

# ALOHA I KE KAI

HAWAI'I OCEAN STEWARDSHIP FEE PROGRAM

## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



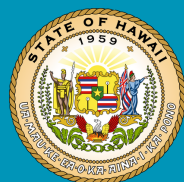
Kealakekua Bay and Snorkeler  
Image courtesy of Bert Weeks

### PREPARED BY:

The State of Hawai'i  
Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR)  
Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR)

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Snorkelers in Ocean  
Image courtesy of Trilogy Excursions

# THE ALOHA I KE KAI HAWAI'I OCEAN STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

**Aloha i ke Kai** - the Hawai'i Ocean Stewardship Fee Program is a sustainable funding solution led by the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) to support marine stewardship initiatives via direct investment from ocean users.

Pursuant to Act 46 (2021), in January 2024 the DLNR-DAR began collecting \$1 per ocean user participating in a commercial ocean recreation activity. These funds are used for a number of marine stewardship projects that benefit ocean resources and flow back into Hawai'i communities and industries.

This fee is an innovative example of natural resource management, the visitor industry, and the general public working together to protect marine ecosystems for today and for the future. This program is key to bridging the gap between funds available and funds required to effectively manage ocean resources.

In its infancy, this program has focused on streamlining experiences for commercial operators transferring the fee to DAR, establishing processes to manage funds generated, and building relationships with diverse stakeholders.

## A WORD FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

The Aloha i ke Kai Ocean Stewardship User Fee Program is a shining example of collaboration across sectors for the betterment of our ocean. At its core, the Aloha i ke Kai program fills a critical funding gap for DAR to prevent marine degradation against threats like climate change, invasive species, urban development, and human-use. As these threats continue to grow, the Aloha i ke Kai program will be integral to meet the financial needs of the Division's long-term marine stewardship goals.

This program's success would not be possible without support from the commercial marine operators and the Ocean Tourism Coalition. To date, this fee has generated over \$2 million for restoration and management activities that support business sectors like commercial operators that are reliant on healthy marine resources. DAR will continue to support this reciprocal relationship with the commercial operators that support Aloha i ke Kai and will prioritize day-use mooring buoys, coral reef restoration and coastal water quality projects, community and commercial operator stewardship initiatives, and other reef management tactics like invasive species and marine debris removal.



Brian Neilson  
DAR Administrator

*Brian Neilson*

**BRIAN NEILSON**

*DIVISION OF AQUATIC RESOURCES ADMINISTRATOR*





Kealahou Bay  
Image courtesy of Bert weeks

**\$1**



\$1 per person from every  
marine commercial activity

**342**



342 commercial operators  
transferring fees to date

**\$2M**



\$2 million generated from  
collected fees in 2024

**\$215K**



Allocated \$215,000 for marine  
stewardship in the State to date

# MULTI-STAKEHOLDER BENEFITS

The Aloha i ke Kai program provides benefit to many groups, as detailed below



## Natural Resource Managers

This fund supports a diverse portfolio of high-priority marine management initiatives that are significant to long-term stewardship of marine resources in the State



## Commercial Operators

Aloha i ke Kai actively protects marine resources critical to many commercial operator business models, and supports commercial operator marine stewardship initiatives



## Visitor Industry

Through this program, DAR is building relationships amongst visitor industry stakeholders, natural resource managers, community groups, and the visitors to promote marine stewardship programs and ethos



## Hawai'i Residents

Hawai'i residents are supported by Aloha i ke Kai through opportunities to provide feedback on marine stewardship priorities and support for community driven stewardship projects



## Ocean Users

Ocean users participating in commercial operations and independent ocean users benefit from this fund through the direct support of projects that enhance marine resources for all ocean users



## The Ocean Itself

As the ocean faces mounting threats from climate change, disease, invasive species, low water quality, and fishing pressure, it is imperative to proactively manage resources for resilience to these threats

# SUPPORTING COMMERCIAL OPERATORS

The Aloha i ke Kai ocean stewardship user fee would not be possible without commercial operators contributing time, energy, and knowledge to the program.

