

CONSERVATION  
INTERNATIONAL



Hawai'i

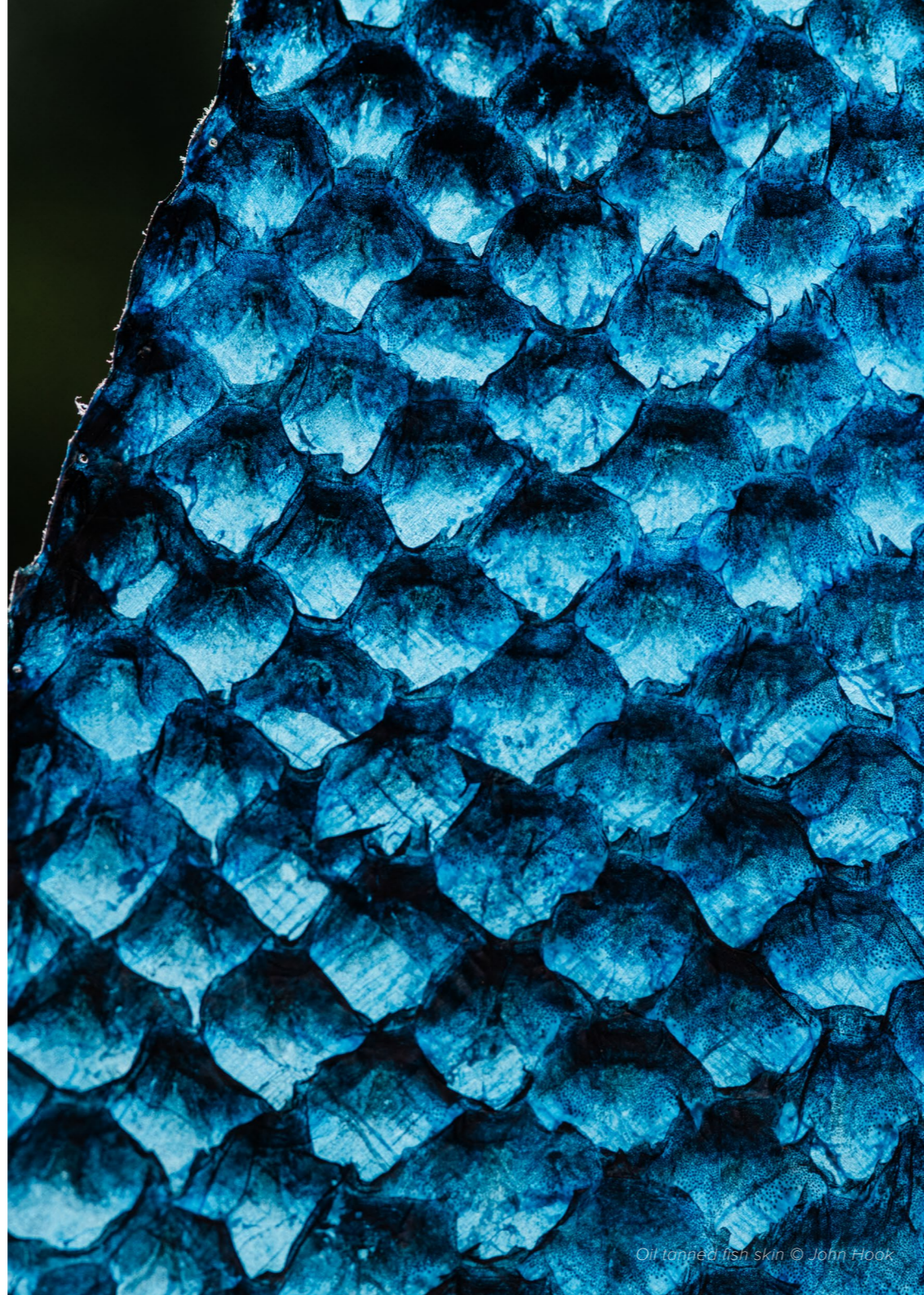
CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL HAWAI'I

# 20 IMPACT 23 REPORT



# Contents

A Letter from our Senior Director	1
Sustainable Seafood Production	2
Inclusive Conservation	4
Equitable Marine Monitoring	6
REEFrame Spotlight	7
Ocean Policy & Incentives	8
Future Generation Investment	10



*Oil tanned fish skin © John Hook*

## A Letter from our Senior Director



**“We all have the ability and responsibility to create a different Hawai’i, one where both people and nature thrive.”**

The 2023 Impact Report of Conservation International’s Hawai’i Program offers a comprehensive overview of the remarkable strides made in advancing a diversity of conservation efforts across Hawaii’s marine ecosystems. Through concerted efforts across the three pillars of the CI Hawai’i program – Sustainable Seafood Production, Inclusive Conservation, and Equitable Marine Monitoring – our team has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to developing system changes that foster more inclusive community engagement and amplify the voices of a diversity of ocean users in the decision-making processes.

