maui and O‘ahu Branch each have one Forestry and Wildlife Technician, SR13;
- Branches – Labor

- Each Branch either has assigned to NAH, or access to, varying numbers of labor level staff positions for field work, the organization and deployment of which is handled at the Branch level, few of which are assigned full-time to NAH, including:
  - Forestry and Wildlife Worker III (crew leader), WB05
  - Forestry and Wildlife Worker II (crew member), BC05
  - General Laborer I (crew member, BC02)
- Each Branch also has access to in-house skilled labor to varying degrees, including carpenters and equipment operators, to assist with field operations needs.

In total, across the state, Nā Ala Hele Program leadership permanent staffing includes:

- Six (6) professional level managers
- Three (3) technician level staff

In addition, subject to funding availability and program leadership capability, NAH has utilized contract staffing through the Research Corporation of the University of Hawai‘i (RCUH) and KUPU. These hires are typically short-term and often project/funding-specific. While surely useful, they do not provide long-term personnel stability for the program.

**Funding**

Sources of funding for the Nā Ala Hele program include the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), administered by the Federal Highways Administration, State of Hawai‘i fuel tax revenues, fees collected through commercial tour and use permits, and donations.

<b>Nā Ala Hele Funding Sources</b>	<b>FY ‘22</b>
Recreational Trail Program (RTP)	\$667,866.65
State Special Funds – Liquid Fuel Tax	\$230,998.63
Fees/donations, commercial use of Nā Ala Hele trails and roads	\$21,578.80
Other sources (parking fees, permits and fines)	\$120.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$920,564.08</b>

**PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

**Abstractor Report**

The enabling legislation that created the Nā Ala Hele Program (Act 236, 1988) recognized the critical need to preserve and protect recreational resources like trails and roads utilized by the user public for access to and across public lands. As important, or perhaps even moreso, was the imperative to protect mauka and makai/shoreline access in perpetuity, in keeping with the Highways Act of 1892 and other foundational public access doctrine.

Recognizing that, among the first Program hires was a professional abstractor, tasked with providing title research and other vital research functions to ensure any land use proposals the Division and Department received for review were thoroughly researched with respect to publically-owned and protected trail and access resources.

The abstract section opened 45 files in FY 22. Although it may seem like a low number, many of the files required extensive research to determine either ownership or location of certain features. Of the 45 files, 11 were requested by the deputies of the Attorney General's office, 6 requests came from the office of the DLNR Chairperson, and the remaining were opened at the request of staff within the Division of Forestry and Wildlife and the Land Division. The requests from the Land Division were in response to a request for comments regarding proposed projects that may impact historic or cultural features.

### **Branch/Island Updates** (as submitted by Branch Trail and Access Specialists)

#### Hawaii Island

At Pololū Valley in North Kohala, program staff have been working closely with community to develop solutions to the over-use of the trail and lookout area. Capital Improvement Project funds (\$500,000) for planning were released in December 2021 and a consultant firm, Townscape was selected. They will be meeting with the community and stakeholders to develop a plan of how to best manage the area.

Hawai'i Tourism Authority funded a 9-month pilot project, Pololū Trail Stewards, developed in collaboration with the community and lineal descendants. Four part-time Stewards assist in managing the crowded parking and overlook area as well as responding to emergency incidents and calling authorities in enforcement violations. This program has proved very successful as it has led to a drastic decrease in safety incidents and misbehaviors, improved response time for emergency or enforcement response, better user behavior, a decrease in trespass onto neighboring private lands, and an extreme decrease in traffic and parking violations.

The Economic Development Administration awarded economic recovery monies to the State in response to the drastic economic impacts of COVID-19 on the Tourism and Recreation industries. The Hawai'i Island Program will be using these funds to continue the Pololū Trail Stewards and expand the Steward program state-wide for several years. In addition, we will be using the funds for an Interpretive Plan for the Ala Kahakai Trail, and a Recreation Plan for Pu'uwa'awa'a Forest Reserve.

