



Wetlands and Waterbirds

– The Need to Streamline Permitting and Regulation

Introduction

The wetland restoration permitting process is unclear, and can be burdensome, particularly with regards to T&E birds. There is no 'one stop shop' where practitioners can go for help. The Moloka'i Wetland Partnership has identified this as a roadblock to expanding wetland restoration and including lo'i restoration in the future of waterbird recovery.

Challenges

Our group identified the following issues:

- There is no road map for permitting needs for wetland and lo'i restoration. As a consequence, people do not know where to start and are afraid of regulatory hurdles.
- While every site is different, we need clear guidance from county, state and federal agencies, and more capacity in those agencies to help private landowners / non-profits.
- It is unclear who to talk to or what to ask
- It is important to build trust between landowners and agencies as that is currently lacking
- There are an excessive number of permits needed for conservation / restoration work
- The wetland restoration permitting process needs to be streamlined as per loko i'a (fishpond) permitting (note that that streamlining is being hampered by the lack of capacity and very slow responses of the Hawai'i State Historic Preservation Division).
- If T&E birds are attracted to new wetlands or lo'i, people do not know what to do and are afraid that they will have to stop normal operations, so may not report their presence, and do not want to engage with organizations that could otherwise help.

Conclusion

Addressing the issue requires bringing together both the people experiencing the problems, and the people managing the permitting and regulatory process, to work through a formal process, and implement improvements.

Actions

- At the Predator and Wetland Workshop in 2024, a session will be dedicated to addressing this issue and developing an action plan to move forward.
- It is hoped that the legal fellow from the Division of Forestry and Wildlife can support this process.