

Further Considerations of Community, Culture, and Change

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I Ka Wā Mamua, I Ka Wā Mahope

(Where We Come From—our past, present, and future)

In the cool of the early evening when the sky has turned from the *alaula* of sunset to the purple blue of night, *Manaiakalani* rises in the west and travels to meet the sunrise. The hook of the demigod Maui that captured the sun is a constant reminder of the inseparable linkages of culture and nature, our biocultural environment.

We are separate, yet for all time entwined—we are defined by our connections to place and people, to resources and events, language, and outcomes. The World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Hawai‘i in 2016 provided a showcase for a microcosm of culture, place, challenges, communication, and sharing, as well as opportunities to explore our commonalities and our differences and how to continue to move forward in an ever-changing environment over which we have limited control. The WCC showcased our commonalities of ocean, islands, people, and cultures.

To accomplish much we must work together. How we structure those models and examples and ways of doing are given many names. One of them is *kuleana*—the uniquely Hawaiian concept of a reciprocal relationship between a person who is responsible and the thing that he or she is responsible for. This responsibility comes from engagement at the deepest, visceral level and it takes many forms and models. The engagement happens both individually and collectively. We can call it co-management, or that we are an alliance, or a consortium, a *hui*, a collective, an *‘ohana*.

What is important is that we keep our joint perspective, continuing to work together and embracing change. In Hawai‘i we have continued this tradition and the work moves forward. There are so many examples of collaboration and culturally competent and appropriate communication, teaching, sharing, and community engagement across all levels and generations—local, community, academic, regional, national, and international.

The critical components in this process involve acknowledging the role and definition of communities in conservation, recognizing multiple knowledge systems (cultural, place-based,

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contemporary scientific) and the importance of co-production of partnerships, knowledge, and community-based management. Within this process it is also important to acknowledge that we are the community and to recognize that as members of a community we may disagree about conservation issues.

When looking back at traditional Hawaiian conservation systems, whether it be the *ahupua'a* and *konohiki*, the *kapu* system, or farming and fishing cycles of planting and harvest, it is attachment, engagement, and integration of culture and place that have sustained our lifeways across generations and time. There is no separation between *kama'aina* (people of the land) and the land itself.

The recently completed *Mālama Honua* (Caring for Our Planet Earth) worldwide voyage by the traditional sailing canoe, *Hōkūle'a*, was the embodiment of the ultimate nature-culture journey (Figure 1). The canoe utilized non-instrument navigation to circle the globe, a journey of four years and more than 40,000 nautical miles, covering 23 countries and territories and calling at more than 150 ports to share the importance of community, culture, the Promise to the *Pae 'Aina*, and a promise to future generations. The journey crossed lands, waters, time, and cultures and continues to resonate with and inspire people locally and globally.

Figure 1. The *Hōkūle'a* is a re-creation of a Polynesian double-hulled voyaging canoe that most recently completed a three-year circumnavigation of the planet carrying the message of *Mālama Honua*, the Hawaiian practice of caring for their land, oceans, culture, and people. (Polynesian Voyaging Society and 'Ōiwi TV)



When the Hawai‘i Conservation Alliance (a consortium of more than 25 organizations, agencies, and community groups) decided to focus its 20th anniversary conference around the theme of the integration of natural and cultural resources, biocultural ecosystems, and multi-generational perspectives, it made a commitment to look at Hawai‘i and Pacific issues in an integrated context. This represented a paradigm shift in terms of the level of engagement, one that broadened and expanded the conservation conversation to embrace a larger, more inclusive collaboration across both landscapes and seascapes leading up to the WCC in 2016 and beyond. Examples of this integrated, upscaled process can be found in both small community organizations and major collaborations.

While an international focus was brought on the Hawaiian Islands during the voyage of the *Hōkūlē‘a* and the WCC, there were a number of ongoing partnerships in Hawai‘i that also exemplified the nature–culture journey and shared the many lessons we have learned and continue to learn. By adopting the core values and common sense of our *kūpuna* (elders), Hawaiian communities have used culture to connect in adaptive and flexible ways that will have impacts for many generations.

Kanewai and our community

Kanewai Spring (Figure 2) is one of the last functioning freshwater springs on the east side of the island of O‘ahu, located along Kalaniana‘ōle Highway in the *ahupua‘a* of Kuliouou. In July 2017, a community nonprofit, the Maunaloa Fishpond Heritage Center, along with the Trust for Public Land and other partners, community groups, and families, celebrated the completion of a seven-year journey to purchase the property, which will now be stewarded in perpetuity.

It was the culmination of years of work by hundreds of volunteers (from *keiki* to *kūpuna*) to clear the trash, remove the weeds, learn about the history of Kanewai, and restore the spring. Clear freshwater now flows to the ocean, to the Kanewai Fishpond, the Paiko Wildlife Refuge, and Maunaloa Bay. Native species and seaweed have returned to the system; and, as



Figure 2. (Left) Kanewai Spring as it appeared in the 1930s. (Photographer unknown; image courtesy Ian Lind)
(Below) The restored spring today. (Trust for Public Land)



one looks at these accomplishments, having an appreciation for the saying that “water is life,” *ola i ka wai*, could not be truer.

