

# **HE MO‘OLELO ‘ĀINA: A CULTURAL STUDY OF THE PU‘U MAKA‘ALA NATURAL AREA RESERVE DISTRICTS OF HILO AND PUNA, ISLAND OF HAWAI‘I**



*View to Pu‘u Maka‘ala and Mauna Loa  
(Photo Courtesy of DLNR-NARS)*



*“Birds eye” View of the Hāpu‘u and Scattered  
Ōhi‘a Forest of Pu‘u Maka‘ala  
(Photo Courtesy of DLNR-NARS)*



*‘Ōhāhā (Cyanea longipedunculata)  
of Pu‘u Maka‘ala  
(William Mull 1975;  
Photo Courtesy of DLNR-NARS)*



*Julie Leialoha Describing Pu‘u Maka‘ala NAR  
to NARS Commission Members and  
Educators (Photo Courtesy of DLNR-NARS)*



**Kumu Pono Associates LLC**

*Historical & Archival Documentary Research · Oral History Interview Studies ·  
Researching and Preparing Studies from Hawaiian Language Documents ·  
Māhele ‘Āina, Boundary Commission, & Land History Records ·  
Integrated Cultural Resources Management Planning ·  
Preservation & Interpretive Program Development*

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*MAY 31, 2004*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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At the request of Ms. Lisa Hadway, Natural Area Specialist for the State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources—Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DLNR-DOFAW), *Kumu Pono Associates LLC*, conducted a detailed study of historical and archival literature documenting the natural and cultural landscape and history of land use in the vicinity of the Pu'u Maka'ala Natural Area Reserve, and adjoining lands of Waiākea, in the District of Hilo, and 'Ōla'a, in the District of Puna. The documentation also includes detailed oral testimonies—describing the lands, traditional and customary practices, and historical land use—from native residents of lands in the 'Ōla'a, Waiākea-Humu'ula, and Keauhou vicinity, collected in the 1870s to 1890s. The documentation cited herein is the product of years of research, and includes specific research conducted for the study between October 2003 to April 2004. The research was conducted in private and public collections, and that documentation, cited herein, includes written narratives that cover the period from antiquity to the 1980s.

The archival-historical resources were located in the collections of the Hawai'i State Archives, Land Management Division, Survey Division, Bureau of Conveyances and the Natural Areas Reserve System offices; the Hawaiian Historical Society; the University of Hawai'i-Hilo Mo'okini Library; private family collections; and in the collection of *Kumu Pono Associates LLC*. The documentation includes rich narratives translated from native Hawaiian accounts; descriptions of lands that make up the Puna, Hilo and Eastern Ka'ū mountain lands, recorded in historic surveys; a history of land tenure from 1848 to the present; records documenting the establishment of the 'Ōla'a and Waiākea Forest Reserves, and the subsequent designation of the Pu'u Maka'ala Natural Area Reserve.

The Natural Area Reserve takes its name from Pu'u Maka'ala, literally, Stay-alert Hill—named by State Forester, Ralph Daelher in the early 1960s<sup>1</sup>—the summit of which is situated a little more than 3,600 feet above sea level. While the name of the *pu'u* is of recent origin, no older name identifiable with the hill was located while conducting this research. Many *pu'u* on the upland slopes of the Hilo and Puna Districts are named, and it is likely that in traditional times this hill too had a name or names, depending on the area it was viewed from.

The native traditions and historical accounts associated with the neighboring lands of the upper Hilo-Puna forests span many centuries, from Hawaiian antiquity to the later period following western contact. The narratives describe customs and practices of the native people who resided on these lands, walked the trails, and who were sustained by the wealth of the forest lands.

Among the most detailed descriptions of the Hilo-Puna forest lands, including documentation of traditional and customary rights, are those found in the Kingdom collections, documenting the history of land tenure, and defining the boundaries of *ahupua'a* of Waiākea and 'Ōla'a. Detailed oral testimonies from elder native tenants were taken in court proceedings of the mid to late 1800s document the occurrence of traditional and customary practices, and nature of the resources within a given *ahupua'a*. In those records, we learn of the traditional knowledge and occurrence of native practices in the lands which today are a part of, and adjoin the Pu'u Maka'ala Natural Area Reserve.

We find in native traditions and beliefs, that Hawaiians shared spiritual and familial relationships with the natural resources around them. Each aspect of nature from the stars in the heavens, to the winds, clouds, rains, growth of the forests and life therein, and everything on the land and in the ocean, was believed to be alive. Indeed, every form of nature was a body-form of some god or lesser deity. As an example, in this context, and in association with lands which are now included in a part of the landscape of the Pu'u Maka'ala Natural Area Reserve, we find that Kū-ka-'ōhi'a-Laka, is a defied guardian of the 'ōhi'a growth of 'Ōla'a; *Ua-kuahine*, is the body form of a goddess of the rains in 'Ōla'a; and *Kū-lili-ka-ua* is the god of the thick mists that envelop the forests of the upper Puna,

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<sup>1</sup> pers comm., Ralph Daelher, former State Forester (June 9, 2004).

Waiākea, and Keauhou lands. Indeed, tradition also tells us that the gods and goddesses of these forest lands were very protective of them. In olden times, travel through them was accompanied by prayer, and care. Traditions tell us that many a careless traveler, or collector of resources, found themselves lost in a maze of overgrowth and dense mists as a result of disrespectful and careless actions.

In the Hawaiian mind, care for each aspect of nature, the *kino lau* (myriad body-forms) of the elder life forms, was a way of life. This concept is still expressed by Hawaiian *kūpuna* (elders) through the present day, and passed on in many native families. Also, in this cultural context, anything which damages the native nature of the land, forests, ocean, and *kino lau* therein, damages the integrity of the whole. Thus caring for, and protecting the land and ocean resources, is a way of life.

In the traditional context above referenced, we find that the forests and mountain landscape—the native species, and the intangible components therein—are a part of a sacred Hawaiian landscape. Thus, the landscape itself is a highly valued cultural property. Its protection, and the continued exercise of traditional and customary practices, in a traditional and customary manner, are mandated by native custom, and State and Federal Laws (as those establishing the Waiākea and ‘Ōla‘a Forest Reserves and Pu‘u Maka‘ala Natural Area Reserve; and the Endangered Species Act).

In this discussion, protection does not mean the exclusion, or extinguishing of traditional and customary practices, it simply means that such practices are done in a manner consistent with cultural subsistence, where each form of native life is treasured and protected. *Kūpuna* express this thought in the words, “*Ho‘ohana aku, a ho‘ōla aku!*” (Use it, and let it live!).

In the early 1900s, the Hilo and ‘Ōla‘a forest lands were determined to be of significance, and worthy of protection. In between 1905 to 1928, the lands of the ‘Ōla‘a and Waiākea Forest Reserves, and the neighboring Kīlauea Forest Reserve were dedicated to the public interest as unique natural resources. As a part of on-going ranching operations, and the mission of the newly formed forestry programs, hunting for pigs, and in earlier times, for wild cattle, has been practiced on lands of the Pu‘u Maka‘ala NAR. Such hunting interests remain of importance to community members and long-term management goals of the Natural Area Reserve System program.

In 1981, the Pu‘u Maka‘ala Natural Area Reserve, containing approximately 12,106 acres was dedicated as one of the extraordinary ecological systems of the Natural Area Reserve program of the State of Hawai‘i.

*māua nō me ka ha‘aha‘a — Kepā a me Onaona Maly*

**“A‘ohe hana nui, ke alu ‘ia!**

(It is no great task when done together by all!)

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