

East Maui Water Authority Newsletter

COUNTY OF MAUI



Photo: N. Moran

What is the East Maui Water Authority?

In November 2022, Maui County residents voted to amend the Maui County Charter to establish the Department of the East Maui Water Authority (EMWA). This action reflects a clear community directive to move toward locally governed, publicly accountable water systems that align with Commission on Water Resource Management (CWRM) orders, instream flow standards, and Native Hawaiian rights, while continuing to support productive agricultural use. Guided by the department's community regional board, the 'Aha Wai O Maui Hikina, which represents the

communities of Nāhiku, Ke'anae, Honomanū and Huelo, the EMWA launched in November 2024. The EMWA is tasked with developing watershed management plans, acquiring and managing water systems to ensure efficient and sustainable distribution of our local water resources. Its work to steward East Maui water resources centers on environmentally sustainable practices, local expertise and Hawaiian cultural and generational knowledge.

“Eia no o Kūlanihāko‘i, No kākou e mālama ai!”

Here indeed is Heaven reflected on Earth, it is for all of us to Protect, Preserve and Sustain

'Aha Wai O Maui Hikina and East Maui Water Authority Motto

Message From The Director

Welcome to the inaugural East Maui Water Authority (EMWA) newsletter. We are excited to launch this new way to share updates about our work and highlight opportunities for community involvement. As we enter 2026, we reflect with gratitude and pride on our accomplishments in 2025- our first full year of operations. This foundational year focused on building capacity through the hiring of new staff, conducting meaningful community engagement, launching EMWA's first community grant program, and working closely with the Department of Land and Natural Resources and Mahi Pono to advance a mutually beneficial partnership that supports agricultural viability, community priorities, and long-term water stewardship. We also celebrated EMWA's first birthday on November 8th, marking an important milestone in our department's growth.

Aloha nō,
Gina Young
Director, East Maui Water Authority

Community Engagement

2025 Community Conversation Series Recap

In June and October 2025, the East Maui Water Authority hosted seven meetings and two field trips in Wailuku, Kula, Ha'ikū, Huelo, Ke'anae and Nāhiku as part of its ongoing Community Conversation Series. The purpose of these meetings were to share our mission and progress as we become operational, gather community guidance and input, and ensure the department's values, strategic planning and operational plan align with the expectations of the public.

In June, participants identified key themes to prioritize:

- Transparent and accountable local control and stewardship of East Maui water resources to ensure ecosystem health and future water availability for all users
- Equity, access, and fairness in management of water resources
- Robust programs to improve watershed health and environmental oversight
- Integration of cultural, historical, and scientific knowledge and perspectives
- Proactive Infrastructure upgrades and investment to improve system efficiency

In October, attendees provided guidance on our operational planning and identified the top priorities as:



Community Conversation Series participants weigh in on EMWA priorities during October Ke'anae meeting. Photo: EMWA

- County acquisition of the East Maui water system
- Development of an East Maui-based operations hub for ecosystem stewardship
- County watershed programs to increase mauka to makai connectivity and increase stream monitoring through comprehensive and ongoing data collection
- Establishing and supporting community watershed stewardship and education programs including hydrology workshops, kūpuna knowledge transfer, stream monitoring training, and facilitating an "Adopt-A-Stream" community stream monitoring program

Across all meetings, participants viewed county ownership of the water system as more beneficial than private ownership. Discussions emphasized the importance of improving efficiency in water tracking, making system repairs, and addressing infrastructure vulnerabilities. Concerns about equitable water access were prevalent, and attendees expressed a desire for intergenerational knowledge transfer and increased civic engagement, including through

a base yard "living classroom." Additionally, protecting ecological and watershed health was a top priority, with participants calling for integrated cultural and environmental stewardship.