This project is an example of a successful nature–culture journey that engaged people, place, community, and resources to chart a way forward together to ensure a sustainable beneficial outcome. The three major lessons from this community project include the need for passionate, committed multi-generational community members who want to perpetuate values; for the courage, commitment, and perseverance to lead a vision; and for communication that invites inclusion, understanding, flexibility, and strength. As one participant said:

The *kūpuna* have passed this *kuleana* on to us, and we will pass our *aloha ‘aina* [love and commitment to the land] to our *keiki* and the many children who will visit the spring and learn about its history and the important role it plays in the life cycles of fish, *limu* [seaweed] and native marine life.

The Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative (PICCC):

Small islands and big impacts

The Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative (PICCC) is one of 22 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) that form a network of resource managers and scientists who share a common need for scientific information and interest in conservation. Each LCC brings together federal, state, and local governments along with indigenous communities, nongovernmental organizations, universities, and interested public and private organizations. The LCC partners work collaboratively to identify best practices, connect efforts, identify science gaps, and collaborate on conservation planning and design. By building a network that is holistic, collaborative, adaptive, and grounded in science, the LCCs are working to ensure the sustainability of the economy, land, water, wildlife, and cultural resources in the face of climate change and other large-scale issues.

PICCC is a consortium of more than 20 federal, state, and local agencies, organizations, community groups, and educational institutions. They fund cutting-edge research and projects that inform adaptation by management partners and decision-makers. The goals of these projects are to provide a range of services and tools to help managers in Hawai‘i and the Pacific make informed decisions for the conservation of natural and cultural resources. By working to achieve the co-development of knowledge, PICCC helps managers reach biocultural adaptation and conservation objectives in the face of climate change impacts and ongoing threats such as fire, land conversion, and invasive species.

In Hawai‘i, PICCC funded a community-based project, the Molokai Climate Change Collaboration, as part of the Ka Honua Momona (The Bountiful Earth) effort on the island of Molokai. The project provides support for the development of programs to engage and educate people about climate change adaptation, their resources, and management and stewardship integrated through a biocultural perspective. The aim is to help restore the community to *momona* or abundance, which is part of Molokai’s cultural tradition. What follows is a description of the project based closely on materials provided by organizers.



Figure 3. Traditional fishpond wall, Molokai.
(Kauwila Hanchett / PICCC)

For the past decade, the grassroots nonprofit Ka Honua Momona (KHM) has been caring for two ancient *loko iʻa*, traditional fishponds (Figure 3), located in the *ahupuaʻa* of Kamiloa and Makakupaia just a few minutes east of Molokai’s main town, Kaunakakai. The work has entailed a great deal of effort: removing invasive mangroves and marine algae, rebuilding *kuapā* (fishpond walls), repairing *mākāhā* (sluice gates), and restocking native fish species in the ponds. Through the years the group has cleared shoreline areas that act as habitat for native water birds, opened up freshwater springs, re-established and maintained mangrove-free zones, and restored a greater degree of function to both the Aliʻi and Kalokoʻeli fishponds—all without the aid of heavy machinery.

These accomplishments represent an immense amount of work powered by thousands of school kids, community volunteers, and visitors that have joined KHM in its stewardship efforts. Together, they are restoring *momona* to these natural and cultural treasures. Muddy banks are slowly becoming sandy, sedimentation levels are dropping, water quality is improving, and prized Hawaiian mullet are spawning and flourishing once again within the fishpond walls.

Over time KHM’s *kūpuna*, cultural practitioners, and leadership began to recognize changes in the natural world that seemed to be out of sync with normal patterns. The texture of *ʻeleʻele*, a native *limu*, was more soft and slimy than usual. The highest tides of the year washed above the top of the *kuapā*, exceeding levels from the previous years during which KHM had been caring for the ponds. The behavior patterns of certain marine species, and conditions in general, seemed to be more variable and unpredictable.

As folks began to talk with others, it appeared that KHM was not alone in its observations and questions. Furthermore, local, national, and global dialogue was increasingly turning to the cumulative impacts of carbon emissions, global warming, rising sea levels, and other large-scale environmental changes. This myriad of phenomena, collectively termed “climate change,” was emerging within the global consciousness as the greatest threat ever faced by humankind.

The project brought together Hawaiʻi climate change scientists, traditional fishpond managers from the island of Molokai, and other natural resource managers to work together as a team to share scientific and cultural knowledge and identify adaptive management strat-

egies to prepare for climate change for two of the ancient fishponds on Molokai. This was accomplished through a series of workshops, development of a strategic plan for the ponds and upland areas, development of a curriculum for the island's elementary school students, and creation of a community engagement protocol to help climate scientists work with other communities throughout Hawai'i and the Pacific.

Conclusion

In helping to facilitate community discussions and empowerment, along with fostering lessons learned and best management practices, the partnership between PICCC and KHM, like the Kanewai Spring project, has been a success and lays the groundwork for future collaborative engagement, with communities investing in their future, their resources, and their *'ohana* on their own terms and in a biocultural context.

Education and learning from our elders, along with access to knowledge from communicating and sharing, is critical to our survival as Native Hawaiians. It is through these engagements across time and generations between communities, place, and people that we are able to personalize relationships. By talking story and hearing the stories we keep the connections alive, connections that become timeless. In that way, our nature–culture journey continues.

There is only here, there is only now, there is only us. — Ms. Claire Ku

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