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## **Hawai'i Forest Institute awarded Kaulunani Grant to Promote Growing a Native Hawaiian Urban Forest**

**Honolulu, Hawaii, August 5, 2020** – The Hawai'i Forest Institute (HFI) has been awarded an \$8,979 grant to encourage Hawaii's residents and businesses to grow Native Hawaiian and Polynesian-introduced ("canoe") plants, as well as to increase public awareness of the value and benefits of planting native plants and trees. The grant is funded by the Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program of the DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife; and State and Private Forestry, branch of the USDA Forest Service, Region 5. HFI is contributing \$16,221 in in-kind professional services.

The *Go Native: Growing a Native Hawaiian Urban Forest* project will promote the growing of Native Hawaiian and "canoe" plants by creating a series of videos and a quick reference guide. The videos will target a non-technical lay audience and will walk the viewer through the stages of creating or converting their landscape to native and/or Polynesian-introduced plants. The guide will enable gardeners, landscape architects, and others to identify the different native plants most suitable to their climate zone, personal tastes, gardening experience, and other factors. It will provide clear guidance and take the guesswork out of planning and realizing a native garden, while eliminating frustrations caused by a lack of success.

"People have this idea that it's difficult to grow native plants just because they are rare or endangered, but that's not really true," says Heidi Leianuenue Bornhorst. "It just depends on understanding what kind of soil you have, and modifying it as needed, plus selecting the right kind of plants for your microclimate. Like pets and keiki, all plants need some attentive care and maintenance, especially when young." Bornhorst is a certified arborist, horticulturist and landscape designer, and author of *Growing Native Hawaiian Plants: A How-To Guide for the Gardener*; she is partnering with HFI on the project.

A major goal of the Go Native Project is to increase the number of people growing native plants by helping them do so successfully. That's why the project has adopted the "Right Tree, Right Place" philosophy promoted by Kaulunani partner Smart Trees Pacific.

A related goal is to reduce the demand for non-native, potentially harmful invasive plants. These introduced plants used in landscaping often escape from their designed areas, harming native species and costing over \$150 million annually to try to control them.



*Ko'oko'olau (Bidens asymmetrica), Endemic to Hawai'i Island. Photo-J.B Friday*

“By increasing the popularity of native plant landscaping, we want to create a ‘demand pull’ effect which encourages the landscaping industry to plant more native plants,” says Heather Simmons, Executive Director of HFI.

Hawaii’s forests have been severely impacted not only by invasive plants but also by development. Only 40% of mesic forest remains, and 95% of Hawaii’s dryland forest has been destroyed. Nearly 10% of the state’s 1,360 native plant species have already gone extinct. Another 236 native plant species in Hawaii each has fewer than 50 plants remaining in the wild.

Together with its partners and the larger community, HFI hopes to reverse some of these impacts by stimulating the creation of a Native Hawaiian Urban Forest.

“The ultimate goal is to strengthen island-wide eco-systems by preserving forests and creating wildlife corridors and habitat for native invertebrates, birds and bats,” says Travis Idol, President of HFI and Professor of Tropical Forestry and Agroforestry at the University of Hawaii-Mānoa.

The idea is that if a sufficient number of urban residents and businesses grow native plants suited to their climate zones and nearby existing forests, a network of interconnected “islands” of native forest could emerge. While imperfect compared to the original forests, this could help increase the resilience of existing forests by preserving the full complement of genetic variation within plant and animal species.

“We can’t roll back decades of development,” says Paul Arinaga, Go Native Project Manager, “but by creating a patchwork of native forest throughout urban areas we hope to restore some of the nature that used to flow uninterrupted from *mauka* to *makai*.”

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*The Hawai‘i Forest Institute’s (HFI) mission is to protect and perpetuate Hawaii’s forests through restoration, education, information dissemination, and support for scientific research.*

[www.hawaiiforestinstitute.org](http://www.hawaiiforestinstitute.org)

[www.hawaiiforestinstitute.org/our-projects/go-native-growing-a-native-hawaiian-urban-forest/](http://www.hawaiiforestinstitute.org/our-projects/go-native-growing-a-native-hawaiian-urban-forest/)

*Founded in 1991, Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program works to improve the understanding of the benefits of trees in urban areas and communities in Hawai‘i.*

<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/forestry/lap/kaulunani/>

*Heidi Leianuenue Bornhorst is a Native Hawaiian plant and forest garden regeneration specialist, and expert plant propagator. She is a Certified Arborist, Horticulturist and Landscape Designer specializing in practical, long-term maintenance and sustainable design.*

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