

Forest Legacy LWCF Project

East Maui Rainforest

Nahiku, Maui Hawaii



FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2026 Forest Legacy Program Funding \$9,930,000
FY 2026 Non-Federal Cost Share \$3,310,000
FY 2026 Project Costs \$13,240,000
FY 2026 Project Acres 773



Forest Legacy Funding To Date \$1,900,000
Total Project Costs \$25,240,000
Total Project Acres 1,927

★ Project Location
■ Forest Legacy Areas

Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Hana Highway Coastal Rainforest	417	\$3,167,000	\$1,900,000	\$1,267,000	Funded 2022
Hana Highway Coastal Rainforest Future Phases	258	\$6,833,000	\$4,100,000	\$2,733,000	Proposed 2027
Nahiku Cost-Share Donation Tract	233	\$800,000	\$0	\$800,000	Proposed 2026
Nahiku Tract	540	\$12,440,000	\$9,930,000	\$2,510,000	Proposed 2026
Paakea Stream Addition to Koolau FR	74	\$1,605,000	\$1,500,000	\$105,000	Proposed 2024
Paakea Stream Cost-Share Donation Tract	405	\$395,000	\$0	\$395,000	Proposed 2024

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The lush coastal rainforest of the 540-acre (ac) Nahiku Tract and 233-ac Cost-Share Donation Tract (collectively NT) is located on the scenic northeast coast of Maui along the famous Hana Highway. As part of the East Maui Rainforest Project (EMR), NT FEE acquisition will enhance ongoing efforts to expand and strengthen protection and management of the region's forests on the slopes of Haleakala volcano. NT will be added to the adjacent state of Hawaii (HI) protected Koolau Forest Reserve (KFR), which is part of a contiguous network of 108,000 ac of managed reserves that encompass Haleakala. NT will secure public access to forest, stream, and shoreline resources that support recreational, cultural, and subsistence uses. NT contains designated federal critical habitat for 5 endangered plant species and roosting and foraging habitat for the federally endangered Hawaiian bat. Six streams flow through NT, providing habitat for native stream fauna and freshwater for coastal fisheries. Maui's coastal forests are becoming increasingly rare as they are cleared for development or replaced by invasive species. Under private ownership, NT is highly threatened by conversion due to its scenic features, accessibility, and lack of protection.



The lush coastal forests of NT extend over 1 mile upland from the sea (Photo by DOFAW)

PROJECT FEATURES

Important

- **PUBLIC ACCESS:** The northeast coast of Maui has the fewest shoreline access points on the island, restricted in numerous locations by private ownership or development. NT will provide public access to natural and cultural resources for hiking, fishing, cultural practices, and subsistence gathering.
- **T/E SPECIES:** NT has 17.2 acres of federal critical habitat for 5 T/E plants, with confirmed populations of coastal flatsedge and potential presence of Horse-eye bean, which occurs near NT. Acquisition will aid recovery by providing management access for surveys and restoration plantings.
- High quality habitat in Hanawi Stream supports a robust population of the federally endangered native Pacific Hawaiian damselfly, currently only known from a few remaining populations in east Maui and Molokai. Acquisition will protect priority habitat for this rare species.
- The forests of NT provide foraging and roosting habitat for the federally endangered Hawaiian hoary bat, HI's only native land mammal. The bat is threatened with extinction due to habitat loss, collisions with structures (e.g. wind turbines), pesticides impact on food sources and roost disturbance.
- NT will help preserve an important dark undeveloped sea-to-land flyway for federally endangered Hawaiian Petrel (largest known nesting colony upland at the National Park) and Newell's Shearwater (nest in remote montane habitats). Artificial lights disorient seabirds causing injury or even death.
- Marine habitat extending 2.5 miles off NT is federal designated critical habitat for the federally endangered Hawaiian monk seal. Protection and proper management of the forest and streams on NT will support the health of the near-shore marine ecosystems critical for monk seal recovery.
- **AQUATIC HABITAT:** NT's 6 streams (2.85 mi) support populations of native stream fish and shrimp that will benefit from enhanced stream protection and management as part of KFR. These streams also provide nutrients and freshwater for healthy coastal fisheries.
- Four species of native oopu (goby) have been observed in 4 of NT's streams. Acquisition will protect goby habitat and preserve stream connectivity that is essential for the goby's survival as they migrate upstream by ascending steep waterfalls.
- With many east Maui streams diverted for ag uses, community groups are leading legal efforts to restore streamflow for cultural uses and habitat protection. Although 3 of NT's streams are diverted above NT into a ditch, instream flow standards have been established to enhance stream connectivity.
- The instream flow standards for NT's streams require sufficient flow to restore native aquatic ecosystems. These standards, in conjunction with addition of NT to KFR, will strengthen the protection of stream habitat for native goby, shrimp, crustaceans, and damselflies.
- The coastal waters off NT are classified as AA water quality (highest EPA Clean Water rating). Forest protection and soil erosion mitigation upslope will preserve the clean and clear water that flows to the sea.
- **DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES:** Native Hawaiians comprise a high proportion of rural northeast Maui's population (36% vs. 10% island wide) and have disproportionately high unemployment, poverty, and health risks. NT will provide access to land and waters essential for traditional customary practices.
- **CULTURAL:** NT's forest, stream, and coastal resources support Native Hawaiian cultural practices, such as gathering of plant materials for lei making or medicinal practices, subsistence shoreline or stream fishing, opihi (limpet) picking, and limu (seaweed) gathering.



