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JOE WEST photo

Lanai Culture & Heritage Center is restoring a fishpond believed to be 800 years old on the eastern coastline of Lanai to feed future generations of residents and encourage stewardship of the island.

## Ancient fishpond to be restored

By **CHRIS SUGIDONO**  
Staff Writer

A fishpond believed to be some 800 years old is being restored on the eastern coastline of Lanai by children and adults and will hopefully encourage future stewardship of the island's forgotten cultural resources.

The Wai'opae fishpond, the largest of at least five known ponds on the coastline, has not been maintained for over a century, and volunteers from the nonprofit Lanai Culture & Heritage Center began work on

it last month. The restoration project is a public-private partnership between the nonprofit and landowner Pulama Lana'i.

"We're at the right time and place to experience this reattachment to good stewardship of the land," Kepa Maly, executive director of the nonprofit, said Thursday. "We didn't have this opportunity previously but under the current ownership they've shown a strong financial desire for this kind of cultural and natural resource work."

The fishpond was built well before western contact in the late 18th century,

Maly said. The 9-acre pond played a key role in feeding the community and some of the oldest kupuna — 98 and 99 years old — living on the island remember gathering fish from it.

Maly said that the outline of the fishpond is clear, despite its stones deflating and flattening out over the years. He said that the nonprofit plans to restore the pond with a crescent-shaped wall about 2,000 feet long, with its most distant point about 500 feet from shore.

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## Fishpond

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About 140 children and teenagers have already worked on the project. Some helped out as part of the non-profit's education program "E 'Ike Hou Ia Lana'i," which means "To Know Lana'i Once Again." The program merges Hawaiian culture research with science, technology, engineering and math to create a curriculum to inspire young leaders.

Maly said students gathered up stones to place on the wall and "put the mana of their hands into the restoration" of the ancient fishpond. He said even kindergartners participated and placed stones on the interior of the pond.

"By having our young people involved, we connect them to the place and the value of stewardship of the land," Maly said. "That is important because our young people sometimes get detached from the living environment around us."

The restoration project is the first program under a new bill that passed this year which simplified the permitting process for groups applying to restore and maintain Hawaiian



KEPAMALY photo

**Students work to restore the Wai'opae fishpond**, the largest of at least five known fishponds on Lanai's eastern coastline, last month.

fishponds. Maly expects the Wai'opae fishpond to be completed within a year and hopes it will feed generations of Lanai residents.

Maly said that the maintenance of cultural resources on Lanai has been lacking ever since the population dropped from approximately 6,000 in the 1790s to 600 by 1848. He said the population dropped even further to less than 125 people by 1922, when James Dole bought the island and developed it into the world's largest pineapple plantation.

"When you think about it, that's phenomenal any knowledge of Lanai survived," Maly said.

Other projects tackled by students on Lanai this summer include the restoration of a 5,400-acre watershed, rebuilding a traditional lo'i (taro patch), composing a new song in Hawaiian and painting three murals depicting traditional cultural landscapes.

Through strong support from the community and Pula-ma Lana'i, Maly said that he hopes to build the "future leaders and caretakers of Lanai."

"It's all tied to personal responsibility and respect of place," he said. "When you work the land and understand the nuances of tide and water flow, the winds — all of these things, you get more closely connected and be more respectful of place."

"The health of the people is a reflection of the health of the land and our goal is to make Lanai healthy."

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