The Aloha i ke Kai program is dedicated to supporting commercial operators as they implement the fee. To accommodate user-friendly fee transfers to DAR, the state has created the Aloha i ke Kai payment portal app and continues to innovate on ways to improve the site. Also, DAR has developed materials for commercial operators to use when communicating the fee to customers such as stickers, flyers, and rack cards.

Importantly, revenue from the fund will finance commercial operator stewardship initiatives, managed by commercial operators. These could include education programs, community science initiatives, or marine debris removal programs.



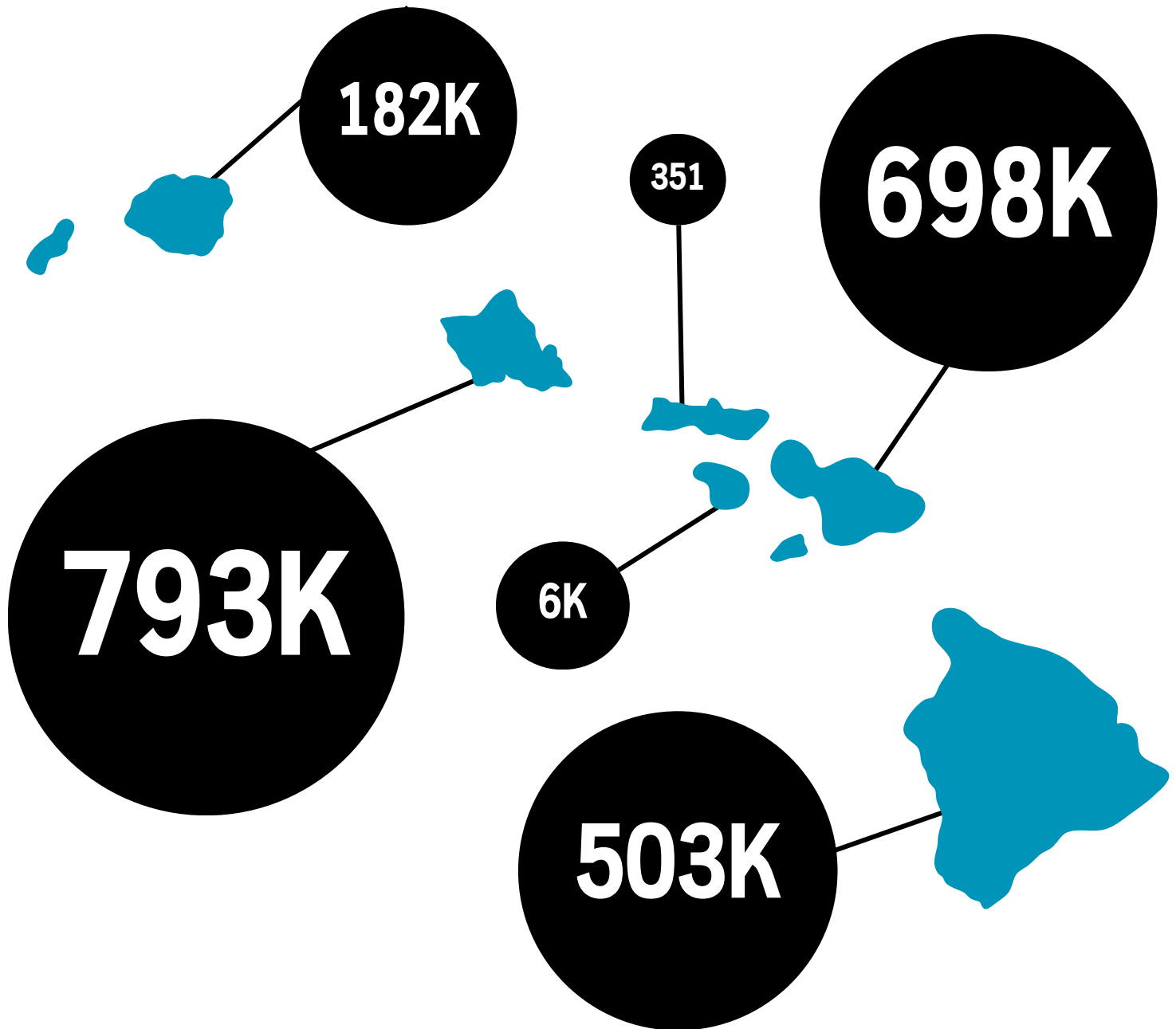
Examples of Aloha i ke Kai Sticker (top left), Aloha i ke Kai Rack Card (top right) and payment portal (bottom)

