



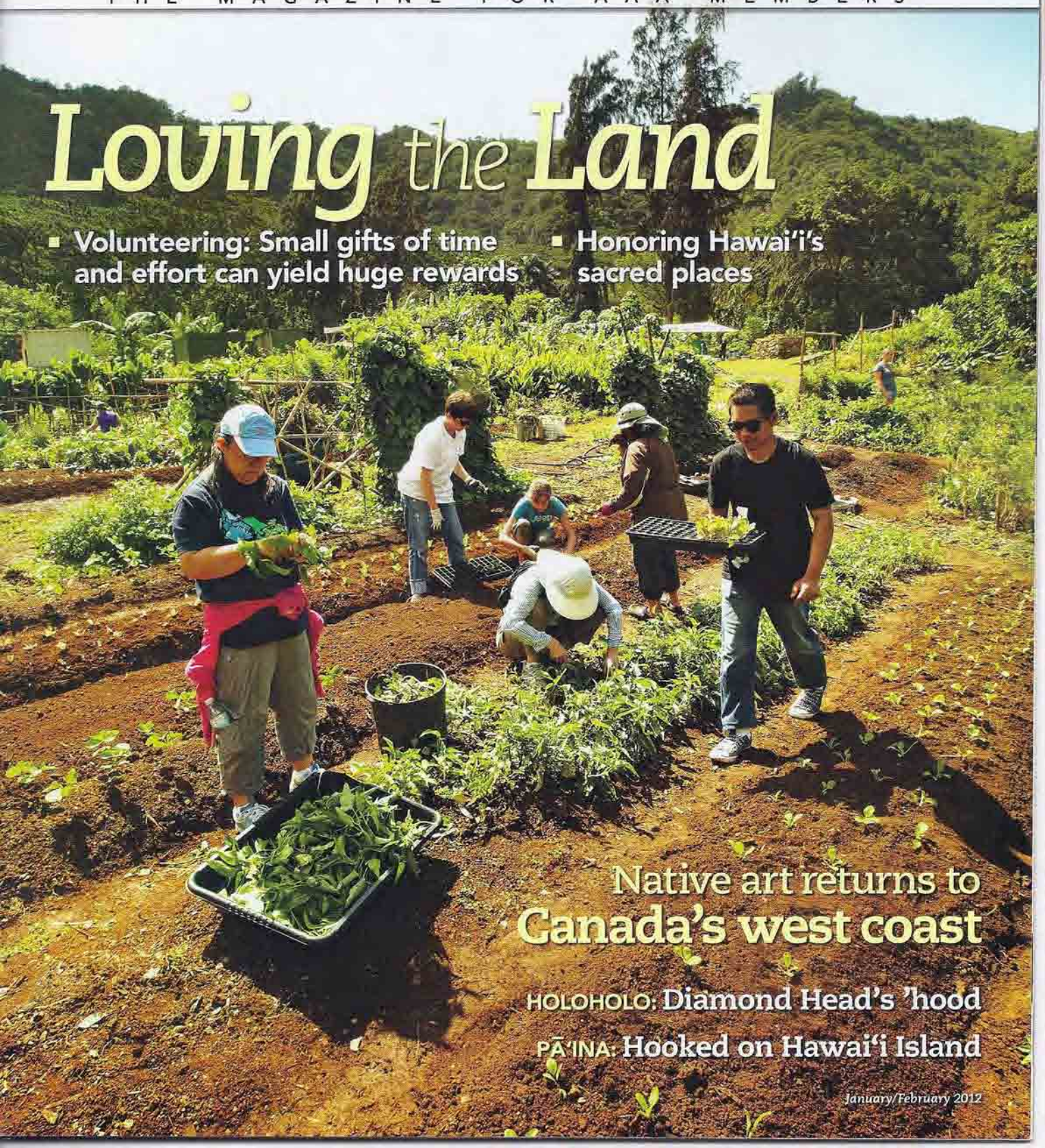
Hawai'i



THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA MEMBERS

Loving the Land

- Volunteering: Small gifts of time and effort can yield huge rewards
- Honoring Hawai'i's sacred places



Native art returns to
Canada's west coast

HOLOHOLO: Diamond Head's 'hood

PĀ'INA: Hooked on Hawai'i Island



Working Vacations

Residents and visitors band together to preserve the Islands

BY JOAN CONROW



Net removal is a popular volunteerism activity on Kauai, where a group did some heavy lifting at Alomani Beach (inset). Another group at Lydgate Park Beach included two people who flew in from New York City the night before.