Whether we consume poke or other delicious seafood, derive our income from ocean-related activities, or simply enjoy swimming in Hawaii’s waters, we all impact nature in some way. But for residents and visitors alike, we can also contribute to its protection and care. This is a longstanding recognition of the CI Hawai’i program and continued to be at the heart of our 2023 initiatives.

In partnership with fishers, retailers, and restaurants, we develop opportunities for consumers and artists to increase the sustainability of seafood. By forging strong collaborations with local stakeholders and public agencies, we advance the development of equitable relationships that prioritize the interests and voices of Native Hawaiian and local communities in marine monitoring and management. And with the resurgence of tourism, we initiate the development of models to mitigate visitor impacts and identify new opportunities to support local marine conservation efforts.

From producers to consumers, residents to visitors, and keiki to kupuna, we can all contribute to the care for and betterment of Hawai’i. We can all be part of the solution that will help our beloved islands and our people thrive.

With gratitude,  
Matt Ramsey, Senior Director, Conservation International Hawai’i



# Sustainable Seafood Production

Building transparency in supply chains, reducing negative environmental impacts, and promoting sustainable business practices in collaboration with seafood industry partners



## Celebrating Zero Waste Seafood

An estimated 40% of seafood in Hawai'i is wasted in the form of heads, skins, bloodline, and tail meat and in Hawai'i, where food security is a pressing concern, we teamed up with Chef Hui to prove that incorporating lesser-valued cuts on menus can have triple win outcomes: they reduce seafood waste, boost food security, and support local fishers. The 8th annual Sustainable Seafood Month in October 2023 was a celebration of Hawaii's unique community partnerships and highlighted how the chef community reduces seafood waste in our culinary and seafood industries, one dish at a time. Through community events and workshops with our partners Chef Hui and Under My Umbrella, we showcased innovative ways to prepare and serve underutilized and often discarded parts of fish. Some of the highlights from the month were three sold-out dinners hosted at Nami Kaze Hawai'i with Chef Jason Peel; Mud Hen Water with Chef Ed Kenney; and Tiffany's Maui with Chef Sheldon Simeon, where over 180 guests were treated to full six course gourmet dinners using the entire fish in creative and delicious ways (think fish eye "caviar" and ahi tails). These dinners sparked a movement within the chef community and many of the preparations, especially the use of ahi tails, continue to be used in menus. [Watch this 3-part video series](#) for more on the Sustainable Seafood Month festivities and outcomes.

Left: Smoked ahi bloodline panisse - One of many innovative dishes created from often discarded fish parts during the Hawaii Seafood Month campaign.



## Reimagining Waste Using Ancestral Techniques

Globally, over six million tons of fish skins were thrown away in 2023. In November, we launched one of our newest sustainable seafood initiatives to challenge this statistic: transforming fish skins into leather. We were fortunate to have Janey Chang, an artist and educator from the Tseil-Waututh Territory in Canada, bring her knowledge of natural fish skin tanning and dyeing to Hawai'i. Over two six-day workshops on Hawai'i Island and O'ahu, more than 30 local artisans, fashion experts, cultural practitioners, students, and entrepreneurs from across the Pacific came together to learn these ancestral techniques and create beautiful leather pieces from fish skins. The O'ahu workshop concluded at the Patagonia store in Honolulu, where participants showcased leather pieces such as wallets, earrings, and bracelets. This event highlighted CI Hawaii's vision for fish-skin tanning as a local solution to seafood waste on the Hawaiian Islands and throughout the Pacific. [Watch this video](#) for more on the fish leather workshops.