## FUTURE ACTIONS

Partner with commercial operators to:

1. Support development of communication materials requested by operators to explain to customers how their fees contribute to marine resource management
2. Support the development of educational materials requested by operators to engage ocean users in ocean friendly and culturally sensitive practices while appreciating ocean resources
3. Host feedback sessions with commercial operators across sectors to gain further insight on how best to support operators

Develop process for commercial operator stewardship mini-grants through requests for proposals, or other financial granting mechanism



## ACTIVITIES ACROSS HAWAII

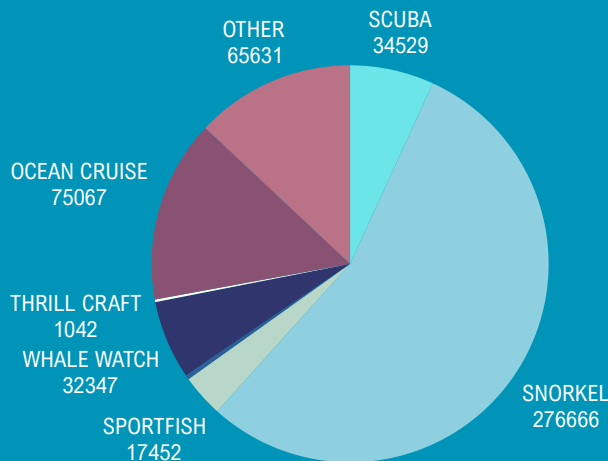
Each island in Hawai'i has a unique relationship with marine commercial operation. Through the Aloha i ke Kai program, the State for the first time is collecting data on how many people are participating in various marine commercial activities, the location of these activities, and how these activities change from season to season. This information will be critical for understanding place-based needs for marine stewardship moving forward and will inform future marine management priorities across the State.

Graphic represents islands across Hawai'i from left to right with number of users in black as of January 7th 2025  
Kaua'i - 182,069 / O'ahu - 792,762 / Moloka'i - 351 / Lāna'i - 6,069 / Maui - 697,762 / Hawai'i Island - 503,353



