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Kupu wins largest award in the State: \$20 million to expand tree canopy, improve climate adaptation and workforce development

HONOLULU — Kupu, Hawai'i's largest youth-focused conservation and sustainability nonprofit, today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Urban and Community Forestry Program has awarded \$20 million to Kupu to expand tree canopy, combat extreme heat, and improve access to green space in communities throughout the state over the next five years. More than \$42 million in federal grants are being awarded to nine Hawai'i organizations— **with the largest award going to Kupu.**

Kupu will receive \$20 million for its MALU (Meaningful Arboriculture to Limit Vulnerability in Urban and Community areas) proposal. In 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (the Hawaiian language), *malu* means shade, cover, protection and rehabilitation. This project will provide funding, technical assistance and support to multiple, local organizations working to increase tree cover in disadvantaged areas. Consistent with Kupu's focus on youth development and environmental restoration, special emphasis will be placed on improving the wellbeing of people and places at the same time.

"Kupu is humbled by this opportunity to bring these resources home to the islands. This program will provide resources, support and technical assistance to a community of partners who will put these federal funds to good use across the islands," said Kupu CEO, John Leong. "Kupu's network includes hundreds of partners that we have grown with over the past 16 years. We are excited to support and empower communities with opportunities to make their neighborhoods and public spaces more resilient to climate change."

The Urban and Community Forestry Program is the only program in the federal government dedicated to enhancing and expanding the nation's urban forest resources. An urban forest is the collection of trees in an urban area that have been disappearing at an alarming rate: about 175,000 acres per year nationwide, according to the [U.S. Forest Service](#). This is the largest single investment to date through the USDA Inflation Reduction Act in urban and community forests.

"We need to be doing everything we can to make our communities more resilient to climate change," said **Senator Schatz**. "This funding will help expand our urban tree canopy and mitigate the effects of extreme heat – all while providing job training opportunities to those who need it most."

"As we work to mitigate the impacts of climate change and promote sustainability, this funding brings us one step closer in creating healthier, more equitable communities across Hawai'i," said **Senator Hirono**. "This historic investment in urban forests will help ensure people in Hawaii have access to quality outdoor spaces, no matter where they live. I am proud to have helped pass the Inflation Reduction Act last year—the largest action on climate change ever passed by Congress, which made this funding possible."

"The funding was made possible through the Inflation Reduction Act, the largest climate and energy related investment in our history, so that we can fully seek and obtain the assistance offered for various critical projects," said **Representative Case**. "These grants administered by the USDA's Urban and Community Forestry Program provides the organizations the crucial funding needed to strengthen Hawaii's capacity to advance climate resiliency efforts."

“This grant administered by the USDA’s program provides Kupu the crucial funding needed to expand opportunities for, and develop marketable professional skills of, the Pacific workforce to strengthen Hawai’i and other Pacific communities and their capacity to advance climate resiliency efforts.”

"Communities across our state are looking at the extreme drought conditions and rising temperatures in their own backyards and they are scared," said **Representative Tokuda**. "This USDA funding is critical as we meet the moment and invest in adaptable green spaces, plant native trees and flora to combat heat and reduce fire risks, combat urban heat islands, mitigate the impacts of natural disasters, and ensure long term climate resiliency."

The USDA Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program awarded more than \$1 billion nationwide to provide funding to community-based organizations, Tribes, State and local agencies, public colleges and universities, and nonprofits working to provide equitable access to trees and nature and the benefits they provide. The funding was made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act. To learn more about this initiative, visit:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/urban-communit-forestry-2023-factsheet.pdf>

About Kupu

Established in 2007 as a Honolulu-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Kupu empowers future generations to create a more sustainable Hawai’i. The organization provides hands-on training and national service programs that educate and mentor youth to become stewards of culture and environment. Kupu has trained more than 5,700 youth and adults in conservation, sustainability, and environmental education. These young adults have supported Kupu partners to provide more than 3 million hours of service, which has culminated in planting over 1.5 million native plants and removing over 151,000 acres of invasive species. For their service, Kupu has presented \$6.3 million in education awards to support the continued growth of its members. To date, Kupu has generated more than \$176 million in economic benefits to the state of Hawai’i. For more information, follow Kupu on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [YouTube](#), or visit kupuhawaii.org.

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