Top left: Janey Chang skins freshly caught fish  
Top right: Two value-added products for sale by local entrepreneurs (a hand stitched bottomfish leather wallet and tuna leather earrings)  
Bottom left: The fish skin leather process and products were shared with the public at Honolulu's Patagonia store  
Bottom right: CI staff, local artists, and entrepreneurs at the fish leather workshop



# Inclusive Conservation

**Incorporating Hawaii's diverse community priorities, voices, and perspectives in governance and decision-making**

## I Ola 'Oe Indigenous Knowledge Summit

In November, CI Hawai'i hosted the I Ola 'Oe Summit as the culmination of two years of work from Lui-Walton Indigenous Knowledge Systems Fellow, Dr. Kalei Nu'uhiwa. The phrase "I Ola 'Oe" means "I thrive through you" and comes from Hawaiian restorative chants, referring to the interdependence of human and environmental health. The Summit brought together federal, state, and county agencies as well as local conservation organizations, community leaders, educators, and funders to explore the intersection of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems in Hawai'i. Through the exchange of stories and lived experiences, participants learned about the value and complementarity of different knowledge systems and their potential to transform how we engage with the natural environment. Attendees participated with thoughtfulness and enthusiasm, committing their time and energy to the discussions and leaving with a pledge to support the application of Indigenous methodologies in their work. Building on the shared relationships and knowledge gained from the Summit, we will amplify the impact of this effort by publishing the Summit proceedings and hosting subsequent gatherings in 2024.



## Visitor Management Action Plan in Hōnaunau

With nearly ten million visitors in 2023, Hawai'i is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. In the face of this high tourist traffic, systems for visitor management are essential to protecting Hawaii's culturally and ecologically significant places. In response, communities across Hawai'i have stepped in to lead the development and implementation of regenerative tourism models that prioritize natural resource health and provide direct benefits to Native Hawaiian communities and local residents.

In 2023, CI Hawai'i partnered with the Hui 'Ohana O Hōnaunau (a lineal descendant group) and other community members at Hōnaunau Bay to roll out a Visitor Management Action Plan. The plan details a holistic and collaborative approach to addressing and mitigating negative visitor impacts and is a critical first step to advancing the community's vision for sustainable fisheries management at Hōnaunau. Among other activities, the Action Plan includes implementing a visitor education program, prioritizing community engagement in place-based stewardship, and normalizing the use of traditional place names in Hōnaunau. With the potential for similar plans to scale across the state, CI Hawai'i is committed to supporting communities as they lead the charge to protect important ecological and cultural sites impacted by tourism.

*Left: Dr. Kalei Nu'uhiwa kicking off the I Ola 'Oe Summit  
Center: A young community member fishing on the shore of Hōnaunau Bay*



# Equitable Marine Monitoring

**Amplifying the value and efficacy of Indigenous and place-based knowledge in marine monitoring practices to inform and improve decision-making**

## Informing Visitor Management through Improved Human-Use Monitoring

Biological and ecological monitoring are essential for effective coastal and nearshore management. Of equal importance to CI Hawai'i and our coastal community partners is human-use monitoring to track and document unprecedented and unsustainable increases in ocean use and the resulting pressure on marine resources from residents and visitors alike. In 2022 and 2023, we piloted human-use monitoring efforts in Kealahou and Hōnaunau on Hawai'i Island and collected critical data to inform visitor management and fisheries stewardship initiatives to reduce the human-imposed pressure on fish populations. Data collected allowed the team to analyze temporal patterns in visitor use and human impact on environmental indicators like water quality and wildlife presence.

These pilots resulted in long-term monitoring collaborations in Kealahou in partnership with Ho'ala Kealahou Nui and the Ala Kahakai National Historical Trail. In Hōnaunau, monitoring will continue as a part of the community's launch of their Kapalilua Kia'i 'Āina Hōnaunau Education Aha (KĀHEA) education program in March 2024. These efforts had the additional benefit of increasing community capacity for data collection, with 365 data collection hours logged and two community presentations on the data collected.

