

Council Chair
Alice L. Lee

Vice-Chair
Keani N.W. Rawlins-Fernandez

Presiding Officer Pro Tempore
Tasha Kama

Councilmembers
Gabe Johnson
Kelly Takaya King
Michael J. Molina
Tamara Paltin
Shane M. Sinenci
Yuki Lei K. Sugimura



Director of Council Services
Traci N. T. Fujita, Esq.

Deputy Director of Council Services
David M. Raatz, Jr., Esq.

COUNTY COUNCIL
COUNTY OF MAUI
200 S. HIGH STREET
WAILUKU, MAUI, HAWAII 96793
www.MauiCounty.us

December 27, 2022

TO: Honorable Michael P. Victorino, Mayor

FROM: Kelly Takaya King
Councilmember, South Maui Residency Area
Chair, Climate Action, Resilience, and Environment Committee

SUBJECT: **ACQUISITION OF WAIPUILANI AND KULANIHAKOI WETLANDS
PROPERTIES IN KIHEI**

As I serve my final week on the Maui County Council, I would like to express my strong support for the preservation of the Waipuilani and Kulanihakoi gulch wetlands in Kihei. There are parcels in these gulch and wetland areas which are currently undeveloped and should remain that way, primarily to aid in flood control, support biodiversity and avoid worsening the chronic muddy deposits that plague Kihei during intense storm events.

Specifically, these TMKs are critical to protect from development as further loss of these wetland properties in the gulches would exacerbate Kihei's flooding issues:

- [\(2\) 3-9-001-162:0000](#) (7.0 acres)
- [\(2\) 3-9-062-019:0000](#) (2.42 acres)
- [\(2\) 3-9-001-164:0000](#) (3.34 acres)
- [\(2\) 3-9-001-007:0000](#) (12.95 acres)
- [\(2\) 3-9-059-001:0000](#) (2.14 acres)
- [\(2\) 3-9-058-061:0000](#) (1.08 acres)
- [\(2\) 3-9-046-011:0000](#) (e.53 acres)

In September 2022, the Maui County Council passed Bill 91, CD1 (2022) (Ordinance 5421) to conserve and protect wetlands. This legislation will advance the policy to increase and protect wetlands from development and allow for restoration in areas not yet developed. While the wetlands mapping is being completed, the above-identified parcels targeted for development should be acquired as soon as possible and protected as open space.

Aerial photos of these parcels show their locations in the path of water and mud flows from the gulches during storm events. Allowing development of the parcels in areas known to flood would further deplete the natural environment and contribute to worsening of the ongoing problems caused by decades of wetlands loss.

Wetlands provide many benefits when allowed to function naturally:

- Improved water quality by intercepting runoff, removing pollutants through biological processes
- Erosion control – wetland plants stabilize soils and reduce water velocity
- Flood abatement – wetlands soak up flood water
- Habitat enhancement for threatened and endangered species
- Cultural activity area
- Water supply – retained water is released slowly into surface water and ground water
- Aesthetics – wetlands are appealing as open space

Through my terms as the South Maui residency area councilmember and four decades as a resident of Kihei, I have seen the impacts of development on our ecosystems and infrastructure. Flooding events are a regular occurrence, brown water smothers our reefs, and native ecosystems are stressed and disappearing. These impacts will continue to worsen as the climate changes and sudden and severe rain events become more common. It is incumbent upon all branches and levels of government, in partnership with community advocates and organizations, to do what is necessary to preserve these sensitive ecosystems which serve as important natural infrastructure and open space.

Recently, much progress has been made in restoring the potential of green infrastructure and ecosystems to exist in harmony with the built environment. The work of a number of South Maui non-profit wetlands groups, as well as the Kihei Drainage Master Plan Ecological Alternatives Assessment, shows that the preservation of these wetlands not only provides the aforementioned benefits, but also allows implementation of natural solutions which serve as infrastructure with low impact and less cost than conventional concrete channelization.

As a reminder, the Council did include the purchase of the Kulanihakoi parcels in a previous budget; however, the amount allowed by the Council (\$750,000.00) was not acceptable to the previous owners.

