

One Native Plant at a Time:

Nā Koa Manu Conservation/Skyline Conservation Initiative

Contributed by Terri Dux

To those who believe one person alone cannot make a difference in the world have not met Joe. Although Joe is the first to give credit to the thousands of community volunteers and partnerships for the Pōhakuokalā Gulch Community Forest Restoration Project, it is Joe's passion that is the heart of conservation. You can see his passion in his eyes as he points to the steep hillside of 200-year-old dead *Eucalyptus globulus* trees in Kula, Maui. Too heavy and expensive to remove from the steep terrain, Joe and his team have cutdown thousands of leafless eucalyptus trees and placed the logs to terrace the mountainside, stabilizing the soil and nestling more than 20,000 native plants and trees in its place.



Joe is Joe Imhoff, program manager for Skyline Conservation Initiative, a charitable program of Nā Koa Manu Conservation (NKMC). Skyline Conservation Initiative's mission is to reestablish the native ecosystem along the Pōhakuokalā Gulch, while NKMC is a non-profit organization for charitable and educational purposes.

Located at 4,000 ft elevation on the slopes of Mt. Haleakalā, the restoration work is extensive and with the recent winter storm damaging the zipline that bring thrill seekers to soar over the lush Pōhakuokalā Gulch Community Forest, the list of maintenance tasks is endless. But Joe is unwavering with the mission of restoring the gulch on private ranch land with native forest ecosystem and species habitat.



Seeing is believing with every Kula rainfall. Where stream beds and intermittent waterfalls were once muddy with visible soil erosion, the log terraces and native plants have slowed down the runoff and improved infiltration resulting in clear and clean water.



Before: A muddy waterfall with visible soil erosion. Photo courtesy of Joe Imhoff.



After: A clear and clean waterfall in 2021. Photo courtesy of Joe Imhoff.

“Conservation is essential to the health of watersheds so that humans and other species can exist in this location,” says Joe. “The Pōhakuokalā Gulch Community Forest restoration project is located in a unique intersection of agriculture, education, and ecotourism. It is easily accessible for the public to visit and reconnect with a very special ecosystem that has been lost but not forgotten. NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) has been a key partner in this progression.”

Working with NRCS

Five years ago, Joe called NRCS Field Office in Kahului looking for funding resources for the restoration project and connected with Soil Conservationist Jason Hew.

“Jason was extremely helpful and knowledgeable on the parameters of NRCS’ program eligibility and the compliance requirements,” says Joe. “He was very patient and easy to work with as we navigated a lot of paperwork.”

The partnership is successful mostly due to sharing a common goal between the NRCS mission and Nā Koa Manu Conservation’s objective to restore native habitat.



L-R: Danny Boren (Founder of Skyline Eco-Adventures), Sea Thomas, Jason Hew, and Joe Imhoff

What’s Next?

“We hope to continue to expand the scope of our native plantings every year,” says Joe. This also means evolving to include “an outdoor classroom and training facility for conservation field workers who develop skills by implementing NRCS conservation practices,” he adds. “Once fully trained, our crew is contracted out to support other conservation programs implement their goals and objectives.”

“We are basically establishing an up-and-coming conservation army of field workers who can be strategically deployed to support habitat restoration efforts in need of a

skilled crew,” says Joe. He adds that NRCS resources and services are a significant part of the program.



“NRCS is an amazing resource for land stewards who are seeking additional resources to expand their conservation footprint on earth,” says Joe. “Even in industrialized agricultural landscapes, you cannot use 100% of the land for production. Land managers have an obligation to implement the best possible conservation planning and practices on any fallow space that is not in production. NRCS is helping shepherd this process in a very efficient way.”

Conservation Beyond Hawai'i

While travelers to Maui are making eco-adventures memories, when Joe travels, he leaves behind more than memories. When Joe and his wife travel across the country, they make it a goal to plant a native plant, endemic to the location in every state.

One man making a difference. One native plant at a time.



More information

Nā Koa Manu Conservation is a 501c-3 with a Mission to *Leverage Conservation Capacity for the Greater Good*. NKMC supports a multitude of conservation programs including protecting the important watershed in Upper Kula and restoring the native forest ecosystem for native Hawaiian birds. Read more about Skyline Conservation Initiative and how to get involved on their [website](#).