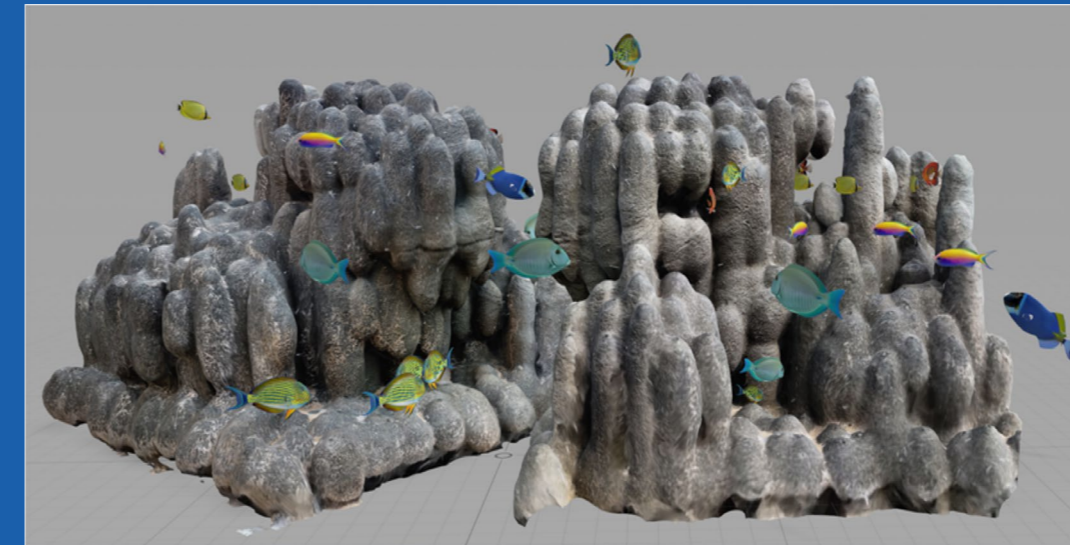
*Right: University of Hawai'i Mānoa undergraduate student conducting seaweed monitoring with the Hui 'Ohana O Hōnaunau at Hōnaunau Bay.*



# Spotlight: REEFrame

## An Innovative and Collaborative Approach to Coral Restoration in Hawai'i

Hawaii's precious coral reefs are impacted by a multitude of threats, including land-based sources of pollution, ocean warming, and unsustainable fishing practices. In October 2023, the innovative coral reef restoration project, known as REEFrame, officially kicked off. REEFrame, funded by NOAA, is a three-year collaboration with Conservation International, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, the Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources, ocean technology firm Natrx, ocean engineering firm Oceanit, and workforce development nonprofit ClimbHI. Using innovative DryForming™ technology, the project will work with local stakeholders from the Native Hawaiian, fishing, surfing, and scuba diving communities to inform the design and placement of large concrete modules off Waikīkī Beach on O'ahu Island to create two permanent coral nurseries that will mimic the natural habitat of coral reef ecosystems. The structures will initially store corals-of-opportunity (living coral colonies dislodged from other locations by storms or other disturbances) for a variety of coral restoration projects, gradually becoming permanent natural reefs following colonization by coral larvae and other sea life. REEFrame is currently in the design and permitting phase and the team is working closely with local stakeholders in recognition of the vital cultural, economic, and environmental value of the Waikīkī region.



*Visualization of 3D-printed REEFrame module. © Natrx*

**“NOAA is excited to be supporting our partners’ innovative efforts to restore coral reefs off the coast of Waikīkī Beach... Coral reefs provide countless benefits for fisheries and coastal communities, and reef restoration projects are crucial for preserving the future of these important habitats.”**

**Carrie Selberg Robinson**, Director of NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation



# Ocean Policy & Incentives

## Supporting and informing policy around Hawaii's ocean ecosystems and resources

### Elevating Community Voices

In 2023, CI Hawaii's Conservation Policy & Incentives Lab (the Lab) worked with partners to transform how diverse perspectives and voices are included in conservation decision-making and nearshore marine management. Among those, the Lab supported an effort to identify pathways to more equitable relationships between public agencies that manage natural resources and the Native Hawaiian and local community members those agencies depend upon to inform and improve resource management. Through this work, the Lab produced a handbook designed to guide public agency staff and community members in ways to better collaborate on these shared priorities. The handbook highlights the constraints that each group works within and the opportunities to create more equitable and functioning collaborations with each other. The handbook has been reviewed and widely supported by members of public agency staff and communities as an important contribution and tool. The final version will be available to the public by the end of 2024.

In addition, the Lab provided follow-on support for a 2022 project that identified opportunities for decision-makers and community members to strengthen and expand community-led conservation efforts through the State's Makai Watch Program. The Lab presented its findings to the Hawaii's Community Foundation's (HCF) Holomua Marine Initiative Advisory Committee. At the request of HCF, the Lab also prepared summary materials of its findings that could be shared with interested stakeholders, including state lawmakers. HCF subsequently published a funding opportunity informed by the Lab's analysis that will make up to \$50,000 per request available to official Makai Watch community organizations to build community capacity and improve nearshore management.