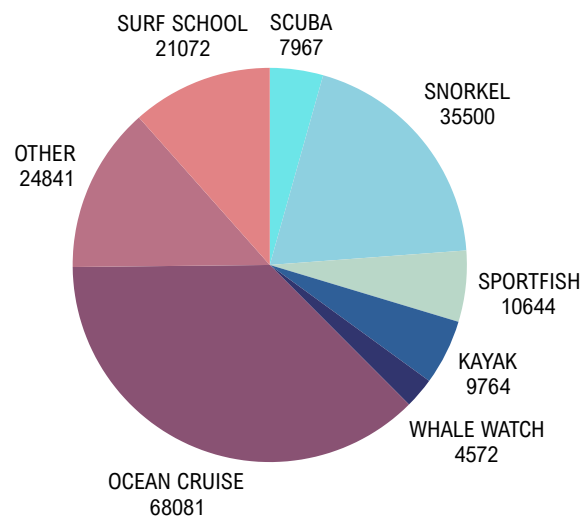
# CONCENTRATION BY ISLAND AND BY ACTIVITY

## Hawai'i Island



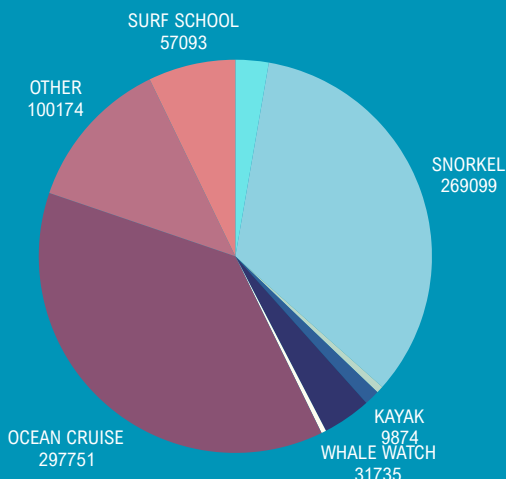
- Hawai'i Island had a total of 503,353 ocean users in 2024
- Snorkeling is Hawai'i Island's most popular activity, engaging 276,666 snorkelers
- Hawai'i Island's popularity of activities changed based on the season and the presence and absence of whales, which is similar across multiple islands

- Kaua'i had a total of 182,069 ocean users in 2024
- The most popular activity on Kaua'i was ocean cruising, perhaps because of Nā Pali cruises
- In 2024, Kaua'i had a higher concentration of surfing activities compared to other islands



## Kaua'i

## O'ahu

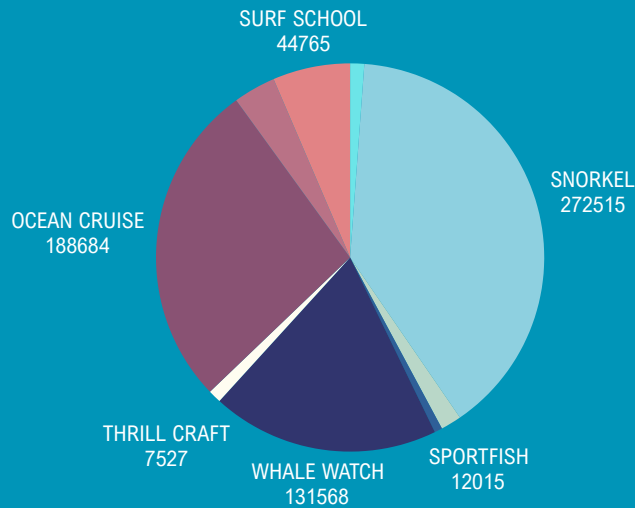


- O'ahu had a total of 792,824 ocean users in 2024
- On O'ahu the most popular activity was ocean cruising, engaging 297,751 people this year
- O'ahu had the highest number of people participating in marine commercial activities across the State in 2024



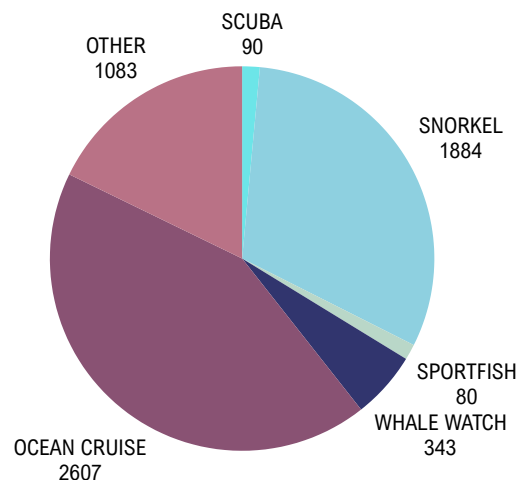
# CONCENTRATION BY ISLAND AND BY ACTIVITY

## Maui



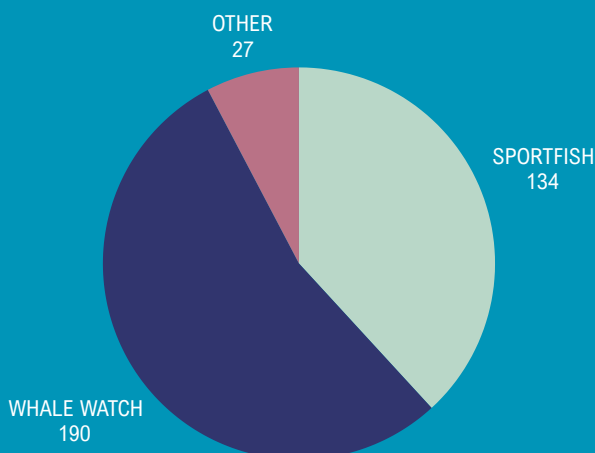
- Maui had a total of 697,762 ocean users in 2024
- Snorkeling is Maui's most popular activity, engaging 272,515 snorkelers this year
- Maui had the highest number of whale watching activities in 2024

