

Forest Legacy Project

Maunawili Valley

City and County of Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii



FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2024 Forest Legacy Program Funding	\$4,950,000
FY 2024 Non-Federal Cost Share	\$1,650,000
FY 2024 Project Costs	\$6,600,000
FY 2024 Project Acres	672
Forest Legacy Funding To Date	\$0
Total Project Costs	\$6,600,000
Total Project Acres	672



Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Maunawili Forest (MF)	672	\$6,600,000	\$4,950,000	\$1,650,000	Draft 2024

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Maunawili Valley, in Kailua, Oahu is at risk of residential development. Maunawili Forest (MF) tract, under federal Sentinel Landscape consideration, will add 672-ac in FEE OWNERSHIP to the State Waimanalo Forest Reserve (WFR) and link 62,250-ac of protected lands, including adjacent Kawainui and Hamakua wetlands recognized by an international conservation treaty. MF is a part of a vast network of forests, streams, and wetlands in the valley, which control flood waters and filter sediment from entering Kailua Bay. The distinct peaks of Mt. Olomana State Monument, which appear in many Hawaiian chants and stories, rise from MF to the ridge to connect with WFR. State ownership will improve forest management, safeguard stream water quality and quantity, sustain habitat for federal and state listed endangered water birds and provide climate benefits to coastal Kailua (pop. 15,231). The State will partner with community stewards and cultural practitioners to protect MF's natural, cultural, and recreational resources and ensure compatible management of state and community-owned parcels in the valley. MF will be managed for forest restoration, increased trail safety, and improved public access to regional trails in the Koolau Mountains.



View of Maunawili Forest, Mt. Olomana, Koolau Mountains from adjacent property (Photo by Trust for Public Land)

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PROJECT FEATURES

Important

- **SCENIC:** Expansive views of MF, Mt. Olomana State Monument, and forested sheer cliffs are defining natural resource features within a viewshed of a designated scenic area. MF is visible from Kawainui Marsh and Mt. Olomana connects and inspires nearby communities in Kailua, Kaneohe, and Waimanalo.
- **PUBLIC ACCESS:** State acquisition of MF will allow enhanced community planning and management of recreational access to the extensive trail network within Maunawili Valley. Many trails in the valley are currently inaccessible to the public because access is blocked by surrounding private property.

- MF has 1.3 mi of trails that connect to the 2,385-ac State WFR. State acquisition of MF and the adjacent golf course parcel will increase public recreational access to state forests for hiking, hunting and cultural uses such as gathering of plant materials. 15.9 mi of trails are within 1 mile of MF.
- The Maunawili Falls Trail is currently closed to preserve natural and cultural resources and minimize disruptions to neighboring residential areas stemming from overuse. MF acquisition will allow managed public access to this trail with improved safety conditions for recreation and cultural uses.
- **AQUATIC HABITAT:** MF boasts a network of freshwater sources including Api and nearby Ainoni Springs and 4.88 miles of streams on the tract which provide most of the water that flows into two internationally recognized wetlands of importance: Kawainui and Hamakua.
- MF is part of a key watershed influencing the health and hydrological function of Kawainui wetland, which drains into Kailua Bay. MF slows and decreases sediment laden stream water runoff as it flows downslope into the wetlands and improves near shore coastal water quality important for recreation.
- MF lies within Kawainui watershed, which as a total watershed is rated an 8 out of 10 for quality in the Hawaii Stream Atlas. The presence of native forest and aquatic species, high native macrofauna species diversity and endangered aquatic species such as damselflies contribute to the high ranking.
- **ENDANGERED:** MF provides potential habitat for federally and state listed endangered species present on adjacent lands including 3 species of Hawaiian damselflies and a forest bird (Oahu elepaio). 4 species of endangered Hawaiian waterbirds fly over MF seeking water and nesting areas at Kawainui.
- MF has been documented as foraging and roosting habitat for the Endangered Hawaiian hoary bat (*Aeorestes semotus*). The hoary bat is threatened with extinction due to habitat loss, collisions with man-made structures such as wind turbines, impact of pesticides on food sources and roost disturbance.
- **ECONOMIC:** A 1997 study by University of Hawaii economists valued the watershed benefits of the Koolau Mountains at \$11.5 - \$23 billion (2021 dollars). MF is part of this range and provides groundwater recharge, enhanced water quality, biodiversity, tourism, military, and climate benefits.
- **HISTORIC:** Noteworthy Native Hawaiian archaeological features on the tract include: Kukapoki temple, petroglyphs, ancient terraces, irrigation channels, and a royal palm tree lined carriage way leading to a historic estate where King David Kalakaua celebrated his election to the monarchy in 1874.
- Queen Liliuokalani, the last Hawaiian monarch, relaxed in the outdoor stone lined bath on the MF property. The bath was built for her visits to a vandalized historic residence that recently burned. "The Queen's Retreat" is said to be where she was inspired to write the famous song Aloha Oe in 1878.
- **CULTURAL:** Natural resources are cultural resources as Native Hawaiian culture is inextricably connected to land and water and dependent on healthy ecosystems. MF's mountain peaks, geological formations, tree groves, springs and streams are famed in Hawaiian stories, songs, and chants.
- According to traditional Hawaiian stories, Mt. Olomana is the site of an ancient battle between a warrior on Oahu (Olomana) and Palila from Kauai. Palila killed Olomana with his war club and divided his body into two smaller pieces that are now prominent landmarks (Mt. Olomana and Oneawa Hills).
- **UNIQUE ECOSYSTEMS:** MF is tall and lush with a mixture of endemic native trees, ferns and groundcover species, indigenous tree and plants brought by Hawaiians that have significant cultural values and uses, and recently naturalized populations of a wide variety of tropical tree species and lianas.