Right: Maui beach



### Driving Innovative Ways to Fund Conservation

Access to long-term, reliable funding is often a barrier to effective and sustainable marine conservation. In 2023, the Conservation Policy & Incentives Lab supported our partners at the State Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) in strengthening DAR's abilities to sustainably manage aquatic and marine resources for the benefit of the people of Hawai'i. The Lab's work provided critical technical assistance needed to put a landmark piece of legislation passed in 2021 into action. This new law will help provide much-needed conservation funding with a first-of-its-kind Ocean Stewardship User Fee. The Lab conducted feasibility studies and provided critical analysis that helped inform the legislation, which is anticipated to generate between \$1-5 million annually in conservation funding. We continue to work with DAR to expand their ability to identify new and innovative funding approaches for conservation interventions designed to protect or improve nearshore water quality.

Top left: Commercial ocean users such as snorkel tour participants will contribute to the new Ocean Stewardship Fund  
Bottom right: Unanimous support for the Board of Land and Natural Resources as they adopt the administrative rules on December 15, 2023

### Using Local Experience to Inform Global Projects

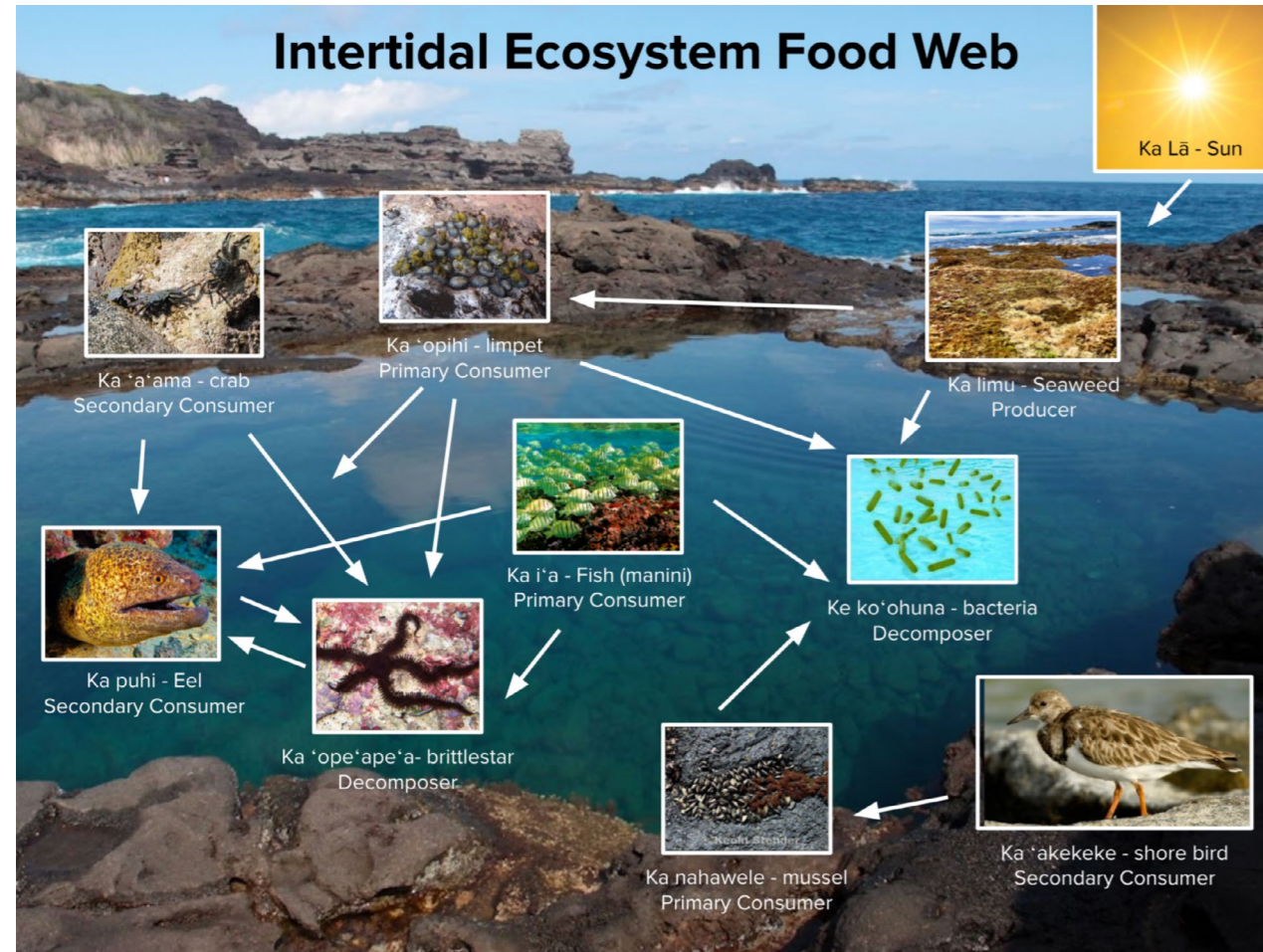
In 2023, CI Hawai'i provided support and guidance to two global CI projects that rely on multi-disciplinary teams to implement work across multiple countries. These global projects are working to increase the flow of private finance for nature-based businesses and encourage the flow of direct funding to Indigenous Peoples-led conservation projects. To be successful, the projects needed to acknowledge and embrace sensitivities around local practices and needs, taking the interests of all project stakeholders into account. CI Hawaii's experience convening and facilitating complex collaborations between Native Hawaiian and local communities, businesses, governments, and others has enabled us to develop a skillset that informs and strengthens CI's global work well-beyond Hawai'i shores.