On a late August afternoon, when thin clouds streaked across the sun and trade winds chopped gray water, I joined a couple of dozen people, all but two of them strangers, on northeast Kaua'i's 'Aliomanu Beach. After brief introductions, we quickly set to work removing a large fishing net that had washed up on a stretch of coarse sand, where endangered monk seals like to sleep. Though many of us were novices, we quickly learned the drill. Some of us began cutting the heavy net into manageable sections as others lugged armloads of the scratchy stuff up a steep hill to the parking lot, where they dumped it into the beds of five waiting pickup trucks.

We laughed, joked, and offered each other words of encouragement. Three hours later, we had completed a job insurmountable for one person. The beach was clean and 1,000 pounds of net was on its way to a cargo container, destined ultimately for O'ahu, where it would be shredded and burned to generate electricity. We volunteers—tired, but glowing with the satisfaction of teamwork well done—gathered behind a Surfrider Foundation banner for a photograph, and then went our separate ways.

Protecting marine life by removing fishing nets from the beach, pulling weeds that threaten to overwhelm a native forest, putting a fresh coat of paint on a historic structure, or rebuilding hiking trails washed out by heavy rain aren't the sort of activities that one typically associates with a vacation in the Islands.

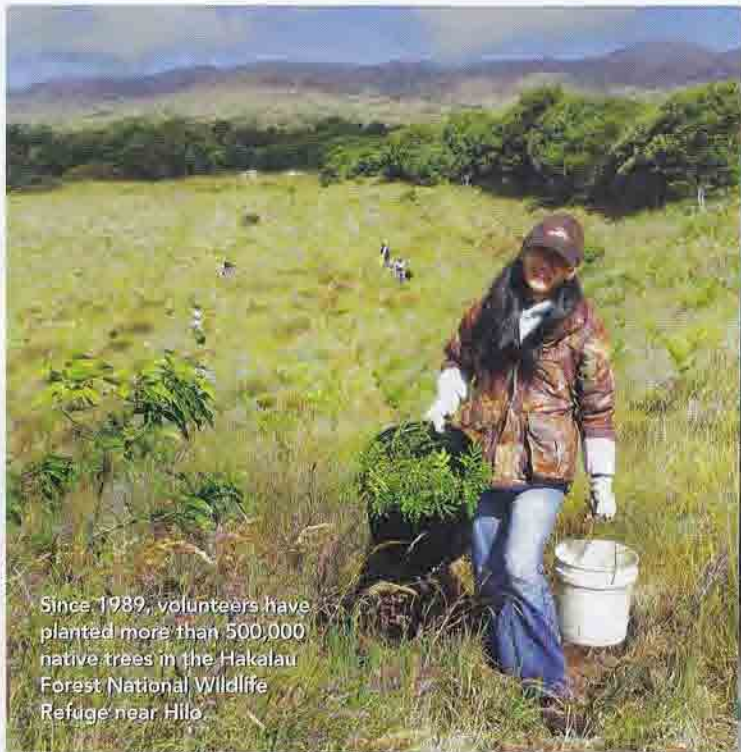
But on just about any day in Hawai'i, visitors are joining residents to make the state a better place through activities like Surfrider's "net patrol," which require no training and just half a day of precious leisure time. Internationally, it's part of a rapidly growing mode of travel known as "voluntourism," which emphasizes getting deeper into a place by giving back to the destination. Locally, it's an extension of the Hawaiian cultural value *laulima*—many hands working together.