New interpretive sign kiosks were created and installed at all trailheads on Hawai'i Island, through funding from the Hawai'i Tourism Authority. These signs detail the historical and environmental significance of the areas these trails go through. These new signs also include trail measurement statistics that help users assess their ability to interact with the trail (and brings the trail to ADA compliance).

Nā Ala Hele program staff continue to negotiate with private landowners for access to public lands and trails, including: Honokōhau Trail; Miloli'i Beaches Subdivision (major historic trails through Pāpā 2); Kōhanaiki Trail to the sea coast; Hōnaunau-Ho'okena Trail; Keauhou-Ka'awaloa trails; Makalawena (Ala Loa trail); Kahuolū, and access to the Kaiwiki Section of the

Hilo Forest Reserve. Staff also offered trail consultation advice to sister government agencies in regard to historic trail preservation and access: Queen Ka‘aumanu Highway Widening Project (Māmalahoa Trail) (DOT), Waipi‘o Valley Road (County), ‘Ala‘ē (County), and Pōhue (NPS),

The program hosted a ‘ĀinaCorps KUPU intern beginning February 2022, an important opportunity for career development. Dedicated volunteers continue to augment program staff on Hawai‘i Island in the maintenance of Waiākea ATV and Dirt Bike Park, the Mauna Kea ATV riding area (roads R1 and R10), Kūlanihāko‘i Mountain Bike Park, Pololū Trail, and Makāula-‘O‘oma Trails.

Routine maintenance is ongoing, including minor grading, signage, and trash collection at numerous sites, including: ‘Āinapō Trail and Road, Mauna Loa Observatory Road, Manukā Loop Trail, and trails at Kāheawai, Humu‘ula, Pu‘u ‘Ō‘ō, Kaluakauka, Ala Kahakai, Pu‘u Huluhulu, Puna, Onomea, Kaūmana, Muliwai, Kahauale‘a, and Pololū. Brushing, hazard tree removal, sign maintenance, helicopter support, and reconstruction make up the bulk of the work. Maintenance is also done on facilities, including ‘Āinapo Cabin, halfway shelters along Muliwai Trail and Waimanu Valley campsites, and various trailhead composting units. Due to Rapid ‘Ōhi‘a Death affecting Hawai‘i Island, boot-cleaning stations installed at all trailheads are routinely cleaned and maintained.

Due to the Hawai‘i Island Mayor’s February 2022 emergency proclamation closing Waipi‘o Valley Access Road, the Muliwai Trail and Waimanu Campgrounds were closed and permits refunded. Staff continues to maintain the trail and campgrounds to keep the features from becoming dilapidated.

The Hawai‘i Island Program continues to be severely short-staffed; the vacant Trails and Access Specialist IV position’s funding was restored by the 2022 Legislature and is currently in the process of being filled.

#### Maui Nui (Maui, Moloka‘i and Lāna‘i)

Several personnel changes occurred within Maui’s Nā Ala Hele program this year. The long time Trails and Access Specialist V retired in December 2021, and the Forestry and Wildlife Technician IV transferred into a DOFAW mechanic position in June 2022. DOFAW staff have been temporarily assigned to the Specialist and Technician positions. Both positions have been submitted to DLNR’s personnel office to start the recruitment process.

In December 2021, the Kona Low Storm caused substantial damage to the roads and trails in Kula Forest Reserve. Fallen trees covered most of the trails within the forest reserve making access impossible, and numerous stream crossings, bridges, and spillways were severely damaged. Contractors were hired to cut and clear the trees from the trails. NAH staff and contractors cleared 7 miles of access roads and 30 miles of program trails. Waiakoa Loop Trail experienced the most significant damage. DOFAW staff have removed all the fallen trees and repaired one stream crossing by installing a steel reinforced concrete spillway. Thirteen more stream crossings remain damaged and require repair. An existing bridge was also damaged in the storm and needs repair, and an additional bridge needs to be constructed on the trail in the largest washed-out area. All repair work on Waiakoa Loop Trail will be contracted out. Currently, the entire forest reserve remains closed due to the unsafe conditions of the roads and trails.