# Future Generation Investment

Fostering the growth of ocean champions who will understand, value, and care for the ocean



## The 'Āko'ako'a Curriculum

Our holistic approach to community-based conservation places an emphasis on nurturing the next generation of community leaders and ocean champions. In 2023, CI Hawai'i offered hands-on workshops, teacher trainings, and graduate student mentorships that reached over 160 participants on Hawai'i Island. Our 'ōpio (youth) education investments included in-classroom 'Āko'ako'a curriculum implementation with 6th graders from Kealakehe Intermediate School. The 'Āko'ako'a curriculum's thematic focus of ecosystems, both in Hawaii's nearshore areas and as they exist in the student's daily lives, takes lessons from the natural world and applies them to their experiences as students and community members. Students participated in discussions around the positive influences they can have on natural ecosystems which supports a holistic view of their lived experiences and how their daily choices impact their well-being and the health of 'āina, all the natural elements that sustain life.

Left: A screenshot from the 'Āko'ako'a curriculum shared with the sixth grade students at Kealakehe Middle School

## Meet Our Interns

In 2023, Conservation International Hawai'i developed several new opportunities and programs to cultivate ocean champions in critical areas of need: Indigenous knowledge, seafood, tourism, and law. By providing opportunities to learn from, participate in, and lead a diversity of ocean conservation efforts, we fostered the development of a variety of passionate conservation leaders. In partnership with four universities, we were honored to host and mentor 14 undergraduate, graduate, and law students to advance the understanding, use, and protection of Indigenous, traditional, and local marine knowledge, catalyze the creation of ocean conservation finance strategies, and explore solutions to Hawaii's seafood waste challenges.



CI Hawai'i mentored a total of five students from two universities in 2023. Jenna Seagle, an Environmental Management master's student from Duke University, completed a summer internship and master's project research to support the market based sustainable seafood initiative. Her report, "A Deep Dive into Hawaii's Seafood Industry: Reducing Fish Processing Waste" will be made available in 2024. In addition, a group of four undergraduate students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute completed a five-month project titled, "Assessing the Feasibility of Using Value-Added Products to Reduce Seafood Waste in Hawai'i" which investigated the feasibility of creating fish broth and leather products.

Ioanna Gotschall, a graduate student from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo's Tropical Conservation Biology & Environmental Science program, contributed to our place-based environmental stewardship efforts in Hōnaunau. In collaboration with the Hui 'Ohana O Hōnaunau, Ioanna and CI Hawai'i staff developed a monitoring plan focusing on ecologically and culturally significant species for place-based management. In 2024, the community will start applying recommendations from the plan and implement seaweed and water quality monitoring in partnership with the Department of Land & Natural Resources.



The Lab provided different experiential learning opportunities for six law students from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa William S. Richardson School of Law. Projects covered a range of legal issues in conservation, such as identifying opportunities to increase the inclusion of Native Hawaiian knowledge and practices in federal fisheries decision-making and approaches to agreements and conflict resolution for data-sharing between Native Hawaiian and local communities, and state agencies. As a result of the law students' great work with the Lab and organizational partners, we have seen increased interest from partners to collaborate with early-career legal professionals.

Left: Worcester Polytechnic Institute students show off their fish leather keychains made at the CI Hawai'i office  
Center: Team cleans fish with Hōnaunau community members  
Right: Lab interns explored regulatory and equity aspects of community-based marine monitoring such as community-based fishery data collection



# MAHALO

Every success story in this report is possible because of the vision, passion, and trust of our donors and partners from across Hawai'i and beyond. Thank you for your commitment to nature, to people, and to our shared future.



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