



HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
Ke'ena Ho'omalu Pōhila O Hawai'i

Laulima

Working Together

A Quarterly Newsletter for Our Partners and Community | 'Okakopa/October 2025



Photo: Mālama Kaua'i

Mālama Kaua'i drives food independence on the Garden Isle

Mālama Kaua'i is gaining steam on the Garden Isle as it drives forward with its vision for a resilient and sustainable food system on Kaua'i. The non-profit has initiatives at all levels of Kaua'i's food system, from farmland leasing to food processing, distribution and education.

"After decades of neglect, our food system is fragile," says executive director Megan Fox. "Building true food

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Photo: MEMA

MEMA's major mitigation project: West Maui wetlands restoration

Efforts are underway on Maui to restore wetlands in an area where years of illegal dumping and decades of invasive species had devastating effects on the wetland ecosystem. Story on Page 5.

Administrator's Message

By James DS. Barros

This issue of *Laulima* seems to be all about taking action – people working together and making real, measurable progress.

From Maui's complex, multi-agency mitigation action, and Big Island's radio solution for Ka'ū and South Kona; to Kaua'i's whole-community approach to food independence, and the people of O'ahu who calmly and safely evacuated despite heavy traffic during the July 29 tsunami warning.

These stories show how Hawai'i can be an example of innovation, problem solving and progress for the rest of world.

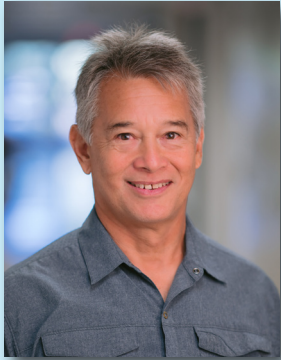


This is a very busy time of year at HIEMA. This summer, we had tsunami threats, a close call with Hurricane Kiko, and numerous wildfires. We all need to be prepared and pro-

active to deal with these hazards. Marching in the Aloha Festivals floral parade in Honolulu was a rejuvenating event. Greeting 'ohana and visitors alike was a great reminder of why we love to work hard each day – to serve our neighbors and the great state of Hawai'i. Mahalo, friends!

Hawai'i Island

It has been a busy summer on Hawai'i Island, even before the tsunami evacuation, nearby pass from Hurricane Kiko and dry-season fires. That has especially been true for our Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), which are a vital part of the emergency management enterprise both in "blue skies" and when hazards threaten.



Talmadge Magno, HCCDA

Our volunteers provided Basic CERT Training Sept. 13 - 14, 2025, in Kailua-Kona for members of the public looking to build their disaster response skills and maybe join a local team.

CERT members also provided volunteer power for the Civil Defense Disaster Preparedness Fair on Sept. 20 in Kailua-Kona.

Between those dates, CERT volunteers were part of a major multi-agency exercise at Hilo International Airport that simulated a collision between two jets with multiple casualties. The Sept. 18 exercise was a part of the training required every three years to recertify the airport's firefighters, and CERT helped get the job done!

Maui, Moloka'i & Lāna'i

Aloha mai kākou-

The past few months at MEMA have been filled with activity, from wildfire mitigation projects and tsunami warnings to hurricane activations and brushfires. No two days in emergency management are ever the same.

As our team grows, it is vital that we strengthen our emergency response



Amos Lonokailua-Hewett, MEMA

capabilities. Weekly tabletop exercises help build readiness and communication during "blue sky" days.

MEMA recently hosted Basic CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) and CERT Train the Trainer courses on Moloka'i. Revitalizing CERT remains a key priority in our resilience efforts.

Our updated Hazard Mitigation Plan has been adopted by HIEMA and FEMA and is now awaiting County Council approval.

In August, MEMA and HIEMA participated in the August 8 Wildfire Remembrance events. It was a time to honor the lives lost and stand with the community in healing. These moments remind us why our work matters.

At MEMA, we value pilina, relationships rooted in aloha. It is not about money, status, or pedigree; it is about kindness and humility. That is what people remember most. 'A'ohe pili wehe 'ole i ke aloha — "No bond is broken when bound with aloha."