Love of the Land

"Voluntourism really gives you such a different experience of the island you're on, whether you live there or are traveling to it, because you get to be with the people of that place and learn about the environmental issues the Islands are facing," says Kirsten Whatley, author of *Preserving Paradise: Opportunities in Volunteering for Hawai'i's Environment* and founder of the online environmental voluntourism clearing-house Preserve Hawai'i. "So your experience becomes even deeper and more meaningful, and the connections you make last a lifetime."

Born of her sense that people want "to join in, if only they knew how to get started," Whatley's book and website detail more than 80 voluntourism opportunities around the state. "It's helped amplify the seeking that was already out there," she explains.

Voluntourists are just as apt to be locals as visitors, and both groups seem to be lured by the prospect of getting off



Since 1989, volunteers have planted more than 500,000 native trees in the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge near Hilo.

the beaten path and doing something that's not considered "touristy."

"They like it because they get to go into amazing places that regular folks don't get to go to," says Cherie Attix, a Maui bed-and-breakfast owner whose own desire to "give back to the land that sustains me" prompted her to create another website that promotes voluntourism in the Islands (see "Lend a Hand" on page 20).

One of those amazing places is Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge on Hawai'i Island, which lies on Mauna Kea's eastern slope. Only a portion of the refuge is open to the public, so people who donate their labor to an extensive reforestation project get a chance to see areas that are otherwise off-limits to the general public, take a naturalist-guided hike, and stay overnight in a rustic cabin.

The Sierra Club's O'ahu Group also schedules regular three-day weekend service trips to out-of-the-way places, such as Hawai'i Island's new Kahauale'a Natural Area Reserve, where volunteers help to clear invasive kähili ginger and faya trees. Friends of Haleakalā National Park hosts three-day projects in the crater.

People Power

But seeing new, often remote, places is only part of the appeal. Many volunteers want to learn more about the Hawaiian culture and native plants, while others enjoy meeting people and working as a team.

"It's a great day because of the camaraderie that's built with folks from all walks of life," says Attix, who offers guests of her Hale Ho'okipa Inn in Makawao—many of them

Hawai'i residents—a 5 percent discount on their room rates for volunteering. She says guests often rank their service outings as a vacation highlight.

"I haven't yet had a volunteer who didn't have a good time," agrees Marsha Erickson, executive director of Hui o Laka, which offers interpretive and park stewardship programs at Kaua'i's Waimea Canyon and Kōke'e state parks. Hundreds of volunteers—ranging from members of the Hawai'i Governmental Employees Association to Junior ROTC cadets to charter school students—travel up to the forested uplands to help out each year.

Most assist the Kōkūa Kōke'e Project, using hand tools to clear weeds from popular trails and park roadsides. Erickson says the project was designed for volunteers age 5 and older as a way to improve areas that people use on a regular basis, do work left undone by cash-strapped state agencies, and "build conservation into the daily lives of citizens."

Some enjoy it so much they become regulars. "We have one couple from Alaska for the last five years that has stayed five weeks each time," Erickson says. Those who work at least four hours a day may stay at the historic Civilian Conservation Corps camp—whose restoration is another volunteer-fueled effort—where accommodations range from bunk beds to semiprivate rooms to private cabins.

Visible Improvements

Whether the voluntourists are families seeking a bonding experience, retirees with extra time and energy to give, or students who need to complete school community service requirements, their combined efforts have a positive effect.

The evidence was clear when I visited Hakalau, where volunteers donate some 5,000 to 7,000 hours each year. Over the past two decades, they've planted hundreds of thousands of native seedlings and pulled countless weeds, restoring the native forest ravaged by cattle grazing. Native birds, insects, and plants have returned in recent years.

Erickson, too, has seen dramatic results from the efforts of voluntourists, and it gives her hope for the future.

"It's just shocking what a difference it's made," she marvels. "We're peeling back 50 years of unweeded roadsides and trails. There's nothing wrong with our forests that thousands of volunteers upon many generations can't fix. We've cleaned one mile of road. We're starting."