Unfortunately, the recent purchase of parcels within the Waipuilani and Kulanihakoi gulches and wetlands by another developer has included destructive activity commenced in preparation for development. These potential new projects and the accompanying degradation threatens the integrity of the wetlands systems and would result in ecological harm while making South Maui less resilient to storms and climate change.

I can think of no better use of Maui County's Open Space, Natural Resources, Cultural Resources, and Scenic Views Preservation Fund than to acquire parcels in the Waipuilani and Kulanihakoi wetlands so that they may be preserved and managed as public resources, either by the County or capable community groups. Doing so would be in alignment with the Maui Island Plan and would be an investment benefitting many generations to come.

December 27, 2022

Page 3

I urge the County Administration and the Conservation Planning Committee to do all that is within your power to allocate funding and take action so that the Waipuilani and Kulanihakoi wetlands may be acquired, preserved and managed as public lands.

Mahalo nui loa,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kelly T. King".

Kelly Takaya King

Cc: Conservation Planning Committee
Kihei Community Association
Mayor-Elect Richard Bissen
Brandi Corpuz
Robin Knox

Aloha, My name is Brandi Corpuz and I am a Kula Kai resident homeowner, a small business owner in Maui County for 35 years, an educator, community advocate and the Executive Director of Rooted Kekahi Me Ka Aina.

I am writing to you today to ask you to consider supporting a budget request from Appendix A, Part II Special Purpose Revenue Open Space funds for the Fiscal Year 2024 budget. This request would be in the amount of \$5 million dollars to acquire the Waipuilani (TMK 3-9-001-007:0000) and Kulanihakoi (TMK 3-9-001-164:000) wetlands in Kihei. This acquisition would allow protection and restoration of our 2 most important wetlands in Kihei.

The Maui County Public Works, Maui County Planning Department and the Maui County Conservation Planning Committee are now beginning to map our wetlands throughout Maui County and we want to make sure that our 2 most critical waterways are protected and used for the greatest good that they can possibly be.

As a community member and homeowner in very close proximity to the Waipuilani Gulch, I have enjoyed exploring this area's natural habitat. Home to endangered Hawaiian species such as the Hawaiian Hoary bat and the Hawaiian Sphinx Moth, our gulches are special and need to be protected. Recent destruction by Peter Savio, of most of the trees in this area, has caused a loss of habitat for these endangered creatures that we may never recover from. This destruction was done without a permit and it caused more damage from flooding.

The damage was caused by the developer cutting the majority of the trees surrounding the gulch and piling or leaving the trees

where they fell. These cut trees have created dams within the gulch that cause the flood waters to divert or overflow into other areas where they did not previously affect. Allowing private businesses and individuals to own our wetlands does not make good sense.

As a South Kihei resident who has been working on the South Maui Vision plan both personally and professionally, I see these areas as cultural and historical treasures that must be preserved and protected. I want to be able to go to the Waipuilani and Kulanihakoi gulches to have green open space to enjoy and learn about our environment with my children and grandchildren.

I want to fulfil our 1998 and 2022 South Maui Vision plan for our community. In the past 20 years, our community has asked for green spaces, wetlands and cultural/historical protection and preservation. There are many reasons for this vision but the greatest one for me is for community enjoyment and protection of our precious resources. There are many parks or green spaces but not many are in our older neighbourhoods from Waipuilani to Kulanihakoi.

The Waipuilani and Kulanihakoi Gulches once were a valued part of the wetlands of Kihei. They have become a hazard because of construction, poor infrastructure, diversion, backfill, grazing animals and contaminants. The fact that the state or county does not own these wetlands is disturbing and dangerous. Wetlands bill 91 calls for the protection of all remaining wetlands in Maui County. These 2 gulches are part of the last 30% of wetlands in South Maui and they are in imminent danger right now.

In the last 2 years I have been working on the Waipuilani Beach Reserve with Rooted Kekahi Me Ka Aina and many other amazing people. I have worked closely with all forms of government, many community organisations and my community of Waiohuli Kai in the Moku of Kula Kai.