The Maui Nā Ala Hele program continues to utilize three automatic trail counters, two at Kahakapao Recreational Area and one at Waihe‘e Ridge Trail on Maui. Waihe‘e Ridge Trail has continued to be a popular trail this year with an average of almost 450 people/day utilizing the trail and a one-day high count of 1,069 people. Kahakapao Recreational Area in the Makawao Forest Reserve continues to be heavily accessed by the public. The Kahakapao Trailhead counter had an average count of 268 people/day, and a one-day high count of 515 people. Kahakapao’s Secret Trail showed lower numbers of visitors with an average of 41 people per day and a high count of 168 people in a day.

Monthly inspections of trails, trail maintenance and repair, and sign checks and replacement occurred at: Haleakalā Ridge, Ala Loa O Maui, Hoapili Trail, Lahaina Pali, Plum, Polipoli, Tie, Redwood, Mamane, Upper Waiohuli, Boundary, Lower Waiohuli, Waiakoa Loop, Upper Waiakoa, Waihe‘e Ridge, Waihou Spring, Waikamoi Ridge, Ohai Loop and Kahakapao Recreational Area. NAH staff completed monthly routine standard trail maintenance procedures, including brushing, grading, water diversion maintenance, tree and brush removal, and sign maintenance, on 54.5 miles of trails. Four new signs were installed this year at trails (two at Waihe‘e Ridge Trail, one at Waikamoi Ridge Trail, and one at Ala Loa O Maui Trail). By partnering with State Highways, Waihe‘e Ridge Trail parking lot was paved, and temporary parking stall lines were installed. At Kahakapao Recreational Area, the West Loop was widened at the bottom of the gulch to make footing and passing easier in that area.

Flow Farm continues to maintain eleven miles of biking trails at Kahakapao Recreational Area in Makawao Forest Reserve. They visually inspect the riding surfaces for any lumber damage and hazards monthly. Quarterly physical inspections are done on features to find loose boards and hardware that might have loosened from usage. All frame and footing connections are physically inspected annually to ensure the connections remain tight. Any damage that is noted is repaired by them. They organize volunteer groups and work with Maui Mountain Bike Coalition to hold trail repair days and family skill course outings.

Maui staff has continued to provide maintenance support to the Maui Motocross Track, including landscaping maintenance, removing rubbish and debris, hauling materials, port-a-potty servicing, and equipment maintenance.

Kamehamenui remains in the planning stage. Consultant planners have been contracted to draft a plan for Kamehamenui. natural resource management, flora and fauna surveys, and archaeological surveys have been completed. NAH staff surveyed and laid out 20+ miles of proposed trails in the upper section that were included in the archaeological survey, and the lower third of the parcel, which includes a proposed parking area, archery range, and small loop trails and corridors was also surveyed. We are currently awaiting the completion of the plan for review and comments.

#### O'ahu

The O'ahu program seeks to maintain existing trails while continuing to prioritize expansion and improvement of outdoor recreation and trail access opportunities. We were grateful to have the Forestry and Wildlife Technician IV position restored this past legislative session and are actively reestablishing and recruiting for it. Unfortunately, the Forestry and Wildlife Worker III position was vacated and we are also actively working to backfill that position.

Ongoing funded Capital Improvement Projects made headway this past fiscal year:

Maunawili Falls Plan and Improvements – \$500,000 CIP to plan and design a trail alignment that avoids cultural sites and establishes a parking situation for hikers has been ongoing. Contracted consultant, HHF, conducted stakeholder interviews, has been compiling archaeological information about the area, and has been working with the private landowner on potential parking solutions. DLNR received a right of entry from the landowner and is working with the Queens Retreat Hui to steward the area in the interim. A plan is expected to be completed this fiscal year. The legislature appropriated \$50,000 in operating funds for the parking lot with \$25,000 in recurring funds for management. These funds will go towards implementing recommended improvements and improved trail management.

