

Hawaii Environmental Restoration (HER) Fiscal Year Summary Narrative

July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

FY 2025-26 was a year of focused follow-through for Hawaii Environmental Restoration in the Keau'ohana Lowland Rainforest. Building on more than a decade of stewardship in one of Hawai'i Island's remaining lowland wet forest systems, HER completed its 10th systematic restoration pass across the 20-acre core site while continuing intermediate maintenance sweeps in areas where young seedlings require the most consistent care.

That work translated into visible ecological progress. Crews and volunteers outplanted 916 native trees and understory plants, reinforcing canopy recovery and strengthening habitat structure in areas previously dominated by invasive vegetation. Planting was paired with a regular maintenance program so that new and established outplants had a stronger chance of long-term survival.

Community engagement remained central to HER's restoration model. Across 19 restoration, outreach, and education events, HER brought students, residents, visiting volunteers, landowners, resource professionals, and partner organizations into direct relationship with the forest. Hands-on volunteers contributed 556 hours of service, while outreach and educational programming directly engaged 1,033 participants and reached a broader community audience of up to 8,000 people.

HER's educational work also expanded beyond the boundaries of Keau'ohana. Through the UH Hilo Connection Fair, 'Ōhi'a Love Festival, East Hawai'i Career Expo, UH Hilo Earth Day, Rotary Club presentation, Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death workshop, and CTAHR Forest Stewardship Leaders Program visit, HER connected restoration practice with daily land-use choices. These programs emphasized native and non-invasive planting, invasive species awareness, practical stewardship techniques, and the importance of protecting Hawai'i's lowland rainforest ecosystems.

The year reflected the strength of HER's partnerships. Koa'e Plant Nursery, managed by Ann Kobsa, continued to provide a substantial portion of the native seedlings planted at Keau'ohana. Collaboration with schools, universities, businesses, community groups, funders, and individual supporters helped turn restoration into a shared community responsibility rather than a single-site project.

HER extends sincere gratitude to the volunteers, donors, partners, and community members who contributed time, plants, knowledge, funds, and encouragement throughout FY 2025-26. Together, these efforts are helping restore forest structure, protect native biodiversity, and cultivate the next generation of land stewards across East Hawai'i.

Key Metrics & Achievements

Metric	FY 2025-26 Outcome
Restoration Pass	10th systematic restoration pass completed across Keau'ohana's 20-acre core site.
Native Plants Installed	916 native trees and understory plants installed to restore and strengthen lowland rainforest habitat.
Volunteer Service	556 hands-on volunteer hours contributed toward restoration, stewardship, and site maintenance.
Special Events	19 restoration, outreach, and education events conducted during the reporting cycle.
Direct Engagement	1,033 volunteers, students, partners, and community participants directly engaged through restoration and education activities.
Hands-on Volunteer Cohort	More than 136 community members contributed direct volunteer service during the year.
Broader Outreach Reach	Educational and outreach events reached a broader community audience of up to 8,000 participants.

Cumulative Progress Since 2014

Using FY 2024-25 cumulative baselines and adding the FY 2025-26 outcomes, HER's long-term Keau'ohana restoration work now reflects:

- 9,686 native seedlings planted in Keau'ohana.
- 8,988 volunteer service hours contributed to restoration and stewardship.
- 187 HER special events supporting restoration, education, and community engagement.
- At least 1,499 hands-on volunteers over the life of the project, with FY 2025-26 also documenting 1,033 direct participants across restoration, outreach, and education activities.

Year in Context

The completion of the 10th systematic restoration pass is a meaningful milestone because long-term lowland rainforest recovery depends on repetition, not one-time planting. Each pass strengthens HER's ability to reduce invasive pressure, protect young outplants, and reinforce native forest structure over time.

The year's strongest outcome was the balance between field production and public education: the 20-acre site was systematically covered for invasive species control and 916 new native plants went into the ground while HER simultaneously expanded community understanding of how everyday vegetation choices affect Hawai'i's forests.

Volunteer & Outreach Highlights

FY 2025-26 events balanced field-based restoration with broader community education. Seasonal solstice and equinox workdays kept volunteers connected to the annual rhythm of the forest; school and business partnerships added skilled help; public outreach events carried HER's message into campuses, festivals, civic spaces, and community gatherings.

Volunteer Field, Restoration, and Stewardship Events

Date	Event
Jun. 16, 2025	Hilo High School / Stantec restoration event
Jun. 21, 2025	Summer Solstice Planting
Jun. 28, 2025	Wai'eale Volunteer Event
Aug. 22, 2025	Kulani Forest Event
Sep. 21, 2025	Fall Equinox Planting
Dec. 21, 2025	Winter Solstice Planting
May 9, 2026	Wai'eale Beach Cleanup
Jun. 8, 2026	Stantec LLC service event
Jun. 21, 2026	Summer Solstice Event
Jun. 26, 2026	CTAHR Forest Stewardship Program field visit

Community Outreach & Education Events

Date	Event
Jul. 12, 2025	Revitalize Puna Event
Aug. 17, 2025	Kosasa Gathering / O'ahu
Sep. 20, 2025	Hala Festival
Sep. 30, 2025	Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death Workshop in Keau'ohana
Jan. 1, 2026	UH Hilo Connection Fair
Jan. 25, 2026	'Ōhi'a Love Festival
Feb. 12, 2026	East Hawai'i Career Expo
Apr. 22, 2026	Earth Day at UH Hilo
May 15, 2026	Rotary Club Presentation

Program Highlights

- Seasonal planting days continued to anchor the year's volunteer calendar and gave returning supporters a consistent way to contribute to Keau'ohana's recovery.
- School, business, and university partnerships brought new audiences into direct stewardship while strengthening HER's education pipeline.
- CTAHR and Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death learning opportunities connected landowners and resource professionals with practical restoration strategies.
- Public outreach events helped HER translate site-based restoration into broader community action across East Hawai'i.

Photo Highlights from FY 2025-26



Ann Kobsa with native seedlings from Koa'e Plant Nursery, a key source of Keau'ohana planting stock.



CTAHR Forest Stewardship Leaders Program participants visit Keau'ohana for peer-to-peer restoration learning.



Summer Solstice volunteers continue planting and maintenance work in Keau'ohana with steady supporter Jeffrey Regan and crew member Cory Edging.



Amy Miller supports HER's outreach and education table at UH Hilo Earth Day, engaging young participants and families.