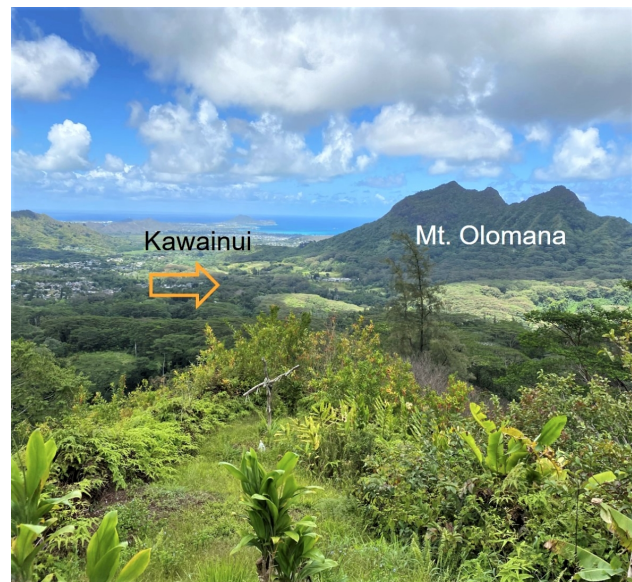


Maunawili Stream and the adjacent Maunawili Falls Trail run through the MF tract (Photo by Trust for Public Land)

- MF contains culturally important plants and trees used for food and in traditional Hawaiian practices, including taro, considered an ancestor of Native Hawaiians, native ferns, breadfruit trees, mulberry trees, mamaki trees, candlenut trees, coconut trees, and native hardwoods such as ohia and koa.
- Maunawili and Omao Streams transport water from the Koolau Mountains over MF to Kawainui where it collects and reaches depths of 60 feet. The marsh stores surface water and provides flood protection for Kailua town as well as endangered waterbird habitat.
- Kawainui was developed as a 450-ac fishpond by Hawaiian settlers in Kailua 1000 years ago. It was the largest fishpond in Hawaii and provided a key food source. Free flowing freshwater from MF forests and streams is required for the fishpond to continue to function as a traditional food source.
- Portions of MF have been used for agricultural production since 1100 AD. The State plans to work with partners to restore native trees and sustainably manage non-timber forest products and agroforestry crops on MF and adjacent community acquired parcels.
- MF has 56 acres of rich Hanalei soil well suited to forest growth and agroforestry uses. Hanalei soils are found on bottom lands and low terraces along streams, generally with poor drainage. Ancient Hawaiians recognized these important properties and planted wetland taro in patches in the region.