This work includes the Waipuilani and Kulanihakoi Gulches. The damages we see to our beaches and reefs from toxic flooding have been devastating. We can not separate our gulches, rivers, streams, springs, muliwai, oceans, marine life and reefs. They are all connected and we know this when referencing our Ahupuaa systems. From Mauka to Makai we are all connected.

Our way of life is in jeopardy and we need your help. The County's updated drainage plan for Kihei will not be fully implemented until 2040, and much can be done before then at a far lower cost to slow and filter runoff in the existing wetlands.

We have recently experienced massive flooding in South Maui that is progressively getting worse with each passing year. In 2021, 2022 and 2023 the South Kihei floods created a river on South Kihei Road from Kulanihakoi to Waipuilani. It brought mud and sediment straight through and miles out into the ocean.

It left debris on our streets, properties, vehicles, muliwai, beaches and on our ocean floor. The thick mud and silt covers the ground, plant and ocean life till their death. It will remain there for years to come. We could eliminate many of these destructive issues by restoring and harnessing the natural ecosystem functions of our remaining wetlands in South Maui and on every island.

Our wetlands are a powerful ecological ecosystem that we can't afford to dismiss. Wetlands serve as a filtering system that is natural and native to South Maui. Without healthy wetlands to slow and absorb stormwater runoff, the ocean and coral reefs are subjected to bombardment with sediment, pesticides and ungulate feces every year during heavy rain events. We have already had 2 major flood events this year.

The pros of Maui County acquisition of the Waipuilani/Kulanihakoi Gulches.

1. Protection, restoration and preservation of our wetlands, beaches, ocean and marine life.
2. Protection of our homes, livelihoods and open spaces
3. Greenways and recreational areas for our communities during the majority of the year and filtration and protections for our ocean and marine life through our wetlands during heavy flow periods.
4. Collaboration efforts from County, state, community, stakeholders and not for profit community organisations.
5. Assurance of no adverse effects from development in this critical area. No further building, diverting, overpopulation, transient accommodations or traffic problems in the South Kihei road area.
6. Cleaner ocean water to be enjoyed by locals and visitors.
7. Recovery of marine life such as limu, fish and reef.
8. Cheaper in the long run as there will be solution driven ecological practices put in place that will allow for less sediment, property damage, car and traffic issues.
9. Cheaper in the present time. Allowing the wetlands to do their jobs with minimal help will create a sustainable habitat for all life to thrive. This can begin quickly as opposed to

very distant government plans for infrastructure improvements.

10. Fulfilment of the 1998-2022 South Maui Community Vision plan. Greenways, open spaces and community enjoyment can all be one and the same. So can infrastructure, drainage plans and wetlands.

If you believe that the county of Maui should own/acquire the Waipuilani and Kulanihakoi Gulches like I do, then please share your support with us? We would like to present all letters to Mayor Bissen for consideration very soon.

Thank you for your help and consideration of the information presented to you in this email. I look forward to hearing from you and working with you to protect our natural resources.

Sincerely,

Brandi Corpuz

Executive Director-Rooted Kekahi Me Ka Aina

808-357-9170





Kihei Rd



Kihei Rd



Waipuilani Gulch



Hoonani St

BFED Committee

From: Gina M. Young
Sent: Tuesday, April 25, 2023 2:20 PM
To: BFED Committee
Cc: Shane Sinenci
Subject: Sinenci FY Budget Priority Open Space Funds Kihei Wetland
Attachments: Sinenci priority FY24 Kelly King wetlands aquisition letter of support.pdf; wetlands aquisition Rooted Kekahi Me Ka Aina letter.pdf; wetland aquisition pic3.pdf; wetlands aquisition pic 2.pdf; wetlands aquisition pic 1.pdf

Aloha BFED committee,

As background for CM Sinenci's budget priority regarding the ability to purchase Kihei wetlands and drainage parcels in support of the Kihei Drainage Master Plan with open space funds, please include the following attachments and the following link to the Kihei Drainage Management Plan in Granicus.

[Final-Kihei-DMP-Report-Complete-2022-12 \(mauicounty.gov\)](#)

Thanks,
Gina

Gina Young

Executive Assistant | Councilmember Shane Sinenci
gina.you@mauicounty.us