Community members also stressed the need for the Authority to establish and maintain transparency in its operations through continued community meetings and two-way communication. We appreciate the community's input, and the Public Finance Initiative for providing free technical expertise for this series, along with co-sponsors Nā Moku Aupuni O Ko'olau Hui, Ha'ikū Community Association, and the Kula Community Association. We encourage the public to watch for future engagement opportunities. The Department affirms its commitment to working with those directly impacted by the East Maui water system to ensure transparency and effectiveness, as they understand that "Eia nō 'o Kūlanihāko'i, nō kākou e mālama ai- Here, indeed, is Heaven reflected on Earth. It is for all of us to protect, preserve, and sustain."

| Community Engagement

**Recap of East Maui Water Authority
Media Relations and Outreach 2025**

Print/Online Publications	Community Meetings	Outreach Events
EMWA mentioned 23 times in 8 different publications	10 meetings with 195 participants in 5 different locations (including online)	3 events Meeting with 175 members of the public

Informing • Engaging • Connecting

| Grants Program

EMWA Selects Recipients For Inaugural Grant Program

In January, EMWA selected five recipients for its inaugural community grant program, which supports local projects focused on water stewardship, cultural practices, environmental restoration, and community collaboration in East Maui. Projects funded through the program are expected to begin early this year.

The grant program is to support and encourage community-based collective action and long-term stewardship of East Maui water resources and cultural practices. Informational meetings were held in Ke‘anae, Ha‘ikū and online to share about the program with community members and encourage applications from residents and organizations.

“Through the application process, the EMWA learned about the diverse ways East Maui communities are caring for wai, or freshwater resources, and identified opportunities for increased resource-sharing and collaboration”, shared Director Gina Young.

The recipients of this first round of grants include:

- East Maui Farm, led by Nāpua Hū‘eu. \$20,000 for the Honomanū Lo‘i. The community-led ahupua‘a restoration effort will include stream and shoreline monitoring to track the impacts of water diversion and drought, as well as documentation of ecological improvements associated with restored stream flows and expanded wetland kalo patches.
- Nā Moku Aupuni ‘O Ko‘olau Hui, led by Jessie-Ellen Kekiwi-Aweau. \$20,000 for its Lo‘i and ‘Auwai Restoration Project in Ke‘anae. The project focuses on restoring traditional water infrastructure that supports food sovereignty, cultural continuity and ecological health in one of East Maui’s historically significant wetland taro-growing regions. *(Continued on Page 4)*



Aerial photo of East Maui Farm in Honomanū, one of the inaugural EMWA grant recipients. Photo: N.Hū‘eu

Grants Program

(Continued from Page 3)

- Friends of Twin Falls, represented by Maile Davis. \$19,000 for Kupu Wai o Ho‘olawa, a yearlong youth and community education program. The project will bring together students, cultural practitioners, and scientists to study the Ho‘olawa Hydrological Unit through place-based learning, water testing, and mapping.
- Okada Design, led by Corinne Okada Takara, a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) Educator and Artist with family ties to East Maui. \$8,000 for the Mizu-Wai Story Weaving Kit. The project combines lauhala weaving workshops with an online toolkit to facilitate community storytelling and oral history exchanges that document connections between people, place and water.
- Kahu ‘Āina: Earth Guardian Network, led by Liana Murillo. \$8,000 for ‘Ōhi‘a Lehua Waihonua. The project expands an outdoor education program for children in Huelo, emphasizing intergenerational knowledge-sharing, stream stewardship, and cultural and scientific observation.

Director Gina Young thanks all who submitted applications for this year’s round of grants and encourages interested applicants to stay connected and apply for future funding opportunities in 2026.

For more information about EMWA grants, visit mauicounty.gov/EMWA

East Maui Water Authority Receives Support from the Hawai‘i Community Foundation and the Public Finance Initiative

The East Maui Water Authority is proud to announce that it has received a \$40,000 grant from the Hawaii Community Foundation’s Fresh Water Initiative program to support water stewardship planning in Nāhiku, Ke‘anae, Honomanū and Huelo.

The Freshwater Initiative program supports organizations working to strengthen freshwater security across the Hawaiian Islands by building leadership and organizational capacity to advance water conservation, groundwater recharge, and water reuse efforts.

Grant funding will support the authority’s watershed planning efforts, which will integrate Native Hawaiian cultural knowledge and community guidance to help inform departmental program priorities and promote the long-term health of the East Maui watershed.