Maunawili Ditch Trail - \$250,000 CIP for Planning, Design and Construction. Planning is needed to ensure community input and support, minimization of user conflict (mountain bike vs horse vs hunter vs hiker), maximize safety of users, and possible restoration of equestrian use of the Old Government Road. Design will focus on converting the existing trail to sustainable equestrian trail standards (max slope, trail bed material (dirt), min height clearance), reroute mountain bike trails to minimize crossings and conflict with horses; providing parking for horse trailers and other users, and informational signs at both ends of the trail. Construction will implement sustainable design trail standards, installation of rerouted mountain bike trail alignments; installation of parking for horse trailers and other users, installation of gates to control users at both ends of the trail; and installation of informational signs to reduce user conflict.

Kaiwa Ridge Plan and Improvements – \$400,000 CIP for Plans and Designs of trail management and improvements and \$900,000 CIP for construction of trail improvements to reduce erosion, sedimentation, and safety in alignment with sustainable trail standards. The contracted consulting firm, PBR, published a draft Environmental Assessment and Management Plan and sought public input. They are currently revising the plan in response to public comments and aim to publish a final this fiscal year. Meanwhile, technical land disposition matters are being resolved to better align the two trail easements to enable better alignment and management.

Kamananui Valley Road Improvements – \$300,000 GIA to Moanalua Gardens Foundation for Plans, Design and Construction for Kamananui Valley Road repairs, realignment, restoration ground and site improvements. We are seeking release of the funds this fiscal year to do the project.

The O'ahu program continues to uphold the goal of providing additional outdoor recreational opportunities for the public and in accordance with grant obligations from land acquisition projects such as Helemano, Honouliuli, and the Waimea section of the Pupukeya Forest Reserve. Additionally, responding to hiker demand to better manage popular locations not officially designated as a program trail such as Lulumahu Falls and meet the demand for mountain biker, off-highway motorized users, and equestrian riders continues to challenge the program.

The program seeks to keep the trails safe and user-friendly by continued clearing of trail-side vegetation, removing downed trees, and mitigating other potentially hazardous conditions. While some of the program's trails have urban interface issues, feedback on social media is generally

overwhelmingly positive. Most of the work carried out by the remaining two, full-time trail crew members (Program Manager and Forestry and Wildlife Worker II) included major chainsaw work to remove downed trees obstructing the trail, brushing, grubbing, rock removal, trailhead maintenance, trail grade reconstruction, armoring water diversions, installing educational signs, and out-planting native plants. Since the number of staff is inadequate to keep up with the maintenance required of 100 miles of roads and trails on O'ahu, the branch has implemented an annual trail clearing permit system for qualified experienced volunteers. Six of these permits were issued last fiscal year enabling many trails to be cleared and maintained independent of staff labor. We are very grateful for this increase in capacity and volunteer labor and dedication to our public trails.

O'ahu's most prominent accomplishment of the year was the reopening of the Poamoho trail. A major storm event in March of 2021 caused eight major washouts making the trail too dangerous for public use and requiring a trail closure. To expedite trail repairs, the program sought support from multiple agencies and programs that use the trail for management and was met with a very positive response. A weeklong mission to repair the trail had over 80 people joining the effort, clearing all eight washouts, reestablishing the trail bed, and clearing the trail of vegetation to the end of the maintained trail sign. Trail crew followed up by repairing two washed out bridges bringing this historic CCC made trail available for public enjoyment again.

This year, O'ahu led the effort to contract additions to the Statewide Universal Trail Assessment and Sign Initiative. The recognized Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) provides an innovative way for users to determine trail difficulty based on their abilities or limitations by providing information on trail conditions such as distance, grade, slope, elevation gain, tread conditions etc. Users may now see that a trail is only 1 mile long but gains 4000 feet of elevation and determine that it may not be appropriate for their ability level. Trails on O'ahu, Kaua'i, and Maui Islands were assessed to provide users with informational signage at all the trailheads, as well as on the official Hawai'i Trails website. The signs include UTAP data that would allow hikers of all abilities to decide whether to undertake a particular trail and make necessary safety or equipment preparations beforehand.

