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Programs get students involved in caring for isle streams, wetlands

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When Pauline Sato, executive director of the Malama Learning Center, saw a photograph of the Nanakuli wetland area known as “stink pond,” she was intrigued.

Looking at the photo of the wetland, she saw a hidden beauty underneath the litter and neglect.

COASTAL CLEANUP

Zablan’s Community Workday:

>> **When:** 9 to 11:30 a.m. Sept. 24

>> **Where:** Zablan’s Beach (Kalaniana’ole Beach Park)

>> **What:** Pick up shoreline marine debris, remove invasive weeds and plant natives. Supplies and light

Malama Learning Center, a nonprofit promoting sustainable living, is one of several

refreshments will be provided. Bring a reusable water bottle.

>> **Info:** Register by emailing chelsey@malamalearningcenter.org or call 305-8287. Learn more at malamalearningcenter.org.

groups that have adopted the wetland at Kalanianaʻole Beach Park, formerly Nanakuli Beach Park, as a restoration site. Sato sees it as the perfect teaching opportunity on the importance of watersheds and water quality.

“It’s one of those places that people tend to know is there, yet they don’t want to acknowledge it’s there because it’s a symbol of how we’re not taking care of a place,” Sato said.

She said the group is trying to impress on kids how interconnected the stream is with the surrounding ecosystem.

The group holds monthly volunteer workdays, called Zablan’s Community Workdays, where members of the community are invited to pick up marine debris along the shoreline, remove invasive weeds and put in native plants to restore the area to its former beauty. At each outing the group takes samples and records data on the wetland.

At the next workday on Sept. 24, the group will post its findings for the EarthEcho International World Water Monitoring Challenge, a global education and outreach program that encourages citizen scientists to monitor their local water bodies and share the results online from March through December.

EarthEcho International, which runs the challenge, is an environmental education and youth leadership nonprofit group co-founded by Philippe Cousteau Jr., grandson of ocean explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau. Their goal is to use “21st-century tools and interactive resources to equip youth to identify and solve environmental challenges starting in their own communities.”

In celebration of World Water Monitoring Day on Sept. 18, the Honolulu Department of Facility Maintenance will send representatives to Jarrett Middle School and Waipahu High School next month to talk to students about water quality at nearby waterways, according to community relations specialist Tonya Ketz.

Honolulu-based nonprofit Trees to Seas adopted Palolo Stream behind Jarrett Middle School and will help kids sample and take readings of pH balance, turbidity, temperature and dissolved oxygen levels of the water. Kids are encouraged to upload their data to the website monitorwater.org. In Waipahu students will examine Pouhala Marsh, a 70-acre tidal wetland that is also a wildlife sanctuary.

The department invites middle and high school students around Oahu to participate in the World Water Monitoring Challenge and offers free monitoring kits for teachers.

Individuals may also adopt a stream and request a kit.

Malama Learning Center was able to launch its community workdays thanks to a \$91,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in November to restore the Nanakuli wetland site.

With the funds, it purchased water-monitoring equipment and started native plant nurseries at Waianae, Nanakuli and Kapolei high schools.

GET A KIT

Teachers and students interested in participating in the city's water monitoring programs can call 768-3300, ext. 3, or visit cleanwaterhonolulu.com (click on "Get involved"). The Department of Facility Maintenance offers free monitoring kits year-round. To learn more about the World Water Monitoring Challenge, visit monitorwater.org.

The group works with students from Ka Waihona o ka Na'auao public charter school in Waianae as well as Nanakuli High & Intermediate and Waianae and Kapolei high schools to monitor water quality at the wetland, which measures about an acre.

The global effort to monitor waterways raises awareness among students about the common indicators of water health. But it's also fun for students to go online and look at the database to compare water health worldwide.

"This is the perfect outdoor classroom," Sato said. "You can teach just about every subject."

One of the most important lessons to teach, she said, is how the mountains and seas are interconnected and that what affects one will affect the other, including the beach where people love to play.

In addition to the restoration work, Sato encourages students to learn about the culture and history of the Nanakuli wetland by asking their grandparents for their memories of the area. According to at least one account, the "stink pond" was once known as Honiniwai Stream and home to five or six species of native fish, Sato said.

"Every community has a place that has been forgotten," she said. "The only way it's going to get better is if we learn about them and start taking care of them."