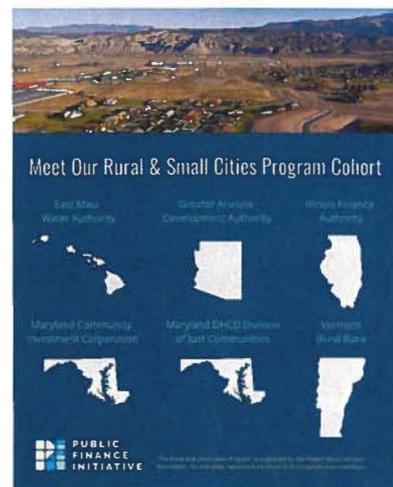
The department has also received support from the Public Finance Initiative (PFI), a nonprofit organization that partners with governments and mission-driven organizations to embed community values into public finance decision-making. PFI’s work focuses on building local capacity and advancing equitable, long-term investments, particularly in rural and under-resourced communities.

PFI provided pro bono assistance to support the East Maui Water Authority’s Community

Conversation Series held in June and October 2025.

Input gathered during these meetings will help shape the authority’s strategic and operational plans.

In October 2025, the East Maui Water Authority was selected to participate in PFI’s Rural and Small Cities Program, which assists communities facing systemic barriers to infrastructure funding by building local capacity and addressing long-standing patterns of disinvestment. Through the program, the authority is developing strategies to secure funding for projects that advance community priorities and long-term water stewardship goals.



The East Maui Water Authority is one of six entities nationwide that have been selected for the PFI Rural and Small Cities Program. Photo: PFI

Grants Program



TAKE OUR GRANTS SURVEY!

Your input helps us to set priorities and expand our East Maui Water Authority Grants Program and Community Benefit work. Anyone can take this survey. Your responses will only be used for planning and community engagement purposes and will not affect your eligibility or chances of receiving a grant should you apply in the future.

Scan the QR code to take this short survey today!

Spotlights

'Aha Wai O Maui Hikina Board Member Spotlight: Jonathan Likeke Scheuer

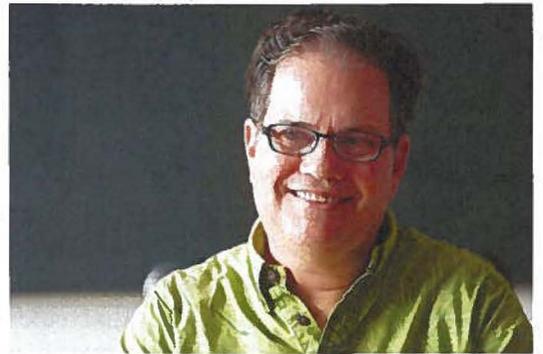
'Aha Wai O Maui Hikina benefits from rare professional expertise through Board Chair Jonathan Scheuer, who brings more than 25 years of experience in water policy, land management, and Native Hawaiian rights advocacy across public, nonprofit, and private sectors.

The board provides guidance to the East Maui Water Authority on acquiring and managing East Maui water resources and watersheds. It consists of eleven members representing the Nāhiku, Ke'anae, Honomanū, and Huelo license areas, with members required to have water resource management experience and community ties. Dr. Scheuer serves as the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) representative. Following his success as the board's first Chair, the Maui County Council reappointed him to a five-year term in February 2025.

Dr. Scheuer's career reflects a sustained commitment to navigating Hawai'i's most complex water governance challenges.

After earning a graduate degree in Environmental Studies with a focus on Environmental Policy from Yale University, he worked for the state legislature and the Department of Land and Natural Resources' Natural Area Reserves System.

Scheuer later earned a Ph.D. with doctoral research focused on Hawai'i's water code and the landmark Waiāhole case. His dissertation examined how scientific evidence and Native Hawaiian claims were evaluated by the Commission on Water Resource Management and the Hawai'i Supreme Court, analyzing the political processes shaping water allocation decisions. This academic foundation has informed his



Jonathan Likeke Scheuer is the current Board Chair of the 'Aha Wai O Maui Hikina, the East Maui Water Authority's community regional board. Photo: Cory Lum/Civil Beat

professional work for decades, providing analytical tools for navigating water policy controversies across the pae 'āina.