O'ahu

Aloha from the City and County of Honolulu Department of Emergency Management! We have been busy over the last few months working on a number of different focus areas.



Randal Collins, DEM

In July, the city's 2025 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan was officially adopted. Hazard mitigation describes the policies and lasting actions that help reduce or eliminate risks to people and property caused by future natural hazards or disasters. This particular plan update was focused on developing an accurate ranking of the major hazards facing O'ahu.

Emergency activations kept DEM busy this summer as well. From wildfires to tsunami threats to a potential hurricane,

DEM and our partners worked together to prepare for and protect against these disasters. We are extremely grateful for the support of our EOC partners and the public!

As we move into the fall, we ask everyone to stay prepared. Hurricane season continues and the threat of wildfires is high when conditions are hot and dry. Mahalo!

Kaua'i

Aloha from Kaua'i!

Over the past quarter, Kaua'i has made important strides in wildfire mitigation and community outreach. KEMA joined with the Kaua'i Fire Department and our Kaua'i partners to conduct door-to-door outreach in



Elton Ushio, KEMA

Kaumakani, providing residents with enhanced messaging and information in the event of an evacuation, home hardening tips, and defensible space strategies. The Kaua'i County Council also passed a wildfire ordinance to enhance protections for our plantation camp communities – an important step forward in reducing risk across the island.

Looking ahead, we will be working closely with our partners during Fire Prevention Week in October to deliver safety education to residents and keiki, as well as offering additional outreach and training sessions on wildfire preparedness. These upcoming events reflect our ongoing commitment to providing families and neighborhoods with the tools and knowledge to stay safe.

Alongside our wildfire efforts, KEMA continues to engage in exercises and training with local, state, federal, and non-governmental partners to ensure our readiness for any hazard. Mahalo to our dedicated team, partners, and residents for joining us in building a safer and more resilient Kaua'i.

'Amazing Aloha' by O'ahu drivers in tsunami evacuation; HDOT plans improvements

The July 29 tsunami evacuation in Hawai'i was triggered by an 8.8-magnitude megathrust earthquake off of the eastern coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia, the most powerful earthquake in the world since 2011 and the sixth-most powerful on record. Officials in Hawai'i ordered the evacuation of tsunami inundation zones across the state, including some highly populated residential and workplace areas in Honolulu.

Fortunately, damage from the historic earthquake was minimal, with maximum tsunami wave heights of around 5 feet observed in Kahului and Hilo. Traffic congestion during the evacuation, especially in Honolulu, remains as the most memorable effect for many people.

Despite some commutes of over three hours during the evacuation, officials emphasize that the evacuation's objectives were met.

"The evacuation was a success in that by 7 p.m., everybody was outside of the inundation zones. It can be smoother," Hawai'i State Department of Transportation (HDOT) Director, Ed Sniffen, said during a briefing to the Hawai'i State House of Representative's Public Safety Committee.



Some drivers faced commutes of over three hours during the July 29 tsunami evacuation on O'ahu. "Amazingly" there were no accidents or road rage incidents, said HDOT director Ed Sniffen.

Video still courtesy of KHON2

Sniffen praised drivers for their aloha, calling their execution "amazing" and remarking that no traffic incidents were reported.

"I really appreciate the aloha that shown during the evacuation," he said during the briefing. "I cannot understate how amazing that was – that we didn't have any incidents, accidents crashes or road rage during that time. It was amazing."

However, HDOT is planning improvements for future evacuations, says HDOT Public Information Officer Russell Pang.

Pang says possible changes could include "reversing traffic along key

roadways, closing critical intersections to facilitate traffic and deploying emergency responders to better manage key intersections."

HDOT also wants to improve public understanding of evacuation zones, "whether they should evacuate or remain in place if they are in a safe location," Pang said, as well as evacuation options including vertical evacuation, using public transportation, "or even walking a few blocks to get out of an evacuation zone rather than trying to drive through traffic."

Pang says HDOT is aiming to have draft evacuation recommendations ready by early November.