Left: Coastal flatsedge; Top: Pacific Hawaiian damselfly; Bottom: Hawaiian goby (Photo by DLNR)

- Streams in east Maui are a critical cultural resource for traditional kalo (taro) farmers that rely continuous stream flow to grow kalo. On-going efforts by the community to restore streamflow have resulted in the full restoration of NT's Makapipi stream for cultural uses.
- NT contains suitable areas for restoration of indigenous hala (Pandanus tree) that are a large component of adjacent coastal forests. Hala is a significant cultural resource, used for weaving, cordage, and medicine, that has lost much of its former range due to development and invasive species.
- UNIQUE: The undeveloped mixed native/non-native forest of NT provides irreplaceable coastal habitat which is rare on Maui (43% converted to development or invasive species). NT is adjacent to the Waiohue cliffs, where surveys have noted high quality remnant coastal habitat including T/E plants.
- SCENIC: NT is located along the world-renowned Hana Highway that meanders along Maui's rugged northeast coast. The highway is famous for stunning views of lush forest, towering cliffs, 50 historic bridges, and 20 cascading waterfalls. Visitors can enjoy the scenic beauty of NT from the highway.
- ECON/NON-TIMBER: Tourism is the largest economic driver on Maui (38% of the GDP). In 2022, Maui saw 2.9M visitors spend \$5.82B (\$244pp/day) on lodging, car rental, and attractions. Driving Hana Highway past NT's scenic beauty is one of the most popular tourist experiences on Maui (500 cars/day).
- HISTORICAL: The precursor to the Hana Highway was a trail constructed by the Chief of Maui in the 1500s that likely encircled all of Maui. Remnants of this historic trail, also known as the "Piilani Trail", still exist on NT. Acquisition will enable the state to protect and restore this trail.
- Hana Highway is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its significance in engineering, transportation, and social history. The Highway, an engineering achievement that connected Hana with the rest of Maui, retains historic integrity in its narrow lanes, bridges, and amazing views.

Threatened

- LACK OF PROTECTION: 92% of NT is zoned agricultural, allowing for subdivision into roughly 75 lots ranging from 2-40 acres with 2 dwellings/lot allowed. The other 8% is zoned conservation, which does not allow subdivision for housing development.
- In the agriculture zone, intensive farming, land and forest clearing, homes with large grassy lawns, and infrastructure are allowed without approval/permits. Agricultural uses allowed in the conservation zone include cultivating and harvesting of horticultural crops, and animal husbandry.
- LANDOWNER CIRCUMSTANCE: The landowner, a commercial real estate company, is a major private landowner in Hawaii. They are supportive of a state purchase of NT for conservation but have expressed their need to sell on a short timeline.
- The landowner's current objective is to sell non-core assets including agricultural and conservation zoned forest land such as NT that are not being used. In 2018, they sold 41,000 acres of ag land in central Maui to a joint farming venture; this was one of the largest land sales in state history
- A potential buyer has shown interest in acquiring a 250 acre portion of NT and has been in discussions with the landowner. The buyer could easily clear the forest to build a luxury estate and intensive agriculture.
- ABILITY TO DEVELOP: NT is easily accessible from Maui's largest town, Kahului (40 miles), which has an international airport and commercial district. NT is only 9 miles from the town of Hana, which has a regional airport that makes this rural region more accessible for residents and visitors.
- NT is attractive for development due to its agricultural zoning and accessibility from the nearby towns of Hana (10 miles to east) and Wailua (less than 2 miles to west). It also has serene ocean, forest, and stream views, proximity to electrical infrastructure and access from Hana Highway.