Threatened

- **LANDOWNER CIRCUMSTANCES:** The owner, a real estate investment company, previously attempted to change the underlying county zoning of MF in the County Sustainable Community Plan to create a large residential subdivision.
- MF is in danger of being sub-divided by the owner, which has taken tangible steps to getting the property under development. The owner submitted subdivision application plans for over 200 acres of lands zoned for agriculture in 2016, 2017, and 2019.
- **ABILITY TO DEVELOP:** Residential and other development in Kailua has already occupied most sites that are not steep cliffs, wetlands and the ocean. However, housing demand in Kailua and all of Oahu continues to rise. MF is only a 25 minute drive to downtown Honolulu.
- Land in the State agricultural land use classification with county agricultural zoning can be subdivided into residential subdivisions where little or no agriculture occurs. Under current laws, these lands can be subdivided into 2-ac lots. MF is the remaining parcel amidst a sea of development.
- Historic, archeological, and cultural features on MF do not protect the property from development. Subdivision would result in grading, felling of exceptional or historic trees, destruction of historic and cultural sites, and loss of important forest values, scenic and recreational resources.
- A new housing development could connect to existing water, electric, street lights, and telecommunications in adjacent subdivisions and would have convenient access to major roads (Kalanianaʻole Hwy, Pali Hwy, and the H-3 Hwy).
- **ADJACENT LAND USE:** MF has a prime location in scenic Maunawili Valley near the towns of Kailua, Kaneohe, Waimanalo, and Honolulu making it desirable for development. The property is also near major highways, beaches, shops and restaurants, and is only a half hour from Pearl Harbor and the airport.
- In 2021, Oahu (pop. 1,016,508) had 3.33M visitors who spent \$5.66B. Visitors come to Kailua for its verdant cliffs, white sand beaches, trails, water sports, restaurants, shopping, and cultural features. MF is just 5 miles from these amenities.
- Out of state buyers with the flexibility to work from home during the pandemic have anecdotally led to recent real estate trends of properties going into bidding wars and offers well exceeding list prices in this strong market for sellers.



Arrow shows where MF and Mt. Olomana are threatened by residential development (Photo by DLNR-DOFAW)

- The median sales price for single family homes in Kailua increased 17% from August 2020 to \$1.5M in May 2022. In May 2022, these homes spent a median of 41 days on the market and sellers received 5% over list price.

Strategic

- Kawainui Marsh State Wildlife Sanctuary, adjacent to MF, is an internationally recognized wetland of importance by the Ramsar Convention, a global treaty calling for international cooperation for wetland conservation. As the largest wetland in the state (797-ac), it provides endangered waterbird habitat, improves coastal water quality and sequesters carbon which are important in a warming climate.
- U.S. Marines identified MF as high priority to both national defense and conservation in a pending federal Sentinel Landscape designation. The Marines are applying for 10.5M Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) funding to protect MF and prevent incompatible development close to active training areas (Bellows AFB, Kaneohe MCBH). REPI funds could be non-federal match for FLP.
- CONSERVATION STRATEGY: The state Koolaupoko Watershed Restoration Action Strategy recommends stream preservation and Kailua watershed restoration as a high priority. MF's streams have exceptional riparian qualities that complement existing adjacent protected lands, including the State WFR, Kawainui and Hamakua wetlands and watershed. The two main streams providing water to the wetlands traverse MF.
- CONNECTIVITY: MF links 62,250-ac of protected lands including Nuuanu Pali State Wayside and WFR. MF is part of a larger acquisition in Maunawili Valley, which includes state purchase of the golf course, which it plans to restore to forest and nonprofit purchase of 150-ac adjacent to Kawainui wetland for traditional Hawaiian agriculture. MF connects the valley's forested and wetland landscape.
- The State, nonprofit stewards, Hawaiian cultural practitioners, and descendants will collaborate to develop a management plan for MF and the surrounding valley that will preserve and restore biocultural resources and ensure responsible management including watershed protection, recreational access, education, and traditional agriculture compatible with endangered water bird species conservation.
- Some MF trails and roads are technically public but are not managed to facilitate public access or maintained for safety. Helicopter rescues of hikers to Maunawili Falls and conflict with adjacent landowners was common until the July 2021 trail closure. MF acquisition will enable the State to plan for and enhance responsible public access to historic trails and protect sensitive cultural sites.
- CONSERVATION INITIATIVE: MF is identified as a high priority watershed in Hawaii's Rain Follows the Forest Plan (2011). The Governor's 30x30 Watershed Initiative committed the State to protect 30% (253,000 acres) of watershed forests by 2030. Hawaii's Forest Action Plan recommends management including invasive species removal and reforestation to restore watershed and increase climate resilience.
- Acquisition of Maunawili lands including MF is a top priority of Governor Ige who expressly stated in the 2019 State of the State Address that he wants to ensure that the valley can resume its traditional role as a place of free-flowing water with abundant traditional agriculture, agroforestry, and rich cultural resources.
- The State Legislature passed three resolutions in 2018 & 2021 affirming support for purchase, preservation, and restoration of agricultural and conservation lands in Maunawili Valley to protect the important ancient and historic sites, trails, and waters in Maunawili Valley and urging various federal, state, and county entities to acquire and protect the property.



View from wetlands and agricultural areas adjacent to Maunawili Valley Forest (Photo by Trust for Public Land)

- The County of Honolulu's 2017 Koolau-poko Sustainable Communities Plan calls to preserve scenic views of ridges, of upper-valley slopes and from trails in Maunawili through public acquisition. The plan also endorses preserving significant historic features, which are abundantly present on MF.