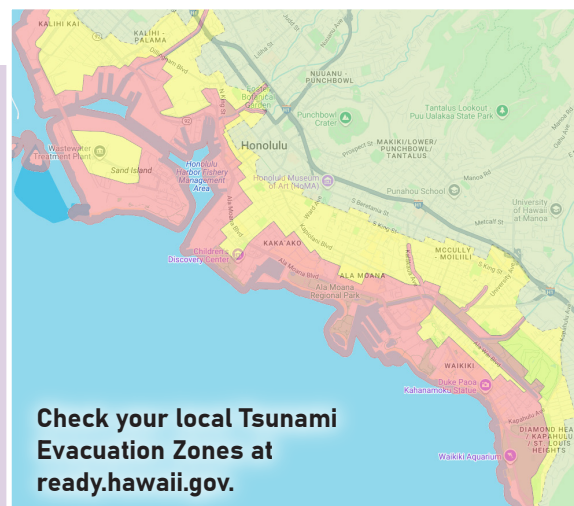
'Know Your Zone' and evacuation tips

Red Tsunami Evacuation Zones are evacuated during all Tsunami Warnings. Exit to higher ground.

Yellow Extreme Tsunami Evacuation Zones are evacuated during an Extreme Tsunami Warning, which is a rare, worst-case event that could be caused by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake in the Eastern Aleutian Islands of Alaska.

Green Safe Zones are areas that are considered safe from tsunami hazards. You are safe here and do not need to evacuate. Avoid traveling and adding to traffic.

Vertical Evacuation: You can evacuate to the 4th floor or above in a building that is 10 stories or taller and made of reinforced concrete or structural steel. This is a short-term solution if you are worried about traffic or having enough time to get to high ground.



Colorado River lessons can help us preserve Hawai'i's 'Ola i ka Wai' - 'Water is Life' mantra

Where the Water Goes: Life and Death Along the Colorado River
by David Owen

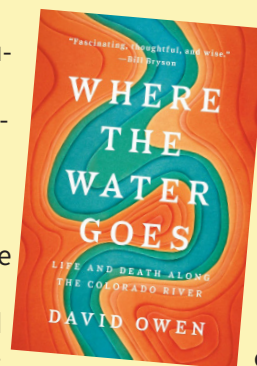
Review by Victoria Hiraoka,
Communications Lead, Hawai'i State
Office of Homeland Security

You turn on the tap and the water comes right away, ready to be boiled and turn your dried packets into ramen. You pick up your hose and water your plants, your trees, your

shrubs. Maybe the succulents, if you've mastered when and how much water they need (RIP to my third attempt at raising string of dolphins!). You leap into our picturesque shore waters and feel the sun on your face and think it would be impossible to ever not have access to water here.

Yet access to water, water rights, and how our freshwater sources are maintained and replenished have become increasingly important topics in the last handful of years. If we are an archipelago surrounded by a vast ocean, what can we learn now from other states that will save our water sources for tomorrow?

Where the Water Goes follows the famous Colorado River from its humble start at La Poudre Pass Lake in Colorado, all the way to its terminus in Mexico. You might



mistake this book for sounding like a textbook, but it's a wealthy resource for how one of the United States' largest sources of fresh water that serves multiple states has been managed, mismanaged, and drained to historical lows. You might be surprised to learn how illogical our nation's water rights can be (a bit of a "I got here first!" method), and how many parts of nature we've impacted by taking water resources for human activity like agriculture, entertainment, and comfortable living.

Native Hawaiian culture recognizes that water is life (ola i ka wai), and it is never too late to start caring about our water resources; *Where the Water Goes* provides us with a blueprint of systems we can utilize, and outdated laws we can change to ensure that ola i ka wai remains a central part of our beautiful state.

