

Gill 'Ewa Lands, LLC: Who We Are and What We Are Doing

Gill 'Ewa Lands, LLC was created as a legacy of the Gill family who have made Hawai'i their home for five generations. Long-time residents will recall the fierce advocacy for environmental preservation and responsible land use that characterized the careers of former Congressman and Lt. Governor Tom Gill and his brother, Lorin, education director of Moanalua Gardens Foundation. Our family's love for Hawai'i's wild places dates back further, to their parents, architect Thomas Gill and his wife, journalist Lorin T. Gill.

Today, the descendants of Tom and Lois Gill, along with Lorin Gill's heirs, manage Gill 'Ewa Lands, LLC (GEL) in the memory and spirit of our parents and grandparents. Our mission is to restore the health of the ecosystem of the Wai'anae Mountains at Pālehua, which was acquired in 2009 from the Campbell Estate. The property encompasses nearly 1600 acres and extends from the coast at Manners Beach to the summit of Mauna Kapu. We have made a commitment to maintain the property's agricultural and conservation uses and to preserve its open spaces, protecting the land from urban sprawl.

Our long-term goal is to preserve and protect the land's important biological, cultural, agricultural and historical resources while enabling its enjoyment and appreciation by residents, neighbors and the broader public. The land contains diverse resources which require careful and balanced management: both endemic plants and abundant weeds, native birds and invasive mammals, sweeping vistas and depleted soils, archaeological treasures and cattle ranches, recreational trails and private residences.

The land at Pālehua has been subject to generations of neglect and abuse, creating challenges to its management and restoration. The soil is easily eroded and its ability to retain precipitation has been reduced. Wildfires originating can spread swiftly, putting homes, businesses and the forest at risk. Invasive plants and animals threaten native species that inhabit the uplands. Without a sustained and significant source of revenue, our efforts can only address a small portion of the immense task of healing the mountain.

Over the past several years, we have spearheaded initial efforts to restore the Pālehua area to its former health and natural beauty by constructing pig fences, fighting the spread of invasive plants, clearing fire breaks, protecting native species and experimenting with reforestation techniques. The work has just begun; there is much more to do. Without intense focus, action and funding, erosion and wildfires will continue to damage both mauka and makai lands, potentially threatening neighboring communities. GEL is committed to this restoration effort, which will take several generations.

We are actively working to fund and implement conservation and restoration initiatives such as:

- Wildfire management
- Protection of native species, including 'elepaio, from invasive animals
- Planting native ground cover, shrubs and trees
- Erosion control
- Archaeological site protection and study

We recognize the importance of educating keiki and involving the broader community in this work, especially since it will take decades of effort to implement. To that end, we welcome students and families to Camp Pālehua to participate in environmental, scientific and cultural education

activities. One of our partners, Mālama Learning Center, offers opportunities for groups to participate in outplanting, and to learn about the ecological and historical significance of Pālehua. A local group of committed conservation volunteers has spent hours building fences, clearing fire breaks, planting seedlings and constructing trails.

Among the projects we have initiated are:

- Protecting a grove of 'iliahi in Piliokahe Valley, which has been fenced and surrounded by a fire break.
- Improving 'elepaio habitat at Akupu, part of which has been fenced. We are coordinating closely with the U.S. Army Natural Resources Program, which has been caring for the habitat for years. Volunteers, including members of the Sierra Club service trip program, have been regularly removing weeds and planting natives.
- Providing a headquarters for the Wai'anae Mountain Watershed Partnership at our conservation baseyard to facilitate their efforts to conserve natural resources throughout the Wai'anae range.
- Coordinating young volunteers with the Sierra Club High School Hikers program, Boy Scouts, and various school groups to establish an 'iliahi and 'a'ali'i “seed garden” which can serve as a seed bank for future outplantings.
- Expanding the interpretive trail network with the help of Sierra Club and other volunteers.
- Reducing the threat of wildfire by constructing fire breaks. Our ranch tenant, under our explicit license terms, is maintaining fire breaks and emergency access to the agricultural lands. Military veterans and Hawaiian hale builders have been removing invasive trees at various locations.
- Experimenting with outplanting techniques through partnerships with the Mālama Learning Center and University of Hawai'i.
- Investigating archaeological sites to learn more about the heritage of the property.