- Lānaʻi had a total of 6,069 ocean users in 2024
- On Lānaʻi ocean cruising was the most popular activity, engaging 2,607 people
- Lānaʻi had a higher number of “other” activities, compared to other island's breakdowns



## Lānaʻi

## Molokaʻi



- Molokaʻi had a total of 351 ocean users in 2024
- Whale watching was the most popular Molokaʻi marine commercial activity, engaging 190 people
- Molokaʻi had a higher number of sportfishing activities compared to other island's breakdowns

# SPENDING PLAN



The Aloha i ke Kai program intends to catalyze long term funding commitments to support local stewardship and conservation practices that benefit ocean users and Hawai'i communities. These funds will support ongoing DLNR-DAR projects and new initiatives associated with Aloha i ke Kai. The spend plan pie chart lists intended project allocations.

- **25%** Statewide Day Use Mooring Buoy
- **20%** Community Stewardship
- **20%** Coral Reef Restoration
- **10%** Improving Coastal Water Quality
- **10%** Education and Outreach
- **5%** Marine Invasive Species Management
- **5%** Commercial Operator Stewardship
- **5%** Marine Debris Prevention, Response, and Mitigation

**In addition to marine stewardship projects, revenue generated will support:**

1. Management of the Aloha i ke Kai program
2. Maintenance of the Aloha i ke Kai payment portal
3. 20% of revenue is transferred to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs for ceded lands revenue

## ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

# STRATEGIC FUNDING SOLUTIONS

## *DAY-USE MOORING PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND EXPANSION*

Day-use mooring buoys are intended to provide accessible ocean recreation opportunities while minimizing damage to coral and other marine life in zones of high anchoring pressure by boaters. Currently there are 220 day-use mooring buoys across Hawai'i.

**Ocean operators identified day-use mooring buoy infrastructure as a primary need for sustainable ocean recreation.**

**Funds will support continued coordination and improvement of a statewide day-use mooring buoy program.**

Specific project goals include:

- Maintaining a state-wide online database for public access to buoy information and status
- Scheduling inspections and maintenance of existing buoys
- Repairing buoy infrastructure as needed
- Pursuing opportunities for installation of buoys in new locations as prioritized by boaters and commercial operators



Mooring Ball. Image courtesy of DAR



# STRATEGIC FUNDING SOLUTIONS

## MARINE DEBRIS HOTLINE

- Marine pollution is a very significant threat to marine life in the ocean. Abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing nets can ruin essential habitat like coral reefs, as well as entangle marine life such as turtles and humpback whales.
- Funds from the Aloha i ke Kai program will support the continued upkeep of the marine debris hotline, which allows people to call-in large and cumbersome marine debris such as nets, tires, or other large manufactured goods.



Marine Debris. Image courtesy of DAR

## WEST-MAUI WATER QUALITY



Diver collecting Data. Image courtesy of DAR

- Land-based sources of pollution like sedimentation, urban run-off and release of chemicals into the marine environment impact water quality and coral reef health.
- Funds from the Aloha i ke Kai program will support coordination of addressing these threats in West Maui, with a particular emphasis on coordinating mauka based sedimentation threats for priority reefs, such as Olowalu.

# OUR GOALS FOR 2025-2029

In the next five years, DAR will focus on building a strong foundation for a long-term program that will support marine resources for decades. Central to this foundation is the continual support of relationships with commercial operators and the visitor industry to promote the Aloha i ke Kai program and marine stewardship that is place-based and responsive to client and business experiences.