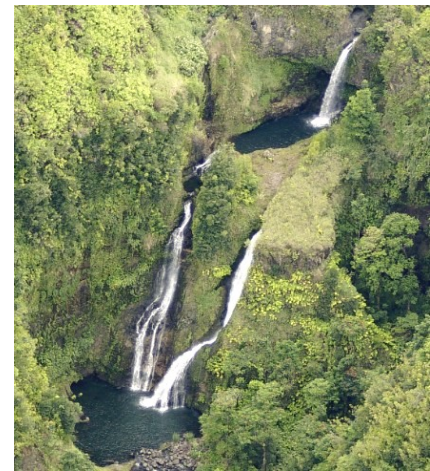


Lots in the Nahiku area have been cleared for homes and agriculture (Photo by Zillow)

- **ADJACENT LAND USE:** The scenic beauty of northeast Maui has created extremely high demand for properties. Residential sprawl is marching relentlessly eastward from Kahului, as properties like NT are quickly sold to speculators seeking to subdivide and convert lands for luxury homes or agriculture.
- The Nahiku area has approx. 70 ag lots, some of which abut NT. 10 lots have sold since 2021 and 5 lots with houses are for sale. One lot listed for \$5.4M boasts an off-grid farm, infrastructure, and 7 permitted structures. NT could easily meet the same fate.
- From 2000-2020, Maui's population grew 28% (128k to 164k), and Maui saw a near-record 2.9M visitors in 2022. These increases are straining the region's limited resources and accommodations, putting substantial pressure on ag and forest land west of NT that are being converted to urban development

Strategic

- **NATIONAL PLAN:** NT contains critical habitat for 5 endangered coastal plant species, 2 of which (*Cyperus pennatiformis* and *Vigna owahuensis*) are included in the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Recovery Plan for Multi-Island Plants. Recovery strategies at NT include surveys, enhancing wild populations, establishing new populations, building protective fences, and maintaining genetic stock.
- Acquisition supports recommendations from the USFWS Recovery Plan for the Hawaiian Hoary Bat and the Hawaii State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) to protect bat roosting and foraging areas, such as the coastal forests of NT, from degradation and disturbance.
- Acquisition of NT supports the recommended action of conserving monk seal habitat identified in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Plan and SWAP. NT will support monk seal habitat conservation through upland forest and stream protection and management, which benefit the health of near-shore waters.
- **STATE PLAN:** Managed as part of KFR, NT will support the 2016 Hawaii Forest Action Plan's (FAP) strategies of preserving stream and nearshore water quality, protecting areas for outdoor recreation, and forest protection and restoration to mitigate climate change. The FAP also advocates for the traditional Hawaiian land management system that enhances connection of forests to the sea.
- The 2014 Hawaii Coastal and Estuarine Conservation Plan identifies NT as a priority area that supports the plan's priority of conserving coastal areas with ecological, recreational and cultural values. To conserve these values, the state will manage NT to protect coastal forest habitat and flowing streams for endangered species, other native fauna, healthy near-shore waters, and public access.
- NT will be incorporated into the KFR management plan, which address on-going and future management. The state will consult with the community on this plan, which will include managed public access as well as protection and restoration of natural and cultural resources. Plans for managed access may include a reservation system to prevent overuse and damage to sensitive natural resources.
- **COMPLEMENT PROTECTED LANDS:** In support of the state's initiative to strategically connect protected areas in the region, NT will be added to the adjacent 31K acre KFR. NT, along with 850 acres of state land planned for addition to KFR, will expand the contiguous network of state, federal, and private non-profit managed forests on Haleakala to over 142K acres.
- Acquisition will complement a funded FLP FY22 tract located 7 miles west of NT. The state also submitted a FLP FY24 IRA proposal for a 74-acre small strategic tract (pending). Efforts are ongoing to acquire other privately owned forest land adjacent to KFR ("Potential Future Acquisition" on map; no willing seller at this time). These strategically located tracts together make up the EMR.



*Hanawi Stream provides important habitat for goby which ascend steep waterfalls
(Photo by County of Maui)*

- **LANDSCAPE GOALS:** The majority of Maui's upland forests are protected, however most coastal areas such as NT are not, resulting in a large gap in protection of lowland forests and streams. The state is actively working to strengthen and expand the continuity of protection and management of Maui's forests from the summit to the sea through acquisition of NT and other private lands along the coast.
- NT will help achieve the goals of the East Maui Watershed Partnership (EMWP), a working relationship of 7 landowners established in 1991 to increase watershed protection through collaborative management. EMWP currently encompasses 100,000 acres of uplands forests on the northeast slope of Haleakala. As part of KFR, NT will enlarge EMWP by connecting to the lowland coastal forests.

Readiness

Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	0
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	1
Readiness Total Tally Score	3

Supporting Parties

United States Representatives Ed Case and Jill Tokuda; United States Senators Mazie Hirono and Brian Schatz; National Park Service - Haleakala National Park; US Fish and Wildlife Service, Pacific Islands Office; Trust for Public Land; Maui County Department of Water Supply; Maui Nui Seabird Recovery Project; and Sierra Club Hawaii, Maui Group.

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