O'ahu staff provided continued support of the Waiale'e Off-Highway Vehicle Park by providing portable toilets and trash pick up. This year a new contractor was awarded the portable toilets contract and was well received by park users. The park's new management team is doing a great job adhering to the terms of the Revocable Permit, implementing park improvements, and improving community relations.

### Kaua'i

Kaua'i Na Ala Hele program has been focusing on the maintenance of our trails and roads under our inventory. We have had a lot of help from volunteers, through school groups, avid hikers, and trail groups from the mainland. We fell victim to a reduced work force like much of the state due to an employee putting in his resignation and moving to the mainland because of the cost of living. The position is a General Laborer and we will be trying to upgrade that position to a Forestry and Wildlife worker II. We also had a Forestry and Wildlife worker III retire and will be trying to fill that position as soon as possible.

We are very thankful for the Oahu branch in overseeing the Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) of gathering trail information, assessing the data and installing signs at selective trails. This project was funded through the Hawai'i Tourism Authority. We are in the process of installing these signs at the designated trailheads that were assessed. These signs will allow all users to see trail grades, and elevation changes throughout the entire trail so that they can evaluate if they would really want to hike the trail.

Kauai DOFAW staff has been working with volunteer groups on the Alakai Boardwalk. This has been an ongoing project of replacing the old boards (redwood) to the new composite Fiberforce plastic lumber. The Alakai boardwalk is one of Kauai's most pristine trails which is home to many different native flora and fauna and several Threatened and Endangered species. We have put in requests for more funding and have also applied for more grants to finish this project. Some of the hinderances that we have run it to are the weather (in the Alakai wilderness preserve it can go from completely clear to completely sucked in by cloud cover in a matter of minutes), personnel shortages (since COVID we were not able to do work projects with the other islands and under the Kauai program we have only three personnel), helicopter scheduling (Once COVID restrictions opened up the helicopter company that services our contract was booked with tours and we were having a hard time booking flights) and procurement payments to vendors (we were getting some difficulties with payment from our funding sources to our vendors). We expect to finish replacing all the boards by the end of 2023.

We worked with Waimea High School (from the westside of Kauai) seniors on various senior projects they needed to complete to graduate from high school. Some of the projects included the removal of invasive species and mulching it up to use as fertilizer, another student had a project of measuring how much erosion comes off of trails and the last project was growing Ohia seeds to increase populations to compensate the loss of the Ohia forests due to Rapid Ohia Death. The second group of Waimea High School students was a class that wanted to experience trail work and to see what working in this field would be all about. We took them to Kukui trail to grub the narrow sections of the trail. That trail is very hot and steep so it was a great test of their will and inner strength and also a great decision maker to do this type of work. They were a very enthusiastic and loved doing the hard work of grubbing trails. All of them wanted to do more volunteer days whenever there are more opportunities.

Nou Nou Mountain consists of three trails, Nou Nou West, Nou Nou East, and Kuamoo trails. These are the most used Na Ala Hele trails on the island and have presented some problems (parking, heavy use, defecation on the side of the trail, and others). We have been working with the island representatives to secure money to get additional parking, fix some of the infrastructure, and receive additional personnel to maintain these trails. The trails are next to one of the most populated areas on the island which makes it very accessible to local people. It also gets a lot of social media publicity which makes it very susceptible to tourists. There is some revenue income due to commercial hiking. One of the solutions that was suggested to alleviate the burdens of the heavy usage is to start a permit system to either park or to hike.

### **American Rescue Plan Act Funding**

In 2021 Congress approved the American Rescue Plan Act, administered through the U.S. Economic Development Agency (EDA). Among the six Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) silo's was Travel, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation, with a total of \$750 million available to the states: \$510 million in State grants, and \$240 million in competitive grants. The description of this NOFO read: "Through state and competitive grant programs, EDA is focused on accelerating the recovery of communities that rely on the travel, tourism and recreation sectors, which were hard hit by the pandemic."

