



Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

HONOLULU DECLARATION ATBC 2015

*IN SUPPORT OF CULTURAL AND BIOLOGICAL RESTORATION
OF KAHO‘OLAWA ISLAND RESERVE, HAWAII.*

The Hawaiian Archipelago is one of the most important, unique and biodiverse hotspots of the world, with approximately ninety percent of its native flowering plants occurring nowhere else, approximately fifty percent of which are endangered with extinction. The natural beauty, diversity, and richness of the native landscape are under threat, as are the cultural practices of the native Hawaiian people that developed in concert with these natural treasures. Kaho‘olawe Island is also culturally and spiritually important to many peoples, and especially to the Kanaka Maoli-people of native Hawaiian ancestry.

Kaho‘olawe Island was used for 52 years (1941-1993) by the U.S. Navy as a “training ground,” primarily as a bombing range for target practice. President George W. Bush stopped the bombing in 1990, and President William J. Clinton returned the island to the State of Hawaii in 1994. The island, upon its return, was to be “held in trust for a Hawaiian entity.” Following a necessary 10-year period of ordnance removal, the final control of access to Kaho‘olawe was transferred to the State of Hawai‘i in 2003. The island was then placed under the administration of the Kaho‘olawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC). Today, KIRC is responsible for the restoration and sustainable management of the island until it can be transferred to a native Hawaiian entity. These are the first lands that were to be returned to the native Hawaiian people for sovereign maintenance, and represent an important precedent for the potential return of other territories to their original owners.

Initial funds for restoration of Kaho‘olawe Island were allocated by Congress after considerable lobbying by former Senators Daniel K. Inouye and Daniel K. Akaka. These funds (US\$400 million) were meant to rid the island of unexploded ordnance. The Navy was responsible for clearing ordnance from the entire surface of the island and twenty-five percent of the ground’s subsurface, to a depth of four feet. US\$44 million of the funds secured by Sen. Akaka were allocated to KIRC’s management and restoration of the island, and the State issued an emergency US\$1 million to keep KIRC in operation for another two years. All funds were exhausted in early 2015, but the island has only been partially restored.

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed Executive Order 10436 in 1953, reserving the right of the US military to use Kaho‘olawe as a training facility, the order clearly stated several

obligations, including the “eradication of cloven hooved animals” and, upon return of the island to Hawai‘i, “render such area...reasonably safe for human habitation, without cost to the Territory.” These obligations have not been met. Twenty-five percent of the land surface remains to be cleared of ordnance and only one-third of the promised subsurface area has been cleared to date.

In addition to the removal of ordnance, efforts to manage and restore the island have been insufficient. The budget shortfall for the operation of the island is at a critical point as the State is now considering opening the island for commercial activity to generate funds. This plan is in direct conflict with the State’s mandate to hold the island in trust for a sovereign Hawaiian entity, as any revenues generated from that trust should belong to said entity.

Because neither clean-up nor ecological restoration has been completed, the US military and US government have failed in their commitment to fully remediate the island before returning it to the State of Hawai‘i. The lack of commitment to the restoration of the island is resulting in extensive soil erosion. The State estimates that Kaho‘olawe loses 1.9 million tons of soil each year, increasing the cost of restoration and continually damaging marine and terrestrial biodiversity.

Issues of social justice are also embedded in the issue of providing sufficient restoration funds. Native Hawaiians who cared deeply for Kaho‘olawe fought, and in some cases died, to ensure that the island is returned to them in its pre-military condition. Such persons as George Helm, Kimo Mitchell, Emmett Aluli, and Walter Ritte are widely-recognized for their important roles. These native Hawaiians, and others, were the original creators of the non-profit Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana (PKO) which eventually facilitated the termination of the bombing and the return of the island. The PKO (which operates on a very limited budget) has obtained rights for access to native Hawaiians to conduct cultural practices, and continues to engage Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian people and student groups in cultural and biological restoration of the island.

WE the 107 scientists from Hawai‘i, 149 scientists from 35 other states in the USA, and 256 scientists from 49 other countries who attended the meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC) held in Honolulu from 13 - 16 July, 2015, organized under the main theme of Resilience of Island Systems in the Context of Climate Change: Challenges for Biological and Cultural diversity and Conservation:

Recognize that the cultural and biological restoration of Kaho‘olawe Island continues to be a major conservation and socio-ecological issue in Hawai‘i, and has implications in the United States for the US government’s obligations to its states and its indigenous peoples.

Understand that to uphold the original proclamations and guarantees of the US Government, additional funds are required immediately for the continued restoration and management of the biocultural integrity of the island. These monies should include adequate resources to eliminate the remaining feral animals from the island, to conduct biological restoration of the island to a level that greatly reduces the negative impacts of erosion, to make the island “suitable for human habitation”, and to provide an endowment that will allow the State of Hawai‘i, at no cost to itself, to maintain minimal management of the island for as long as is needed before ceding the island to a sovereign Hawaiian entity. We estimate these total funds to be approximately US\$1 billion.

The ATBC makes the following recommendations:

1. The State Fund (or equivalent funds petitioned from the US military) be made available for the full remediation and biocultural restoration of the island;
2. The US military provide at least US\$700 million to complete the environmental clean-up, and remove all remaining ordnance;
3. The US military provide at least US\$300 million to mitigate erosion, restore the native flora, and eliminate invasive animals (feral cats, rats, cloven-hooved animals, etc.).

The full biocultural restoration of Kaho'olawe is important not only for Hawai'i and native Hawaiians, but as a model for how restoration could be achieved following demilitarisation anywhere in the world.

16 July 2015, Honolulu, Hawai'i, USA