Dr. Scheuer spent six years at the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), serving as Director of the Land Management Division—a division he established. In this executive role, he oversaw management of approximately 28,000 acres, directed acquisition strategies, and helped shape board-level land management policy. As a Policy Analyst at OHA, Scheuer worked with Hui o Nā Wai 'Ehā helping to restore water to the four streams of Nā Wai 'Ehā—Waihe'e, 'Īao, Waikapū, and Waiehu—one of the most significant water restoration achievements in modern Hawaiian history. Currently he serves as Water Policy Consultant for DHHL, providing specialized expertise on water rights, allocation, and policy development. *(continued on Page 6)*

Spotlights

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Dr. Scheuer has an extensive record of public board service. Appointed to the State of Hawai'i Land Use Commission in July 2014, he served for eight years and became Chair in July 2018. His tenure provided deep experience in state land use regulation, administrative law, and legal frameworks governing development and conservation. He also served on the O'ahu Island Burial Council as Vice Chair.

Over the past two and a half decades, Dr. Scheuer has participated directly in nearly every major water controversy across the pae 'āina. His experience spans the legal, scientific, political, and cultural dimensions of water disputes, making his perspective invaluable as the board works to acquire and operate East Maui's water system.

Throughout his career, Scheuer has demonstrated an ability to build coalitions among Native Hawaiian communities, environmental organizations, government agencies,

"I hope that in ten years our conversations are more about what we are planting and growing together, and less about who gets what."

and private landowners. His professional approach emphasizes collaboration where possible while maintaining a firm commitment to Native Hawaiian rights and environmental protection. This balance enables him to navigate contentious issues with both diplomatic skill and principled advocacy.

Scheuer's experience informs his strategic vision for the East Maui water system. He supports operational improvements such as remote intake operations, flow measurement to ensure compliance with instream flow standards, and infrastructure upgrades, including lining ditches and reservoirs, to increase system efficiency.

His broader vision emphasizes watershed management grounded in traditional ahupua'a principles, integrating mauka-to-makai approaches

that align Native Hawaiian resource management traditions with contemporary conservation science. Looking ahead, Scheuer hopes to see the board successfully operate the entire water system with long-term security and extend watershed conservation into lower portions of the ahupua'a, advancing full mauka-to-makai restoration. Reflecting on this work, he notes, "The time we spend fighting takes away time to plant more trees, restore the watershed, and build more relationships with each other. I hope that in ten years our conversations are more about what we are planting and growing together, and less about who gets what."

Scheuer emphasizes that traditional and customary practices, including water governance, are protected Native Hawaiian rights. He encourages community members to attend board meetings, ask questions, and remain engaged. His persistence in fulfilling the voters' mandate—even in what has felt like a "David versus Goliath" effort—reflects the dedication and professional expertise he brings to this vital work.

Meet the 'Aha Wai O Maui Hikina



(L-R) Jonathon Scheuer, Chair (DHHL), Councilmember Shane Sinenci (East Maui), Moses Kahiamoe, Jr. (Huelo), Francis Quitazol (Kula), Kyle Nakanelua, Vice Chair (Ke'anae), Robert "Bobby" Pahia (Kula), Nonnan "Bush" Martin, Jr. (Ke'anae), Moses Bergau, Jr. (Nāhiku), Verahyn "Sissy" Latham (Nāhiku), Lurlyn Scott (Huelo-Hā'ikū), Harry Hū'e'u, Jr. (Honomanū). Missing: Janet Redo (Honomanū) Photo: EMWA

The Aha Wai O Maui Hikina, East Maui Regional Community Board is concerned with the Nāhiku, Ke'anae, Honomanū, and Huelo license areas and shall, investigate, acquire, manage, and control water collection and delivery systems with staff that consists of a regional director, grant writers, community liaisons, and water system technical analysts.

The Board consists of eleven members with a minimum of two members each

from Nāhiku, Ke'anae, Honomanū, and Huelo license areas and must have experience in water resource management and watershed restoration in the applicable watershed and reside in the applicable community plan area. The three remaining members are appointed by the council based on the following requirements: one member with experience in water resource management who is actively engaged in ranching, farming, aquaculture, or

loko i'a in the area where water service is provided; one member with experience in water resource management who resides full-time in the area where water service is provided; and one member who is a representative of the Hawaiian Homes Commission, and is recommended by the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands. Of these eleven members, seven are appointed by the Maui County Council, and four are appointed by the Mayor.

| Spotlights

Kia'i Wai Community Spotlight: Lilia Davis

Twenty-three-year-old Lilia Davis is the first person featured in our EMWA Kia'i Wai Community Spotlight, an ongoing series highlighting emerging community leaders in environmental stewardship and water resources protection across East Maui. In her recent interview with EMWA staff, Lilia Davis shared about her conservation work, background, what inspires her, and what she hopes others can learn from her experience to further environmental stewardship efforts on-island.