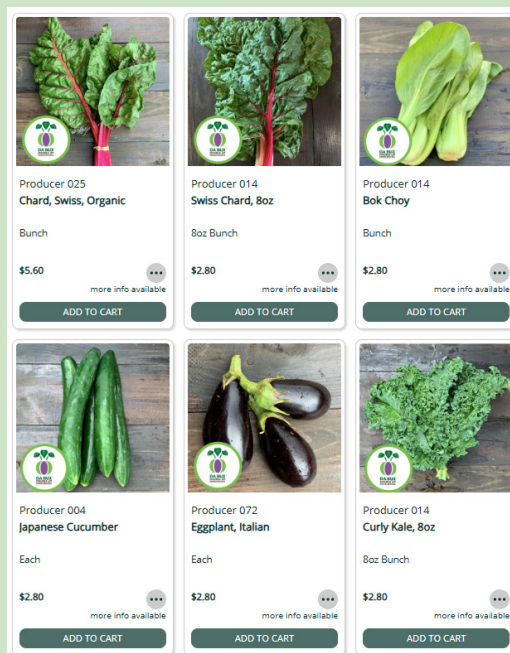
Mālama Kaua'i – from page 1

security will require major investments in infrastructure that strengthen local production, processing, storage and distribution."

Mālama Kaua'i's most recent effort, and perhaps its most remarkable, is the Olohena 'ĀINA Center – an 87-acre agricultural park on Kaua'i's east side that will provide "new and underserved" farmers with long-term leases, shared equipment and cooperative facilities.

"Lasting resilience isn't possible without getting more farmers and ranchers on the land," Fox says. The new project will "help to remove some of the biggest bottlenecks in local food production."

Olohena is one part of a large system that Mālama Kaua'i has developed over the years. Its food hub distribution system can deliver island-wide, with a network of over 100 local food producers and an online shopping website – kauailocalfood.com – that accepts SNAP and DA BUX benefits. Its Kaukau for Keiki program launched this summer, providing summer break-



Consumers can make local food orders on kauailocalfood.com, and benefits like SNAP and DA BUX are accepted.

fasts and lunches to low-income families across the island.

Mālama Kaua'i also recently launched the Moloa'a 'ĀINA Center, a facility available to the 70 farms comprising the Moloa'a Irrigation Cooperative (MIC) on

Kaua'i's north side. MIC producers can rent the facility's commercial kitchen, cold-processing space, commercial processing equipment, walk-in cold storage and office space.

Fox says that the Mālama Kaua'i's success is largely due to listening and adapting.

"What I love most about this work is how nimble we can be," she says, "constantly adapting to what our community needs. Our growth hasn't been about following a rigid plan, but about listening and responding," engaging farmers, consumers and the wider community.

To that end, Mālama Kaua'i developed the Kaua'i Food Access Plan 2030, a set of objectives based on public input and voting. Among the top objectives are more food pantries, including emergency food delivery; community gardens and orchards; long-term agricultural land and equipment access; and expanding local food in schools.

To learn more about Mālama Kaua'i's programs, or to volunteer, visit malamakauai.org.

MEMA leads major wildfire mitigation effort to restore West Maui wetland

The County of Maui is well underway with a complex wildfire mitigation project at Ukumehame in West Maui, where years of illegal dumping and decades of invasive species growth degraded its former wetland ecosystem into a major problem. Following authorization in June, the project to clean up and rehabilitate the 42-acre site on county property abutting the Honoapiʻilani Highway is moving quickly forward with several county, state, federal and private agencies cooperating.

“This site, like much of West Maui, is highly susceptible to rapid wildfire ignition and spread due to prevailing dry conditions, strong winds and the abundance of highly flammable non-native vegetation,” says project operations chief Chris Wenger of Maui Emergency Management Agency (MEMA).

“The Honoapiʻilani Highway is a vital link that connects our communities,” notes MEMA Administrator Amos Lonokailua-Hewett. “By reducing hazardous fuels and ignition risks, we’re not only lowering wildfire danger, we’re keeping our neighbors from being cut off and isolated. Wildfires bring deep trauma to our community and we have a responsibility to do all that we can to prevent them.”

Maui County personnel also worked with unsheltered individuals previously living on the property to offer shelter, medical, behavioral health and social services in partnership with local organizations. The county said it is working to find innovative solutions to support the unsheltered community.