Or as Mary Kawena Pukui wrote in *Ōlelo No'eau: Hawaiian Proverbs & Poetical Sayings*: "A 'ohe hana nui ke alu 'ia."

No task is too big when done together by all. ■

Kaua'i-based Joan Conrow writes about land-use, cultural, and environmental issues in Hawai'i.

Your AAA travel agent can provide more information. Visit the branch in Honolulu, call (888) 651-0198, or go to AAA.com/travel.

Lend a Hand

Whether you have a few hours, days, or weeks to give, each island has volunteer projects, and they satisfy a wide range of interests. Some projects can accept only a limited number of participants, so you may need to plan ahead and make a reservation.

The most comprehensive list of voluntourism activities, as well as helpful volunteer calendars for each island, can be found at preservehawaii.org. For a listing of Sierra Club service outings around the state, visit aditl.com/hstp.

MAUI

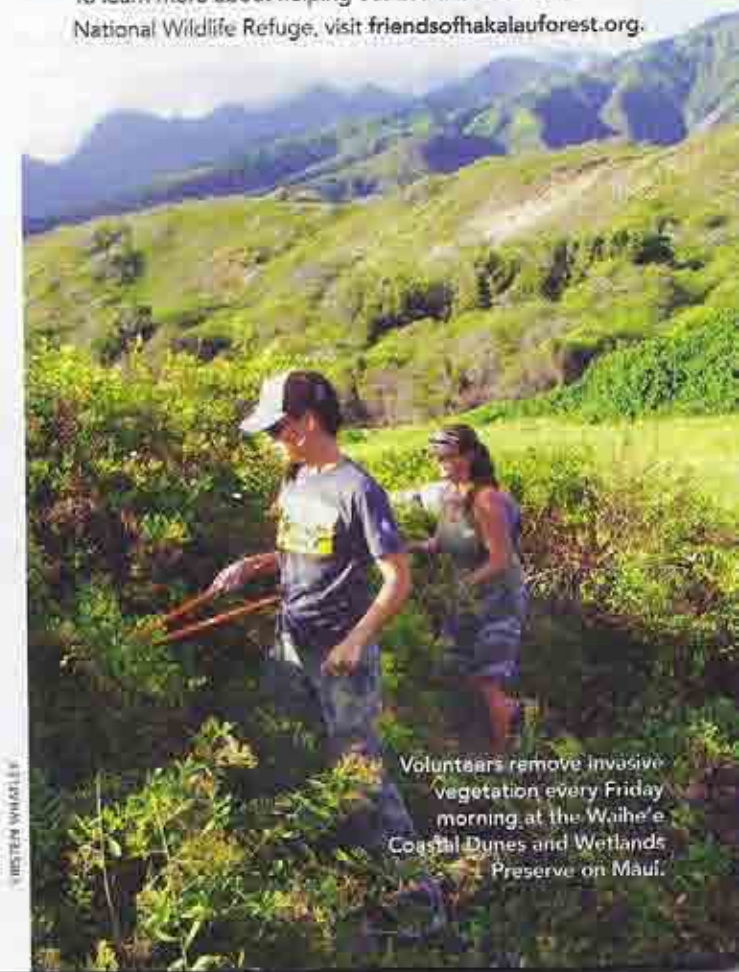
Cherie Attix's site, volunteer-on-vacation-hawaii.com, lists several opportunities. The Pacific Whale Foundation lists its programs at volunteersonvacation.org. In addition to projects on Maui, the National Tropical Botanical Garden has vacation volunteer opportunities on Kaua'i. Visit ntbg.org/donate/volunteer.php.

O'AHU

Those interested in cultural projects can assist with the He'eia Fishpond restoration. Visit paepaeoheieia.org/wall.php#work_days.

HAWAII ISLAND

To learn more about helping out at Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge, visit friendsofhakalauforest.org.



Volunteers remove invasive vegetation every Friday morning at the Waihe'e Coastal Dunes and Wetlands Preserve on Maui.

CHRISTEN WHALEY