Readiness

Pre-Appraisal/Market Analysis	1
Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	0
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	1
Stewardship Plan (or equivalent)*	1
Readiness Total Tally Score	5

Supporting Parties

Senator Brian Schatz and Senator Mazie Hirono; Representative Ed Case and Representative Kai Kahele; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; United States Marine Corps (Marine Corps Base Hawaii); The Trust for Public Land (TPL); Hawaii Land Trust; Community Groups (Hookuaaina; Hikaalani; Hui Kawainui-Kailua Ka Wai Ola); Community Groups (Hui Maunawili-Kawainui; Hui o Koolau-poko); Community Groups (Kauluakalana; Ahahui I ka Lokahi); Kailua Historical Society; and Luluku Farmers Association and Aloha Aina Health Center.

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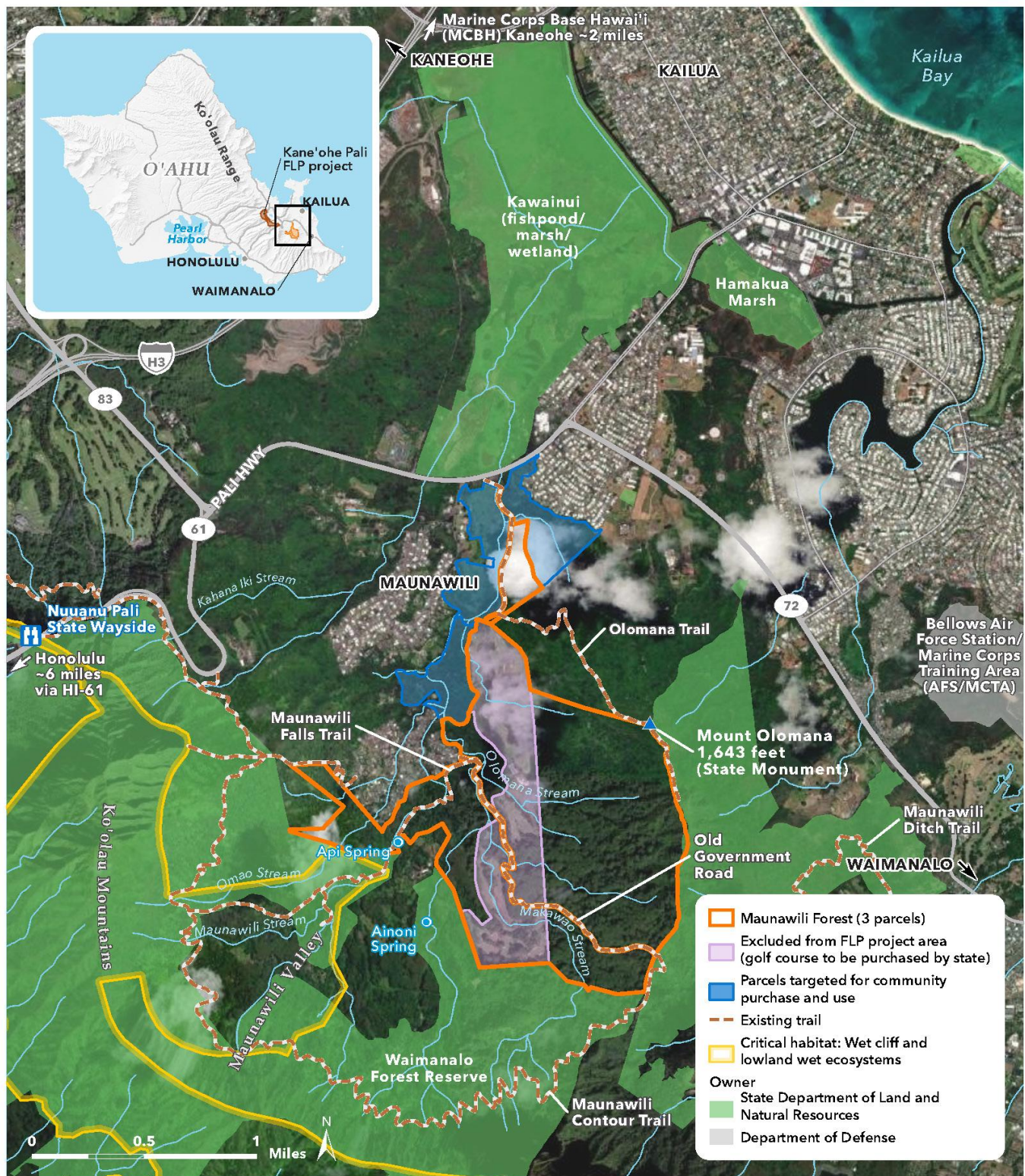
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ISLAND OF O'AHU, HAWAII

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