Cleanup: 250 tons of debris

Among the first steps in the mitigation project was the removal and disposal of what Wenger calls a “profound physical blight” – 123 vehicles, 175 tons of solid waste, 75 tons of

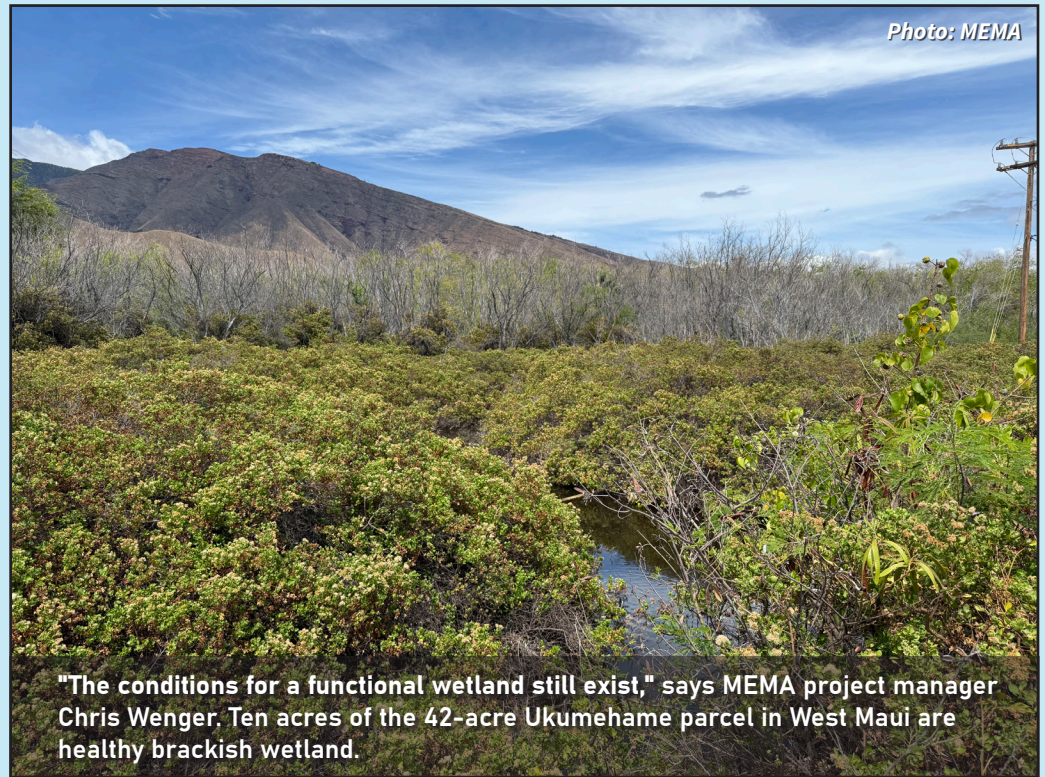


Photo: MEMA

“The conditions for a functional wetland still exist,” says MEMA project manager Chris Wenger. Ten acres of the 42-acre Ukumehame parcel in West Maui are healthy brackish wetland.

scrap metal, 2.5 tons of recycled metal and 1200 tires.

MEMA also needed to carefully coordinate the safe removal of 90 electric vehicle and hybrid vehicle batteries, an “extreme wildfire hazard.” This delicate maneuver involved the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Hawaiʻi State Department of Health, Maui Police Department and specialized private contractors including Vares Contracting and Penco.

“These lithium-ion and nickel metal hydride batteries, if damaged, present a serious combustion risk that is difficult to extinguish, threatening the adjacent community and critical infrastructure,” Wenger says. “This entire undertaking, executed with zero safety incidents, demonstrates what can be accomplished through responsible, disciplined collaboration.”

Vegetation mastication – the shredding, grinding, chopping and redistribution of vegetation – is now underway to create firebreaks and prepare the site for native plant regeneration. Wenger says that MEMA chose this technique based on past work by the Hawaiʻi State Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) on neighboring parcels, and consulted research from similar projects in California, Australia, Spain and Portugal.