Born and raised in Ha'ikū, Davis earned her undergraduate degree at the University of Denver where she majored in Environmental Science before completing a master's in Environmental Management at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. After graduate school, she returned home, where she has dedicated her work to what she describes as aloha 'āina, caring for the land.

A Spark of Curiosity

Davis said her interest in water rights began when she learned the history of a water-filled ditch behind her childhood home. Realizing that the water had been diverted from nearby streams, "It gave me an understanding that this water doesn't belong here," she recalls, "and that this ditch is taking water away from the streams that I should be playing in but can't because there's no water left there." She described the realization as pivotal in shaping her academic and career path.

Community Oriented

Davis grew up under the guidance of her mother, community activist Maile Davis, who emphasized a community-first

approach to creating change. She also credits her grandfather with teaching her to respect the history of East Maui lands while riding horses through the area, navigating by what she describes as his "mind maps" of the 'āina.

The Power of Data

Davis' first exposure to conservation work came during the sixth grade where she participated in a one-week internship in the Kupukupu 'Āina Program at Haleakalā National Park. More than a decade later, she now works across several roles:

- Intern with the Kamehameha Schools Natural and Cultural Stewardship team to care for 'āina in ways that honor Ke Ali'i Pauahi's legacy and strengthen community, culture, and long-term stewardship of land and water
- Community-driven water research in Ha'ikū, Maui, including stream monitoring and water quality analysis fieldwork
- Translating field work data into accessible formats for community use (reports, newsletters, visuals, and story maps). Her writing often bridges Indigenous knowledge and Western science, with an emphasis on environmental stewardship, water governance, and community resilience

At the center of her work, Davis said, is one guiding question "How do we turn data into something that the community can use?"



Lilia Davis embodies her role as a kia'i wai through education, research, and hands-on field work through both western and cultural scientific lenses. Photo: L.Davis

This comes as no surprise, as her motivation has long been rooted in human connection to place and local relationships with streams. She said helping residents understand water-quality data — and using it to support community decision-making — is among the most rewarding parts of her work.

"For example," she states, "one community member just reached out to see results of chemical contamination within water sources in Ha'ikū. It was cool to look at data done by another amazing student and communicate to him, 'These are the results, no need to worry, but if you still want to do testing, we can absolutely help you.'"

Kuleana

When asked what fulfilling her kuleana means to her, Davis shared, "I am always working to uphold the 'ōlelo no'ēau, "He ali'i ka 'āina, he kauwā ke kanaka, that the land—and wai—is chief, and the people are it's servants." She credits internships throughout middle school, high school and college with expanding her understanding of conservation on Maui and recommends Hawaii Conservation Compass as a resource for students seeking opportunities.

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Her Message to Emerging Kia'i 'Āina
Davis emphasized that environmental stewardship is accessible to everyone. “Our kūpuna were the greatest scientists,” she said. “Anyone can be a scientist. You don’t need to wear gloves or take samples, just use your observation—kilo what is around you in your place.”

She encourages young people to seek mentorship and not be afraid to reach out to those already doing the work. “Being brave and reaching out gets you a really long way.”

Learn More

More information on Davis's work can be found here:

- haikumaui.org/haiku-water-quality
- Instagram [@haikustreamproject](https://www.instagram.com/haikustreamproject)

For statewide conservation internship information visit:

- conservationcompass.org
- kupuhawaii.org

We Are Hiring!

Join Our Team!

**East Maui Water Authority
Program Specialist for Watershed
Planning**

POSITION HIGHLIGHTS

- Oversees Water Resources Program
- Develops, implements, and evaluates watershed plans and programs
- Leads 'Aha Wai o Maui Hikina Board through watershed planning process
- Permanent full-time position with the County of Maui with a full benefit package
- Based in Kahului and East Maui

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO APPLY

Questions? E-mail gina.young@co.maui.hi.us

Stay In Touch With Us!

Upcoming Community Events That EMWA is Attending

- **East Maui Taro Festival**
Saturday April 18, 2026, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Hāna Ball Park
tarofestival.org



Make sure to subscribe to our e-newsletter for future announcements and updates!