Hawai'i's share of the State grant pool of funding was \$14.2 million, and the EDA left to the Governor of each state the decision as to what agency within their respective states would administer this funding. Governor Ige awarded this responsibility to the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, with instructions to have the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) work with the DLNR to formulate a Grant Application Plan (GAP) with a series of specific "workplans" to submit to the EDA for review and approval. Deputy Director Robert Masuda and the HTA's Keith Regan and Caroline Anderson convened a working group, and while the initial wish list was long, a total of fifteen workplans were proposed from DLNR. Several were Outdoor Recreation/Nā Ala Hele Program focused, including:

- Nā Manu 'Elele: Land Steward Program: \$3,250,000
  - This program will enable statewide expansion of the highly successful Trail Stewards program piloted at Pololū Valley on Hawai'i island statewide
- Nāpu'u Recreation Plan: \$400,000
  - To develop a comprehensive recreation plan for the Pu'uwa'wa'a Forest Reserve and the Pu'uuanahulu Game Management Area on Hawai'i island
- Ala Kahakai Interpretive Plan: \$100,000
  - To develop, in coordination with the National Park Service's Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail staff, a comprehensive Interpretive Plan in cooperation with the various communities and descendants within the Ala Kahakai Trail Corridor on Hawai'i island
- Statewide Trail Capacity Study: \$1,100,000
  - To gather data on current trail use, limits of acceptable change, community impacts, and other socio-environmental impacts to then craft a standardized decision-making framework as a foundation for responsible trail management and enable establishment and enforcement of defensible limits on use

Other workplans have been developed by the DLNR's Division's of Forestry and Wildlife, Conservation and Resources Enforcement and Aquatic Resources. The original EDA deadline for GAP submittal was September 26, 2021. Post-submittal, the EDA and HTA/DLNR have conferred, and Hawai'i's original list of fifteen (15) projects has been whittled to nine (9); monies proposed for the projects removed from the GAP have been redirected to the remaining projects, and the above listed projects remain an active part of the GAP. We currently have no projected timeframe from the EDA for approval, but pre-planning in anticipation of that funding materializing is well underway.

## **Administrative Rules Revision**

In FY '21 Nā Ala Hele initiated an internal review and revision of its Administrative Rules (HAR Chapter 130). Significant staff time has been spent reviewing and revising, including working to ensure, wherever practical and possible, consistency with recently revised Forest Reserve and State Parks administrative rules. Other significant components of the current revision include:

- Consistency, clarification and updating edits;
- Addition of “Historic” to the trail classification list;
- Clarification of rule relating to entering closed or private lands from a trail, road, or access;
- New definitions and rules governing electric bicycles (ebikes);
- Clarification of Advisory Council member terms and level of authority/purview;
- Updating rule relating to “unmanned aerial vehicles,” i.e. “drones”;
- Enabling a revised fee schedule allowing for the collection of fees for campsites and cabins, UAV flights, film permits, trail activity events, parking and entrance, and other uses.

We are currently going through internal review of the draft revisions, both within Forestry and Wildlife and with other Divisions in the Department. We hope to receive approval to move forward with the approval process in the current fiscal year.

### **Program Plan Update**

Authorization for \$450,000 in CIP funds for an update to the 1991 Nā Ala Hele Program Plan came through Act 40, SLH 2019, Item H-3. Governor Ige released the funding in late 2021. We have completed the professional services consultant selection and engaged PBR Hawai'i to perform and complete the Program Plan update process. We are excited to have PBR as our partner in this important and long-overdue update; PBR recently completed the 2021 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 5-year update, and are particularly well-suited to bring their talents to this effort for us.