The primary vegetation target is Opi-uma, an invasive tree that quickly grows

into thickets that burn at high intensity. Other problematic invasives on the site include Kiawe, Indian Fleabane, guinea grass and fountain grass.

West Maui Wetland: 10 healthy acres to grow from

In the past, what was once the West Maui wetland corridor gave way to sugar cane fields, whose subsequent disuse fostered the spread of flammable invasive species.

Today, within the 42-acre Ukumehame parcel exist 10 acres of “healthy, functioning brackish wetland,” Wenger says, “the ecological memory of the site – a proof of concept that the conditions for a functional wetland exist.”

The goal for the mitigation project is a full restoration of the West Maui wetland corridor. A replanting strategy led by ecologists and botanists at DLNR would populate the corridor with plants that are both ecologically appropriate and less prone to intense burning.

“The existence of that healthy 10-acre core is crucial,” Wenger says. “It demonstrates that the underlying prerequisites for a wetland – the water sources, soil composition, the fundamental ecology – are still present and capable of supporting the target

Continued on page 6

KWXX and Hawai'i County boost radio in remote Ka'ū areas

Radio dials at the southern end of Big Island are coming in strong thanks to a project that has extended FM radio coverage to remote areas of Ka'ū and South Kona districts. Hawai'i County Civil Defense Agency (HCCDA) and KWXX 94.7FM have reached a solution by connecting KWXX's primary radio transmitter in Hilo to a new FM booster on the county radio tower at South Point via the Starlink satellite internet constellation.

"Improving radio coverage to Ka'ū advances our work to reach the last person in the last house on the last block of every community with the alerts and information they need to keep themselves and their 'ohana safe," says HCCDA Administrator Talmadge Magno.

HCCDA communications officer Adam Weintraub says concern emerged in 2020, a time when seismic measurements indicated activity at Mauna Loa – the world's largest active volcano. Meanwhile, Ka'ū was growing. 2020 U.S. census data shows a 54% population increase from 2000.



A Coconut Wireless Construction worker lifts the new FM booster antenna onto the Hawai'i County radio tower at South Point.

Photo: Hawai'i County Civil Defense Agency

At 13,600 feet, Mauna Loa was obstructing radio signals to significant Ka'ū communities including Ocean View, Nā'ālehu and Pāhala. Weintraub says HCCDA approached KWXX, the primary radio station for broadcasting emergency messages on Hawai'i Island, to explore transmission solutions for the area.

In the end, Hawai'i County offered tower space on its South Point radio tower to house an FM booster that KWXX purchased and paid to install. With the development of SpaceX's Starlink satellite network – which now has over 7,000 satellites at a low orbit level of 340 miles above the Earth – KWXX was able to transmit FM radio signal from Hilo up to Starlink satellites, down to a Starlink receiver at South Point, and back out the South Point radio tower to residents in Ka'ū and South Kona districts.

The project "gets the commercial broadcaster into an unserved area for much less money than building their own tower, and it allows Civil Defense to reach that same area with Emergency Alert System messages if necessary, providing resilience in alert and warning," remarks Weintraub.

"This isn't just about expanding our reach," writes KWXX president Chris Leonard, "it's about serving our community. Ka'ū has waited a long time for dependable radio coverage, and we're honored to provide both entertainment and life-saving information to these resilient communities."

West Maui – from page 5

ecosystem. Our challenge will be to meticulously guide the land back to its stable, natural state."

MEMA continues to lead vegetation control and regular brush abatement, with a final wetland restoration plan expected in place in the first quarter of 2026.

"Protecting our community and 'āina requires us to meet clear dangers with clear action," Wenger says. "The progress made here – securing hazardous batteries, removing tons of debris, and reducing the fuel for a catastrophic fire – is a testament to what we can achieve when we move forward together, with a shared commitment to care for this land and for one another."



"A profound physical blight" – 123 vehicles and 90 electric and hybrid vehicle batteries were removed from the Ukumehame parcel.

Photo: MEMA