### **Completion of the HTA CON20210 Contract**

The close of FY '22 saw the close of a contract between DLNR and the Hawai'i Tourism Authority that provided several hugely beneficial products for the NAH program. The contract had three (3) main components:

- Universal Trail Assessment Program and Sign Initiative (UTAP)
- Equipment Purchases
- Trail Safety and Enhancement – Brushing/Maintenance/Rehabilitation

Primary components of the UTAP initiative were to digitally assess trail and road attributes such as distance, slope, grade, elevation change, tread condition, and other attributes in a consistent manner, and then develop signage that provided all of that information for trail users, in the hopes of ensuring users have a better understanding of the conditions they can expect on these trails and road. Funding provided allowed for not only the assessments but also interpretive signage of various sorts with, at a minimum, condition attributes specific to that trail or road.

A total of 35 trails or roads were assessed using this system, with signage developed, and manufactured for all, and installation underway. Moving forward we will continue to assess more NAH features using the system and develop consistent signage using the data gathered as funding allows.

Because of the limitations on how we can utilize federal RTP funding we received annually, equipment purchases were identified as a priority in formulating this contract with the HTA. As a result, each Branch had available to them \$20,000 for equipment purchases, for a total of \$80,000.

Lastly, because of chronic staffing shortages and the popularity of trail access, and the sheer number of users on O‘ahu in particular, funding made available for trail maintenance and rehabilitation work was put into a series of contracts for work solely on O‘ahu trails. Over 60 miles of trails were cleared, as were over 20 miles of roadways, affording safer and more satisfying and comfortable use for O‘ahu outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

COVID NOTE: This contract spanned a timeframe from pre- to post-COVID shutdown, and was significantly hampered along the way by both state government and private sector staff shortages, travel complications, as well as significant supply chain issues of the sort experienced widely. We greatly appreciate the HTA’s understanding of these conditions and patience as we worked diligently to get assessments done and product delivered.

## **PROGRAM NEEDS**

### **Staffing**

To even moderately increase the capacity of the Nā Ala Hele Program to manage the resources and responsibilities it is charged with, enhanced staffing is absolutely essential, at both the Administration level and on the Branches. We envision needs at the Admin level to include professional level Specialists to handle myriad contracting, compliance, program planning and project management functions. This will be particularly critical as we receive increased federal grant funding that will need careful oversight and management. Additionally, at the Admin level, an additional Abstractor is essential to ensure the vital research and title search work necessary to protect these precious resources is properly and completely performed.

At the Branch level we see, at a minimum, a total of two (2) professional staff and one technician on each branch to carry on the planning and oversight of field work on the ground.

In summary:

- Specialist III/IV/V
  - One to two (1-2) at Administration
- One (1) Abstractor VII/VIII/IX
- Specialist II/II/IV

- One (1) each on Maui, O‘ahu and Kaua‘i branches
- Technician IV
  - One (1) on Kaua‘i

We anticipate submitting these position requests in our Departmental budget request for consideration of the FY‘24-‘25 Biennium Budget Request.

## **Funding**

Historically, the Nā Ala Hele Program has not received general fund operating funding. That changed with the 2022 legislative session when \$2,000,000 in general fund monies were appropriated for “Trail Maintenance and Rehabilitation.” This funding was non-recurring, and we‘ll be seeking to secure this level of funding on a recurring basis with our FY ‘24‘25 Biennium budget request. While the funding received through the Recreational Trails Program is essential to maintaining these trails, roads and other features, limitations on the ways those monies can be spent severely hampers the Program’s ability to fully discharge it’s duties. Far greater results are possible with a strong mix of state and federal funds, making better use of available resources.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

Across the state, utilization of trails and roads, access to shorelines and uplands has leapt significantly. This is evidenced when you drive by trailheads in both populated and unpopulated regions of our islands. Residents and visitors alike are at an extraordinary rate seeking these types of experience. It was noted significantly in the recently-completed State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan update, along with public sentiment, strikingly increased demand for more services, more infrastructure, increased maintenance and potential limitations on user numbers. On O‘ahu and beyond, neighborhoods in urban and rural setting are besieged by people seeking a different type of recreational experience. The Nā Ala Hele Program was enabled to manage and care for these resources, provide protections of the ability to access these resources, and and protect the resources themselves.